

« PARENEL » Research Project

Parliamentary Representation at National and European Levels

Comparative study of the identity, behavior and socialization of national and European parliamentarians

I. MOTIVES

This research project is inspired by three main factors:

1. The first is the deficit in studies related to national parliamentarians as well as the generally unsatisfactory state of research on the European Parliament and its members.

On the national level, in-depth research on parliamentarians is lacking in many European countries. It is as if the theme of « parliamentary decline » has discouraged researchers from studying normative parliamentary activities, and the fictions attached to parliamentary representation have erased all reflections on the rationale for representatives' actions and their relationships with the citizens. Today, parliaments are institutions studied mainly by constitutional law experts, and studies on parliamentarians are far from complete, even though they make for interesting biographical research.

At the European level, the numerous researches completed on the European Parliament (EP) and its members are, in general, unsatisfactory. Three types of studies dominate the field at present. The first « institutional » type takes a very broad perspective, which does not allow us to grasp the role of principals, who are assimilated into groups. The second type, largely inspired by the *rational choice* research studying the U.S. Congress, is based on a quasi-exclusive analysis of roll-call votes, and provides only a partial insight into the rationale governing the functioning of the EP and the behavior of MPs. For several years now, a number of studies have included a more in-depth analysis of the identity and the behavior of European MPs, yet these are limited to specific examples.

This project aims to gain a broad understanding of the behavior of parliamentarians and the constraining factors limiting their actions – via a dual comparison, national and level of government- by focusing on three sets of variables: the identity of elected officials, their behavior within and outside the legislatures, and the socialization phenomena that affect them.

2. The second factor, quite conventional yet nonetheless indisputable, is that of the rapid transformation of parliamentary legislatures, whether at the national or the European level, due to strong circumstantial constraints- i.e. the progress of European integration, constraints related to international law, the threat to the central role of states and the dogma of state sovereignty, the rise of corporatism, decentralization, a political crisis, etc. These phenomena have all forced national parliaments to adapt and have led to the rise to power of the EP. Such factors have largely been studied (see in particular: O. Costa, E. Kerrouche and P. Magnette (ed.), *Vers un renouveau du parlementarisme en Europe?* Brussels, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2004). Yet there has been no such analysis of their impact on parliamentarians, the conditions for their recruitment and their career, their behavior within and outside of the institution, the perceptions that they have concerning their role or their territorialized relationships with the citizens, etc.

3. The third factor is the opportunities that a comparison of the situation of these two types of elected officials (national and European) across several European countries offers. Precautions must be taken when comparing different actors and political systems. Yet the existing contrasts between the situations of national and European MPs, as well as between the parliamentarians of the countries included in the study, should allow us to reveal the constraints, strategies and rationale underlying their election and their behavior. We will also be able to reveal their own ideas concerning their role and their relationship to their region and to their constituents. The goal is to eventually undertake this research within each European country.

From a **methodological** perspective, we run up against a dichotomy that jeopardizes the study of the phenomena related to representation. Concerning the study of the « representatives of the people », two research traditions clash: the first emphasizes the influence of strategic variables, while the second prefers to study the influence of structural variables. When, from an analytical perspective, we distinguish the access to the parliamentary mandate from the MP's activities during his term in office, this contrast becomes particularly visible.

Concerning the access to the mandate, the majority of Anglo-Saxon research emphasizes, from a strategic perspective, the role of anticipation and calculations in the process of candidate selection. This research generally seeks to detail the preferences, the motivations, and the intentions of the candidates upon election, and even the objectives pursued by the leading teams of the political 'machines' participating in the designation of candidates. Although these studies shed light on the power politics within candidate selection, it is regrettable that a number of additional elements for analysis, (social rules, representations, analyses of « local configurations », the reproduction of social inequalities within the process of political selection, etc.), which would allow for a better understanding of candidate behavior, should be pushed aside. These are the aspects that Francophone sociology and political science studies have privileged. They have demonstrated the existence of inequalities in various forms of political recruitment through a study of the social, economic or cultural attributes that seem to predispose certain individuals, well before the elections, to a political career (age, sex, social and family origins, professional status, economic resources, education, etc.). However, insisting on the influence of social factors also minimizes the importance of strategic factors.

