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Amateur Legislators—Professional Politicians: The Consequences of Party-Centered Electoral Rules in a Federal System

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The Argentine Congress plays a limited role in the production of public policy and is a relatively ineffective check on the Argentine Executive Branch. We argue this is the combined result of incentives created by several features of Argentine political institutions. In this article we emphasize the role of the country's electoral rules, which place the legislator re-election decision not in the hands of the voters, but rather in the hands of the provincial governor/party boss(es). These rules limit legislators' ability to develop a professional legislative career and reduce their incentives to specialize and to develop strong legislative institutions. We provide empirical evidence of the short duration of congressional careers, the province-based nature of Argentine political careers, and the lack of specialization among legislators resulting from the above-mentioned institutional incentives.

The gargantuan literature on the U.S. Congress provides a detailed and relatively comprehensive understanding of this institution. In fact, we likely know more about the U.S. Congress than about any other political institution in the world, with this literature providing a set of widely accepted truisms. First, members of the U.S. Congress exhibit remarkable longevity. Second, members of the U.S. Congress tend to specialize in committees. Third, the U.S. Congress plays an active role in policymaking.¹ Fourth, the U.S. Congress engages in considerable oversight of the public bureaucracy.² Fifth, the U.S. Congress is at the center of policymaking.³

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¹On the longevity of U.S. congressional careers see Polsby (1968) and Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin (1998). On committee specialization and the U.S. Congress' policymaking role, see Shepsle (1978), Weingast and Moran (1983), Weingast and Marshall (1988), Krehbiel (1991), and Londregan and Snyder (1994).

²See Weingast and Moran (1983) and McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast (1989).

³See Weingast and Moran (1983). For a differing view on U.S. Presidential powers see Moe and Howell (1999), while for a critical assessment of the "congressional dominance" theory see Moe (1987).

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Venturing outside of the United States however, one most commonly encounters legislatures that do not resemble the U.S. Congress in terms of many or all of these five above-mentioned features. This is particularly the case in the party-centered systems (Shugart and Haggard 2001) that dominate the world's democracies, yet are also the least studied.⁴ The U.S. Congress is thus a rare outlier in the population of national legislatures. As a consequence, studies of the U.S. Congress, while very helpful in generating general theory, are also quite limited in terms of extending general legislative theory due to their status as case studies of an atypical case. Nonetheless, studies of the U.S. Congress predominate while articles on legislatures in other countries are rare.

To contribute to the development of general theories of legislatures, what is required is work on legislatures in the party-centered systems that exist in a large majority of the world's parliamentary and presidential democracies. Legislatures in these countries differ considerably from the U.S. Congress in terms of the five above-mentioned features.

Argentina is an excellent example of a country in which none of the above-mentioned characterizations of the U.S. Congress appear to hold. First, Argentine legislators are merely transitory visitors, averaging only one term in office. Second, Argentine legislators belong to a multiplicity of committees. Third, the Argentine Congress does not play an active role in the policy-process, but rather plays the role of a blunt veto player. Fourth, the Argentine Congress pays little attention to oversight activities. Fifth, in Argentina crucial political bargains are struck in a less institutionalized manner away from the national legislature.

In this article we make progress in explaining this divergence in Argentina from the typical portrayal of the U.S. Congress. In doing so, we advance scholarly knowledge of the functioning of legislatures in the world, particularly of the relation between electoral incentives and legislative institutions. We also improve our understanding of the Argentine Congress' role in the policymaking process.

Argentine Political Institutions

Argentina has a presidential form of government and a bicameral legislature. It is a federal republic consisting of twenty-three provinces and a semi-autonomous federal

capital. Provincial governments are extremely important political entities. They possess their own constitutions, control very large budgets, and exercise influence over vital areas of public policy.

The Chamber of Deputies has 257 members, elected from province-wide multi-member districts for four-year terms. The deputies are chosen from closed party lists using proportional representation (PR). One-half of the Chamber is renewed every two years, with every district renewing one-half of its legislators. The political parties employ three methods of candidate selection: elite arrangement, assembly election, and direct primary. Regardless of which method is used, the provincial-level party leaders are the key players in the nomination process, with the national party leadership and rank-and-file members playing a decidedly secondary role (De Luca, Jones, and Tula 2002).

Electoral Incentives and the Argentine Congress

The idea that the organization of the U.S. Congress reflects the electoral incentives faced by its members has been a cornerstone of the American politics literature since the 1974 publication of David Mayhew's *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. The key question for comparative work is whether the assumptions that drive Mayhew-type arguments for the U.S. case are appropriate in understanding how electoral rules shape legislative incentives elsewhere. In principle, non-U.S. politicians are as strategic in their actions as their U.S. counterparts. However, the political institutions that shape legislators' incentives do vary across countries; career structure, electoral laws, and party rules can be very different. The question narrows, then, to the incentives these politicians face in different contexts.