The dichotomy observed in literature related to candidate selection is found in works concerning the role of the representative once elected. American studies prioritize the role of structures and institutional rules, by demonstrating to what extent the possibilities of exercising power are constrained and shaped by these factors. In sum, these analyses attempt to focus on the "objective" factors that explain situations and choices. Francophone research is used to extract, in a more general manner, the characteristics of what some call the « political profession », while still emphasizing the structural determinants of social relationships that help explain the constraints placed on this role.

II. OBJECTIVES

The main aim of the project is three-fold:

1. First of all, it seeks to gain an understanding of the identity, the behavior, and the socialization of parliamentarians. To achieve this, our study must not remain limited to an analysis of their practices, but must also identify the groups of constraints within which they must evolve, as well as the impact of the views that they hold towards their role, their mandate, their relationship to their constituency, their position within the institution and the position of this institution within the political system. Using a cognitive approach, we shall study the manner in which parliamentarians adjust their behavior according to a body of formal and informal rules, which is fluid in the case of national chambers, and susceptible to change- and thus to conflict- in the case of the European Parliament. In a more mundane manner of speaking, we seek to respond to the following questions: Who is a parliamentarian? What characteristics do these elected officials share? How do they perceive and exert their power? To what end? What may be said about the determinants and the nature of the parliamentary mandate today? What do they contribute to territorial public action?

2. Second, our research will attempt to shed light on the interactions between the MPs and their institution, relationships that constitute a 'dead angle' in existing literature. By doing so, we can address the issue of the transformation of parliamentarian roles as well as that of the adaptation of parliamentary institutions to the changing environment, and in particular to the redefinition of public action spheres. We may also study to what extent their values, views, behavior and priorities are affected by their socialization within the parliamentary institution.

3. Finally, our research will allow for an analysis of the modalities and the evolution of the territorialization of representation. In virtue of the threat to the dogma of national sovereignty both from the « top » (European integration, international law) and from « below » (decentralization), the emergence of competing forms of representation (different levels of government, corporatism, civil society...) and the evolution of the citizens' relationship with the parliaments, it is essential to study the conditions of access to the parliamentary role and its conservation, and the meaning of « parliamentary representation : in today's society. Concerning the European Parliament, our ambition is to examine the way in which its members are progressively integrated within the national and regional political landscapes, and whether or not they succeed in finding territorial anchorage and in influencing public action on the local level.

III. METHODOLOGY

Our research is based on two axes of comparison:

- The first related to the countries analyzed;
- The second related to the national and European levels of representation.

The various teams will be responsible for leading the research within the chosen countries, using jointly created methodological tools (biographical data forms, surveys, interview forms). At present, we shall focus on France, Belgium, Portugal, Bulgaria and Romania; in the near future, the research will be undertaken in other Central and Eastern European countries.

The concept of « eligibility » will allow us to gain an understanding of the phenomena in question and to bypass certain irresolvable methodological contradictions. The term « eligibility » as it is generally understood, (for example as defined by Marc Abélès, 1989), signifies all of the particular social attributes with which certain individuals are endowed, attributes similar to the elements according to which we identified notables in the past. Included within this accepted meaning of the term, eligibility may become a means to

analyze and comprehend the processes of the selection of politicians, while still representing a factor, non exclusive but real, that explains their practices. Nevertheless, this definition may not be applied generally. On the one hand, the analysis by Marc Abélès only focuses on the « local ». In addition, focusing on inter-knowledge networks obscures the other elements within the political universe, such as the partisan system, the power relations within this system, or even the legal rules governing election methods.