For example, if party nomination is inconsequential for electoral success, as is the case for incumbents in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies (Ames 2001), party renomination will play no substantial role in shaping legislators' behavior. In contrast, there are situations, as in closed-list PR systems, where nomination at the top of a major party list can virtually guarantee electoral success. In this latter case, legislators' behavior will be constrained by the renomination rules but essentially unconstrained by the electoral process (Strøm 1997).

In federal countries with a closed-list PR electoral system, the process by which the provincial (district) party lists are formed largely affects which candidates run on each party list, what order they occupy, and,

⁴To the extent that studies of legislatures in other presidential democracies have been conducted, they tend to focus almost exclusively on the least party-centered systems, especially Brazil.

consequently, their chances of winning a seat in Congress. Hence, depending on the role that electoral rules give local party leaders in the creation of the district-party list, local party leaders may or not be key in the determination of legislators' futures.

In Argentina, where local party bosses dominate the construction of the local party list, legislators' ability to independently pursue a legislative career is substantially curtailed. In this sense, Argentina is neither Brazil nor the United States, where the decision to run for reelection lies almost exclusively with the incumbent legislators. From the Argentine legislators' point of view, in order to pursue their desired career paths, they must maintain a good relationship with their local party bosses. Although challenging the local party boss could at times be an optimal strategy, it is certainly a risky one, and the timing of the challenge must be strategically chosen. Absent a challenge, career progression requires the support of the local party boss, whose main interest, it can be safely assumed, is to retain power.

Local party bosses have a complex political objective. They want to maximize the performance of their party in their province, but at the same time want to safeguard their position within the provincial party structure. The threat of challenge by popular legislators provides local party bosses with a strong incentive to reduce the national and provincial visibility of their local underlings by rotating them among the various jobs the provincial party can offer. The electoral risk associated with nominating lesser known candidates is attenuated by Argentina's electoral rules, especially the use of party supplied ballots and closed-list PR. Voters tend to vote for the party list, not for the individuals on the list.

Within this institutional context, legislators have little incentive to work hard to improve their visibility in the eyes of the voters and no incentive to develop legislative policy expertise. A legislator may be marginally aided in his or her career progression by obtaining public visibility. However, policy expertise is unrelated to visibility, nor is it relevant for the candidate nomination and general election process. The institutional barriers to reelection, therefore, generate widespread "shirking," providing suboptimal levels of effort both from an "informational" (Krehbiel 1991) and "institutional" (Fearon 1999; Ferejohn 1999) perspective.

A legislature's organization reflects the electoral incentives faced by its members. In Argentina, a committee system that enables legislators to pursue their electoral objectives through constituency service (Weingast and Marshall 1988), or that enables the legislature to develop informational capabilities (Krehbiel 1991), does not emerge. Instead, legislators appear to serve on com-

mittees mainly to obtain perks and/or additional resources, as well as to be in good standing with the provincial party leadership (Jones 2002).

Amateur Legislators— Professional Politicians: Party Politics and Legislative Tenure

Since 1983 the average reelection rate for the Chamber of Deputies has been 20 percent, ranging from a high of 29 percent in 1985 to a low of 15 percent in 1995. The country's two dominant political parties, the Partido Justicialista (PJ) and Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), possess similar reelection rates.

There are two primary reasons for this relatively low reelection rate. First, to be reelected a legislator must obtain a spot on the provincial party list. This is a significant "barrier to reentry." During the 1989–2001 period only 25 percent of the deputies surpassed this hurdle. However, once incumbent legislators are on the party lists, their probability of reelection increases considerably. Between 1989 and 2001, 76 percent of those incumbents who obtained a position on the party list achieved reelection. Although this is a little below the standard in the United States, it is much closer to it than to the 19 percent (1989–2001) unconditional reelection probability.

The overall stability of membership also has been relatively low. During the 1983–2001 period the average Argentine deputy served only one term in office. In contrast, during the Twentieth Century the average U.S. House member served between five and six terms (Polsby 1968; Ornstein, Mann, and Malbin 1998).

Legislators' Political Careers

The career paths of Argentine Chamber deputies during the post-1983 period are extremely party oriented. Virtually all deputies arrive to the Chamber having previously occupied an elective, appointive (in a national or provincial executive branch), or party post. Following their tenure in the Chamber, an equally high percentage continues in elective, appointive, or party posts. The consequence is a very strong link between the careers of legislators and their relationship with their party. While most Argentine legislators are "Amateur Legislators," they are nonetheless "Professional Politicians."

Table 1 provides information on the last elective, appointive, party or other post held by PJ and UCR deputies prior to the start of the 1991–95 congressional

TABLE 1 Last Post Held by Deputies Prior to Assuming Office and Post They Held as of Mid-1998 (Class of 1991–1995)

Position	Prior to Assuming Office % Distribution of Deputies			As of Mid-1998 % Distribution of Deputies		
	Total	PJ	UCR	Total	PJ	UCR
Provincial Legislator	29	15	50	9	9	9
National Deputy	17	20	12	16	17	14
Mayor	10	11	9	1	2	0
National Executive Branch*	9	12	5	7	12	0
Provincial Executive Branch	8	14	0	8	9	7
Party Activity	5	6	2	20	9	37
Private Activity	5	6	2	12	12	12
Prov. Party President (only post)	4	2	7	1	2	0
Governor	3	3	2	1	0	2
Municipal Councilor	3	2	5	1	0	2
Union Leader	3	3	2	5	8	0
Vice Governor	3	5	0	1	0	2
Career Diplomat/Party Activity	1	0	2	1	0	2
Federal Judge	1	2	0			
National Senator	1	0	2	8	6	12
Defector				3	3	2
Deceased				2	3	0
Prison/Fugitive				2	3	0
Business Association President				1	2	0
Vice President				1	2	0
Total Number of Deputies	108	64	44	108	64	44

*Includes appointees to the Attorney General's office and political ambassadors

Source: Jones (2002).

term.⁵ The table also provides information on the same posts held by these deputies two-and-a-half years after the end of their term in office (i.e., as of mid-1998).

Nineteen possible positions are included in the table, covering the gamut of the positions occupied by these individuals before and after the 1991–95 term.⁶ Table 1 details the last position held by the deputies of the 1991–95 legislative class prior to their assumption as national deputies. Of the 108 deputies, all but six either held a governmental (appointive or elective) or party position (as a provincial, county, or municipal-level party official) prior to their election as deputy.⁷ The most prominent

penultimate post among these deputies was Provincial Legislator (29 percent).⁸ One-half of the UCR deputies were provincial legislators prior to assuming office in 1991. Other common positions held by these individuals immediately prior to 1991 include: National Deputy (17 percent), Mayor (10 percent), and member of the National (9 percent) or Provincial (8 percent) Executive Branches.

Table 1 also shows that after the deputies of the 1991–95 class completed their term in office, an overwhelming majority continued a career path tightly linked to their respective parties. Of the 108 legislators, as of mid-1998, eighty-two were in positions strongly influenced by their party ties/position within the party.⁹ Indeed, only thirteen

⁵Only PJ and UCR deputies who served more than a year during the 1991–95 period are examined.

⁶Three categories are exclusive to the post-1995 careers: Deceased, Prison/Fugitive, Defector (i.e., the person defected to another party between 1991 and 1995).

⁷The position of Union Leader, especially for the PJ, is for all intents and purposes a party position.

⁸Between 1983 and 1991, 37 percent of the 108 deputies at one time held the post of provincial legislator.

⁹Six others were in high political content posts (five Union Leaders and one Business Association President), where ties to the PJ were an integral part of their position.

of the 108 (12 percent) deputies departed voluntarily from the political scene (at least two due to poor health).¹⁰ Of these eighty-two, 50 percent held elective office at the national, provincial or municipal level, 29 percent were active solely as party leaders at the provincial, county, or municipal level, while 21 percent occupied appointive posts in the national or provincial executive branches.¹¹

Finally, the provincial-nature of Argentine political careers is clear. Two-thirds of all deputies either returned to positions in the province (42 percent) or remained as the province's representatives in the national Congress (24 percent).

Weak Legislative Incentives— Weak Congressional Institutions: Evidence from Congressional Committee Membership, 1983–1997

This section presents evidence of the lack of incentives to exert legislative effort and to invest in developing strong legislative institutions in Argentina. We focus on the committee system and show that it does not promote individual legislators' electoral objectives through constituency service. It also only modestly enables the legislature to develop informational capabilities. Thus, neither Weingast and Marshall's (1988) distributional nor Krehbiel's (1991) informational hypotheses can serve as foundations for the Argentine Chamber's organization.

Standing Committees in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies

The Argentine Chamber is divided into a large number of committees where most legislative work is conducted.¹² The composition of congressional committees

¹⁰Because of prior events, seven deputies could not continue in any of the elective, appointive, or party posts: two were deceased, one was in jail, one was a fugitive, and three deputies had defected to another party (all three continued to be active in politics, one as a national deputy).

¹¹With a few exceptions a party leadership position at the county or municipal level does not carry with it any type of salary. These posts however provide the individual with a considerable amount of political power, and it is quite common for many of these local leaders to receive some type of salary through an appointive post in the national, provincial, or municipal executive or legislative branches.