It thus appears necessary to resort to a more extensive notion of eligibility. Although it represents –also- a relationship to a territory and to its history, this framework must be surpassed. We can thus consider eligibility to be the sum of all social factors that, at a certain point and within a given political configuration, allow an individual to lay claim to a position within the framework of democratic power competition, and then to preserve this position. The various factors evoked earlier place eligibility at the heart of global sociological reflection. Essentially, they originate from the following groups of overlapping phenomena:

1. The **viewpoints**, for it is not possible to ignore the psycho-emotional aspect that exists within the functioning of a political regime, particularly a democratic regime. We know that the perception of reality is conditioned by several cultural variables, which have consequences for both voters' and electors' perceptions of the political game;
2. The **structural variables**, whether biographical, socio-economic, or geographical;
3. The **rules**, which we have grouped under the generic term « **institutional** », which are essential to explain the access to the role. These may concern voting methods, the territorial political game, modalities of investiture or even pragmatic formal rules shaping the admissibility of a candidate within his organization and the organization that he will then enter.

Candidate practices are shaped by all three of these levels of demands, which may sometimes be contradictory. However, «eligibility», in the sense of strategic and social conditions allowing for selection, represents but a moment in one's career, even if this moment is repeated during each electoral cycle. Without wishing to repeat the economic metaphor of a "capital" that must be fostered, the eligible status is in some ways a credit that is of benefit to the elected individual and which he must preserve. In a way, eligibility is just a filtering process that shapes one's access to another level of the political arena. If we think of an election as a rite of passage that transforms the individual concerned, we must focus on this change in status which in itself partially explains ulterior behavior. In other words, we are interested in the secondary socialization (« professional ») that elected officials experience via their new function. This socialization, which sometimes takes place even before the role is taken on, is both the result of attitudes, practices and behavior integrated during the selection phase, and of the new conditions of the role itself, which often renders learning necessary.

It is through this framework of opposing and complementary demands that we may understand the role of the elected official. The focus on eligibility puts our reflection at the heart of the individual/constraint argument. Working on this concept will also create a productive alliance between an understanding of the « field work » achieved by parliamentarians-whether the regional base is ensured (French deputies) or to be constructed (European deputies) - and the work undertaken within the parliamentary institution itself. It would permit us to contemplate the repercussions and the cross-cutting perceptions between these two levels of representation, while making sure to avoid an excessively dichotomist approach. We will thus emphasize the continuity existing between the French and European public spheres.

Such a presentation does not strive to provide an exhaustive or complete explanation of the diverse aspects of the role in question: an analysis in terms of eligibility allows us to identify clusters of constraints existing within the role of the elected official, and therefore to draw a richer picture.

Concretely, the study will be based on:

1. The compilation of principal structural data relating to the studied chambers (lower chambers of states and the European Parliament);
2. The collection of exhaustive biographical data of all elected officials. ;
3. The direct delivery, to each deputy, of a closed questionnaire comprised of scales of attitude, and of a more open qualitative questionnaire ;
4. The collection of information on the schedule of elected officials.

The data will be processed using a statistical method that is particularly favorable to an easily-achieved international comparison. The results will be verified via in-depth interviews with a representative sample of parliamentarians.

The study intends to avoid a comparison of objects that are too dissimilar in the sense that it focuses on the *actors*, and more specifically on their eligibility and the effects on institutional configurations, and not on the *institutions* themselves. This decision seems particularly favorable to a renewed approach to the key concepts of representation and deliberation. In particular, this would allow us to go beyond appearances: to detail, in the case of the European Parliament, the manner in which the parliamentary role is on the path to rationalization and is to object of strategic conflicts, and to grasp the significance of the institutional constraint and the effects of socialization; to reveal, in the case of national legislatures, the tensions that exist in this regard between institutional, organizational, partisan and individual rationales.

Basing ourselves on two axes of comparison will allow us to neutralize, in part, the variables that render comparison problematic. The cultural variable that is related to the political context can be left aside when comparing the national and European deputies in a particular country. The institutional variable may also be frozen by the comparison of deputies from different countries within the European Parliament.

The somewhat arbitrary choice of nations to be studied is only temporary. Once the initial results have been acquired and the methodological tools broken in, our goal is to extend the study to include all European countries in a uniform manner.

IV. Human resources

The project associates three research teams in France, Belgium and Portugal.

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2. Belgian team: CEVIPOL (Center for the study of political life) from the Free University of Brussels (ULB).

Creation of the research protocol, research on the Belgian Parliament, the parliaments of the Central and Eastern European countries, and the European Parliament

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