¹²Most substantive legislative policymaking is conducted in standing committees with specific policy jurisdictions (there are no sub-committees). Legislation is customarily referred to the permanent committees of each house. Bills can bypass the committees and go directly to the floor with the approval of an extraordinary majority

reflects the proportion of seats held by the various party delegations in the Chamber.¹³ Every two years, following the Chamber's partial renovation, committee positions are allocated among the parties by the Chamber President in rough proportion to the percentage of seats held by the parties in the Chamber. The President also decides, in consultation with the party delegation leaders, which committee leadership positions (President, Vice-President, Secretary) correspond to which parties. Once this allocation is decided, each party's leadership distributes its committee assignments.¹⁴

During the period under study, the number of standing committees increased from twenty-seven to forty, while the number of deputies increased only slightly from 254 to 257. Committees must normally have a minimum of fifteen, and a maximum of twenty-five, members.¹⁵

Throughout this period, the majority party held 49 percent of the seats and 51 percent of the committee assignments. The Chamber rules do not restrict multiple assignments. Since 1983 there has been a monotonic growth in the supply of, and demand for, committee slots. The rules, for example, required every member to possess an average of 2.2 slots to satisfy the minimum committee membership requisites during the 1995–97 period. The average Argentine deputy, however, decided to serve on one additional committee, for an average of 3.5 slots per deputy.

To explore the extent to which committee membership represents constituency interests or the need for specialization, we analyze the main determinants of legislators' committee participation. The complete sample population consists of 1906 observations (956 legisla-

(two-thirds). Most bills are discussed and voted on in the committees before being sent to the floor. For example, in the 1987–88 and 1997–98 legislative periods respectively, only 14 percent and 25 percent of the bills were sent directly to the Chamber floor (Rossi 1998). Moreover, although there is no formal rule giving the committees the power to submit legislation to the floor that cannot be amended (closed rule), the Chamber approved 70 percent of the bills sent to the floor without any amendment (Rossi 1998).

¹³The principal organizing unit in the Argentine Chamber is the party delegation. All parties with three or more members constitute a delegation with a president and any other authorities they wish to designate.

¹⁴Technically the Chamber President makes all committee assignments. However, in virtually all instances with opposition parties, and in most instances with the Chamber President's party, the Chamber President has respected the nominations made by the respective party leaders.

¹⁵A small number of committees have somewhat larger maximums, which progressively increased, albeit slightly, during the 1983–97 period.

tors) for the 1983–97 period.¹⁶ Each observation corresponds to a single legislator over a two-year period (the length of committee memberships).

Empirical Analysis of Committee Membership

Our initial analysis examines a sample of 1384 legislator/legislative period observations. Excluded are all observations from the 1983–85 period.¹⁷

The dependent variable is the number of committees each legislator served on during the two-year legislative period. It is a continuous variable that ranges from 0 to 8.¹⁸ Regarding the determinants of committee membership, we consider the following variables:

1. **Committees in the Chamber.** This variable consists of the number of committees in the Chamber. Since every committee must have a minimum of fifteen members, as the number of committees (and hence committee slots) grows, the number of committees on which a legislator must serve also grows. Thus, there should be a positive relationship between the number of committees in the Chamber and the number of committees a legislator serves on.
2. **Party Delegation Size.** This variable consists of the number of seats a party delegation possesses in the Chamber. Committee slots are roughly allocated in proportion to a party delegation's Chamber seat share. However, since smaller parties have fewer legislators to distribute across committees, this variable checks whether they are overrepresented or underrepresented on committees.
3. **Chamber Seniority.** This variable indicates the number of years a legislator has served in the Chamber prior to the current legislative period. It is calculated at the beginning of each two-year period. In an environment in which legislators expect to remain for a substantial period of time, junior legislators may shop around for interesting committee appointments, specializing as they become more senior.

¹⁶For methodological reasons we exclude (for the respective two-year period) from the analysis all legislators who arrived after May 1 of the first year of the two-year period as an alternate to replace a deputy who died or resigned.

¹⁷The 1983–85 period was the first following the 1976–83 military dictatorship. Only 6 percent of the 254 members had previously served as a Chamber deputy during the 1946–55, 1958–66, or 1973–76 democratic periods (73 percent of these fifteen legislators served during the 1973–76 period).

¹⁸Except where otherwise noted, all data employed in this article were obtained from the official records and archives of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies located in the Dirección de Información Parlamentaria de la Cámara de Diputados de la Nación.

We estimate both Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and Poisson regressions. To address the potential problems caused by the panel structure of the data we also estimate models including fixed effects for the province, legislative time period (the two-year congressional term), and individual legislators.¹⁹ As Table 2 confirms the robustness of our findings across these different models, our discussion below focuses on the results contained in the basic OLS model.

Table 2 demonstrates, in its various models, that Argentine legislators do not “substitute” their participation among different committees. As a new committee is created, the typical legislator increases the number of committees he/she serves on by 11 percent. This number represents 6 percent more than would be required to fill the minimum fifteen slots per committee. Instead of substituting between committees, as the “supply” of new slots goes up, Argentine deputies demand more of them. This suggests that committee membership imposes few costs on members. But as time and effort are limited resources, as legislators participate on more committees, they specialize even less.²⁰ Also, Table 2 shows that legislators from larger parties tend to hold more committee appointments. Thus, small parties do not ask their members to participate on multiple committees so as to increase their committee representation. Although the coefficient of seniority in the Chamber is negative and significant, supporting the specialization hypothesis, it is politically insignificant. An increase in tenure by 1 year (an increase of 25 percent) reduces committee membership by .06 (a reduction of slightly less than 2 percent), implying an elasticity of just above 1 percent. The brevity of congressional careers, then, drastically limits the legislators' incentives to specialize.

Policy Jurisdiction and Specialization

The U.S. politics literature assumes voters' preferences will be reflected in legislators' committee assignments. Thus, in environments in which legislators have incentives to specialize, they will choose to participate in committees likely to help them improve their reelection chances. In

¹⁹The two individual legislator-specific fixed effects models are included only for informational purposes. The small number of two-year periods served by legislators, problems of overparameterization, and the corresponding loss of efficiency leads us to view the results from this analysis as unreliable.

²⁰Unless they hold committee or party leadership positions, Argentine deputies' base budget for legislative staffers is unaffected by the number of committees upon which they serve. They receive the salary equivalent of only one full-time legislative staff position (in addition to lower salary equivalents for a secretary and a receptionist).

TABLE 2 Number of Committees Upon Which a Legislator Serves

Explanatory Variables	OLS				Poisson				
	Basic	Provincial FE	Temporal FE	Prov. + Temp. FE	Individual FE	Basic	Provincial FE	Temporal FE	Prov. + Temp. FE
Committees in the Chamber	0.118*** (0.009)	0.118*** (0.009)	0.118*** (0.009)	0.078*** (0.004)	0.155*** (0.034)	0.038*** (0.004)	0.039*** (0.004)	0.031*** (0.004)	0.045 (0.032)
Party Delegation Size	0.007*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.001)	0.004* (0.002)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)
Chamber Seniority	-0.058** (0.017)	-0.061** (0.017)	-0.057** (0.017)	-0.058** (0.017)	-0.075* (0.042)	-0.018* (0.008)	-0.019* (0.008)	-0.018* (0.008)	-0.019 (0.040)
Constant	-1.192 (0.314)	-1.045 (0.387)	2.177 (0.108)	0.14640	0.41085	-0.292 (0.152)	-0.246 (0.186)	0.811 (0.055)	
Adjusted R ²									
Log-Likelihood Function	-2222.137	-2205.224	-2218.297	-2219.897	-1414.872	-2398.483	-2390.345	-2396.855	-2388.707
N	1384	1384	1384	1384	1384	1384	1384	1384	1384

Note: Standard errors are below the estimated coefficients in parentheses, * = p-value < .10, ** = p-value < .05, *** = p-value < .01.

Argentina, legislative behavior is affected by the power of local party bosses rather than the preferences and interests of each legislator's constituents. Thus, in Argentina we should expect two different results. First, constituency interests should not be a very important factor determining committee membership. Second, committee membership should be guided primarily by legislators' personal preferences rather than by electoral incentives.

We explore these two hypotheses by analyzing membership on thirteen key committees. The sample consists of 1623 legislator/period observations for the 1983–1997 period,²¹ with only the Chamber President excluded.

The thirteen committees are Health, Agriculture, Judicial, Energy, Industry, General Legislation, Labor, Appropriations, Foreign Affairs, Housing, Urban Affairs, Defense, and Social Security. For each committee there is a variable coded 1 if the legislator belongs to the respective committee and 0 otherwise. This is our dependent variable.

Following Shepsle (1978), we estimate a binary logit model for each committee. The independent variables seek to capture the main determinants of particular committee membership. The following explanatory variables are considered:

1. **Committee Membership.** This variable is the number of committees a legislator serves on in a given two-year period. It is a proxy for committee exclusivity (see below).
2. **Party Delegation Size.** See the previous definition.
3. **Chamber Seniority.** See the previous definition.
4. **Committees in the Chamber.** See the previous definition.
5. **Alignment with Governor.** This variable indicates whether the legislator comes from a province ruled by a governor from his/her party. It is coded 1 if the legislator belongs to the same party as his/her governor and 0 otherwise. We seek to capture with this variable the importance of local leaders to legislators' legislative/political careers.

Due to the relative infrequency of roll-call votes in Argentina (Jones 2002) there are no indices of legislators' issue preferences similar to those used in studies of the U.S. Congress (ADA ratings, D-NOMINATE scores). Therefore, as attractiveness measures, we use a series of indicators of professional background and constituency characteristics related to the jurisdiction of the committee in question:

6. **Professional Background.** This variable is coded 1 if the legislator belongs to a committee that matches

²¹The exception is the Energy Committee, for which, due to data restrictions, there are 561 observations.

his/her professional background and 0 otherwise. See the appendix for a complete description of the coding rules.

7. **Regional Interests.** This variable seeks to capture constituency characteristics related to the jurisdiction of the committee in question. We consider different economic and social indicators as a proxy for regional interests. See the appendix for more details. The data were drawn from 1980 and 1991 Argentine National Censuses.

The results from estimating a system of seemingly unrelated logit equations for all committees are presented in Table 3.²² The coefficient for the number of standing committees is normally negative, not always significant and small in political impact.²³ The effect of the number of committees a legislator belongs to is normally positive and significant for all committees except Health and Labor. These coefficients represent a measure of the importance of a particular committee. Legislators hold multiple committee appointments. However, while most legislators can request and become members of different committees, only some (likely due to unobserved personal and political characteristics, but, given the lack of permanency in the Chamber, irrespective of seniority) are able to add the "prestige committees" to their membership list. We infer that important committees are composed of important legislators, who spread their relative power around issues by belonging to a larger set of committees than the remaining legislators. We expect, then, this coefficient to vary with the importance or "exclusivity" of a particular committee.

To interpret this exclusivity effect properly, Table 4 presents the expected change in the probability of membership given a one standard deviation increase in the number of committees a legislator belongs to, with the other independent variables set at their mean values.

²²Because of missing values, the Energy Committee was estimated separately from the remaining twelve committees. Table 3 reports results without fixed effects. Adding fixed effects (provincial and temporal) would have required estimating a total of 436 parameters. Also, our regional variables (one per equation) are time-invariant. Thus, they could be close to a linear combination of the regional fixed effects for each equation. Caution therefore must be taken in the interpretation of the impact of regional interests. The estimates in the fixed effects models do not differ significantly from the basic logit estimates. We also estimated a random effects binary probit model with the same specification as the logit models presented in Table 3. All of these additional analyses, available upon request, provide results that do not differ materially from those reported here.

²³The largest, in absolute value, impact of an increase over the mean by one standard deviation of this variable on the probability of belonging to a committee is for the Appropriations committee, where the impact is less than –4 percent.

TABLE 4 Ranking of Committees by Political Power of their Members, Marginal Effects of Seniority in Chamber and Professional Background - NLSUR estimates

	Change in Probability of Being on Committee as Participation on Committees Increases by One Standard Deviation	Change in Probability of Being on Committee as Seniority in Chamber Increases by One Standard Deviation	Change in Probability of Being on Committee as Regional Interest Increases by One Standard Deviation	Change in Probability of Being on Committee as Professional Background Matches Committee
Appropriations	6.50	4.87		50.53
Foreign Affairs	3.94	2.72	-0.13	
Agriculture	3.81	-0.35	1.40	49.32
Housing	2.85	-1.62	1.53	
Industry	2.12	-0.38	3.76	12.56
Social Security	2.08	-0.65	2.53	20.43
Defense	2.03	2.06		
General Legislation	0.80	-0.09		19.58
Judicial	0.27	0.00		19.00
Labor	0.23	2.69	3.94	55.09
Urban Affairs	0.00	0.00	8.85	
Health	-0.42	-0.22	-1.58	66.87

According to our measure, the most important committee is the Appropriations Committee, followed by Foreign Affairs and Agriculture.²⁴

Table 3 also demonstrates that the effect of seniority on committee membership varies across committees. The coefficient for seniority is positive and significant for Appropriations, Foreign Affairs, Defense and Labor, whereas for Urban Affairs the coefficient is negative and significant. It takes, then, slightly more experience to belong to the more prominent committees such as Appropriations or Foreign Affairs. But as Table 4 shows, the substantive impact of tenure is relatively low (as should be expected given the short tenure of members).

In Table 3, the coefficients for the constituency interest variable, although having the predicted sign, are all politically insignificant, except for Urban Affairs, where a one standard deviation increase in the variable increases the probability of belonging to the committee by 9 percent, whereas for all other committees the effect is less than 4 percent (see Table 4). These results lead us to reject the distributive hypothesis (Weingast and Marshall 1988). Although relevant for committee membership, constituency interests are politically insignificant.

Conversely, Table 3 shows that professional background is often a powerful determinant of committee membership. Six of the nine estimated coefficients for the legislators' occupational background are positive and

significant. Table 4 provides the marginal effects of professional background for each committee.²⁵ For example, being a physician increases the probability of belonging to the Health Committee by 67 percent, being a union leader increases the probability of belonging to the Labor Committee by 55 percent, and being an economist or accountant increases the probability of belonging to the Appropriations Committee by 51 percent.²⁶

A casual review of the results appears to provide support for the informational hypothesis (Krehbiel 1991). A closer examination of the results, though, combined with knowledge gained from extensive interviews with Argentine legislators, staffers, and other qualified observers, leads to the conclusion that support for the informational hypothesis is also modest. While there is some alignment of legislators' professional background and committee membership, this alignment is unaccompanied by committee specialization, either in terms of committee tenure or by legislators limiting the number of committees upon which they serve to those that match their professional background. As a consequence, informational advantages

²⁵In this case we calculate the marginal effects as the change in the probability of committee membership if an individual legislator's professional background is related to that particular committee or not, while keeping all the other independent variables at their means.

²⁶The strong union leader-Labor Committee relationship may also be a measure of interest representation, and not just of professional expertise.

²⁴The rates of rotation do not differ significantly across committees.

are not being obtained. Instead, a more compelling explanation of these results is that legislators required to participate on committees simply choose those whose topic they find of greatest intrinsic interest, and with the least personal cost.²⁷

Committee Chairs

Committee slot inflation dissipates the worth of the currency endowed (Shepsle 1978). In Argentina, a “harder currency” is the committee chair position.²⁸ It is there that the relationship to party leadership may matter. In Argentina, the privileged relationship is between legislators and the provincial party boss (the governor when the party controls the provincial government).²⁹

In contrast to the winner-take-all procedure for allocating committee chairs in the U.S. House, committee chairs in the Argentine Chamber are not distributed entirely to the majority party. Between 1983 and 1997, the majority party received 74 percent of the committee chairs.

Taking into account that there is no formal or informal recognition of seniority in this respect, and that not all chairs will be distributed among the majority party, gubernatorial support may also be key to obtaining appointment as a committee chair.

We estimate a binary logit analysis of whether or not a legislator is a committee chair. The sample consists of

1367 legislator/period observations for the 1983–1997 period. We exclude alternates as well as those who cannot serve as committee chairs (the Chamber President and the leaders of the party delegations). The dependent variable, committee chair, takes a value of 1 if a legislator is a committee chair, and 0 otherwise. The explanatory variables include:

1. **Alignment with Governor.** See the previous definition.
2. **Majority Party.** This variable indicates whether a legislator belongs to the party holding the majority of the Chamber seats. It takes the value of 1 if that is the case, and 0 otherwise.
3. **Chamber Seniority.** See the previous definition.
4. **Committee Chair Seniority.** This variable indicates the number of years a legislator has served as a committee chair. It is calculated at the beginning of each two-year period.
5. **Number of Chair Positions.** This variable indicates the number of existing chair slots in the Chamber.

All of these variables are expected to have a positive impact on the probability of being selected as a committee chair. We again control for provincial, temporal, and individual legislator-specific fixed effects. The results for the basic model as well as with temporal and provincial fixed effects are presented in Table 5.³⁰

All of the coefficients have the predicted sign (positive) and are significant except for the number of available chair slots.³¹ Table 5 also presents the marginal effects of the variables. Seniority as committee chair is the most important determinant (an increase in one standard deviation in the variable results in a 26 percent increase in the probability of being a committee chair), followed by majority party status (10 percent), and seniority in the Chamber (5 percent). The effect of the alignment with the governor (4 percent) is close to that of seniority in the Chamber, showing that a powerful patron (that is, a governor from your home province who is from your party) aids in becoming a committee chair as much as being a senior member of the Chamber.³²

²⁷Observe also that while a physician may serve on the Health Committee and an agriculturist on the Agriculture Committee, both also serve, on average, on two other committees that have little to nothing to do with their profession. For example, the five most popular committees for physicians who serve on the Health Committee are Agriculture, Defense, Energy, Housing, and Social Security.

²⁸As part of ongoing research, we undertook extensive formal and informal interviews with more than two dozen PJ and UCR Chamber deputies and/or their staffers in the months prior to the biennial allocations of committee assignments between 1995 and 2001. In regard to committee assignments, virtually all the interviewees focused their comments on strategies for obtaining a committee chair (or vice chair) position. They devoted only a modest amount of time to the topic of on which other committees they might serve (the Appropriations Committee represents a partial exception in this respect). Our interviews uncovered no support for alternative explanations of the high levels of committee rotation such as a universalism norm (whereby rotation would allow everyone to “share” good and bad assignments during their tenure in office) in committee assignments.

²⁹In the committee membership regressions, the coefficients for alignment with the governor are statistically insignificant in 8 of the 13 equations. As there are no restrictions on committee participation, provincial party support is not a requisite for participation. The only committee where this variable is politically significant is the Appropriations Committee, considered the most powerful in the Chamber, where being aligned with the governor increases the probability of membership by less than 5 percent.

³⁰Provincial and temporal fixed effects have no significant effect. Use of individual fixed effects eliminates more than a quarter of the sample, biasing the sample towards legislators with longer and varied tenure, and thus are not reliable.

³¹An equation excluding Committee Chair Seniority provides substantively similar results.

³²We also interacted Alignment with Governor with Majority Party to examine whether the impact of the former differed depending on whether or not the legislator was in the majority. The interaction term was statistically insignificant. Having a copartisan as their governor helps minority legislators as much as majority legislators in obtaining a committee chair appointment.

TABLE 5 Determinants of Committee Chairmanships

Explanatory Variables	Basic Model	Marginal Effects	Provincial FE	Temporal FE	Prov. and Temp.
Alignment with Governor	0.351* (-0.191)	0.040	0.287 (0.203)	0.327* (0.195)	0.253 (0.209)
Majority Party	0.864** (-0.204)	0.097	0.933*** (0.213)	0.855*** (0.207)	0.936*** (0.218)
Chamber Seniority	0.247*** (-0.042)	0.047	0.236*** (0.043)	0.255*** (0.043)	0.245*** (0.044)
Committee Chair Seniority	1.888*** (-0.227)	0.262	1.894*** (0.236)	1.882*** (0.228)	1.890*** (0.235)
Number of Chair Positions	0.039 (-0.024)	0.017	0.045* (0.024)		
Constant	-4.448 (-0.810)		-5.386 (0.991)	-3.219 (0.245)	-4.013 (0.582)
Log-Likelihood function	-446.312		-434.366	-445.341	-433.167
Likelihood Tests					
Basic Model vs Model with Provincial FE, Chi-Square (d.f., P-value)			23.891 (22; .353)		
Basic Model vs Model with Temporal FE, Chi-Square (d.f., P-value)				1.942 (5; .857)	
Basic Model vs Model with Prov. and Temp. FE, Chi-Square (d.f., P-value)					26.291 (27; .502)
N	1367		1367	1367	1367

Note: Standard errors are below the estimated coefficients in parentheses; * = p-value < .10, ** = p-value < .05, *** = p-value < .01.

In contrast to general committee assignments, a committee chair is a highly valued commodity. This is unsurprising. With few exceptions, every committee chair receives extra resources (mostly for staff salary) amounting to approximately 50 percent of the base allocation received by each legislator. The committee chair also controls the permanent staff assigned to the committee. These findings also demonstrate that contrary to a pure seniority system, the link to the local party boss constitutes an important determinant of who becomes a committee chair.

Conclusions

This article applies the insight that legislative behavior and the organization of legislative institutions are affected by electoral rules to understand some basic features of Argentina's national legislature. By moving legislators' electoral incentives away from voters to the interests of the provincial party boss, Argentina's electoral rules, along with a constitutional system that places limited restraints on unilateral executive actions, have

created an amateur congress; one that has neither the expertise nor the incentives to initiate influential legislation nor to control the public administration. The evidence presented here shows, though, that these are not amateur politicians. Argentine legislators' progressive ambition causes them to leave Congress, but not politics. We also show how the internal organization of the Argentine Chamber of Deputies reflects the electoral incentives legislators face. Instead of developing institutions to maximize policy expertise and the ability to provide services to their constituencies, Argentine deputies pass through Congress making only a minor policy impact. Indeed, they behave very much like U.S. House members at the turn of the twentieth century (Kernell 1977).

Our analysis has implications for theoretical and comparative analyses of legislative organization and performance. The article raises questions about the general applicability of some of the theories developed for the organization of the U.S. Congress. The distributive hypothesis fails in the Argentine case as legislators have very few incentives to devote efforts on their constituents' behalf. Further, although committee appointments appear to match prior professional expertise, multiple

Appendix Definition Professional Background and Regional Interests Defined

Committee	Professional Background	Regional Interests
Health	Physician, Dentist, Health professional	% homes with Unsatisfied Basic Needs (1991 Census)
Farming	Farm related activities	% work force in agriculture (1991 Census)
Judicial	Lawyer	
Energy	Engineer, Geologist	Oil production (m ³ per year) (1991 Census)
Industry	Industry related activities	% work force in industry (1991 Census)
General Legislation	Lawyer	
Labor	Union Leader	Active Economic Population (in 1,000) (1991 Census)
Appropriations	Economist, Accountant, Business Major	
Foreign Affairs		% foreign population (1980 Census)
Housing	Businessperson	% of work force in construction (1991 Census)
Urban Affairs		% of urban population (1980 Census)
Defense		
Social Security	Union Leader	Senior citizens (in 1,000) (1980 Census)

committee membership coupled with low tenure both in the Chamber and in committees, as well as information gleaned from elite interviews, cast some doubts on the applicability of the informational rationale for legislative organization.

The article also contributes to the comparative analysis of legislatures. Argentina provides a case of a weak Congress populated by transient amateur legislators who answer to fragmented provincial leaderships. This Argentine reality is in large part the consequence of party-centered electoral rules in a federal system. From a methodological perspective, the article also suggests the complex nature of legislatures and electoral rules requires an intensive micro-analytic approach to comparative legislative studies. These studies extend and refine preexisting legislative theories, primarily designed to explain the functioning of the U.S. Congress, thereby contributing to the development of better general theory of legislative institutions.

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