P75 / Legislatures as Policy Actors: Committee Systems, Audit, Post-Legislative Scrutiny and the Governance of Implementation

Topic : Governance, Policy Networks and Coalition

Chair : Jude Ani (National Assembly)

Second Chair : Enrico Albanesi (Università degli Studi di Genova)

Third Chair : Hannah Muzee (Africa Regional Convening on Parliament and Legislation (AFRIPAL))

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Policy process scholarship has examined legislatures closely and at every stage of policymaking, and the panel does not claim otherwise. As a result, punctuated equilibrium theory is constructed upon congressional hearings as its principal measure of governmental attention (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005), the multiple streams framework assigns legislative actors a central part in coupling problems to solutions (Kingdon, 2011), veto player theory specifies the legislature's structural position in the production of policy change (Tsebelis, 2002), and the delegation literature treats the legislature as a principal exercising ex ante and ex post control over administration (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984; Strøm, 2000). A panel premised on theoretical neglect would therefore be premised on an error, and this proposal advances a narrower and, we suggest, more defensible claim.

Indeed, the claim concerns the level of abstraction at which the legislature enters these accounts. In each of the traditions named above the institution is represented by a single property, whether attention, veto capacity or the capacity to sanction, rather than as an organisation whose committee jurisdiction and specialisation, research and secretariat capacity, procedural repertoire and membership stability vary systematically across cases and over time. Legislative studies supplies exactly that organisational detail (Martin, Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014; Martin & Strøm, 2023), and has begun to demonstrate that organisational capacity is itself variable and in places declining (Crosson, Furnas, LaPira & Burgat, 2021), yet it has engaged comparatively little with policy outcomes as public policy scholars specify them. The two literatures consequently model the same institution at incompatible levels of abstraction, with the result that organisational variation among legislatures is rarely carried into explanations of policy outcomes.

The objective of this panel is, therefore, to close that distance by treating legislative organisational capacity as an explanatory variable rather than as background, and by concentrating on the stages at which its effects are least examined, namely implementation oversight, audit and ex-post evaluation. Subsequently, the panel’s theoretical ambition is accordingly one of integration rather than discovery: it then asks, what the policy process literature would predict differently if the legislature were modelled as an organisation rather than as a property.

Research Question

The panel seeks to answer the question: under what conditions, and through which institutional mechanisms, do legislatures shape policy outcomes beyond the moment of enactment?

Three subsidiary questions are:

i) The first concerns mechanism: which legislative instruments - committee inquiry, budgetary amendment, statutory review clauses, summons and reporting requirements, audit findings and the recommendations of public accounts committees, or constituency-level feedback - actually alter implementation, and which generate activity without effect?

ii) The second concerns condition: what institutional features, including committee specialisation, staff and research capacity, tenure and turnover, and the degree of executive-legislative alignment, determine whether those instruments carry force?

iii) The third concerns measurement: how should legislative influence on policy outcomes be identified empirically, given that the counterfactual is rarely observable and that recorded legislative activity is a poor proxy for policy effect?

iv) The fourth concerns audit: how does the relationship between supreme audit institutions and legislative accounts committees shape the detection and correction of implementation failure, and what accounts for the persistent gap between the issuing of audit-based recommendations and their implementation by

administrative bodies (Matlala, 2025)?

Scientific Relevance

The panel addresses a gap that is theoretical, empirical and methodological at once.

1) Theoretically, the components of a fuller account already exist but have not been assembled. Hence, work on post-legislative scrutiny has established the design and rationale of ex-post review and documented its diffusion across parliaments (De Vrieze & Norton, 2020, 2021); the delegation literature has specified the control relationship between legislatures and agencies (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984; Strøm, 2000); and comparative legislative studies has mapped the organisational variation on which both depend (Martin & Strøm, 2023). What has not been attempted is their integration into a single account in which organisational capacity is the explanatory variable and post-enactment policy outcomes the explanandum. The panel's theoretical originality lies in that integration, and in the proposition it generates, namely that legislative influence after enactment is a function of organisational capability rather than of formal authority, which is a proposition the comparative evidence can falsify.

2) Empirically, the evidence base is heavily concentrated on a small number of well-resourced legislatures in Western Europe, North America and the Westminster tradition, a concentration visible in the cases from which the leading comparative treatments are drawn (Martin, Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). Legislatures in Africa, Asia, Latin America and small island states operate under materially different conditions of capacity, tenure and executive dominance, and existing cross-national work on oversight tools indicates that the availability of an instrument and its effective use diverge sharply under those conditions (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2014). The propositions derived from the established cases cannot be assumed to transfer to them. This panel actively seeks contributions from those settings.

3) Methodologically, the study of legislative influence on policy outcomes confronts an identification problem that the field has not resolved. Counting bills, motions, committee sittings or oversight visits measures institutional activity rather than policy effect, and the two can move in opposite directions. The panel welcomes papers that confront this problem directly, whether through process tracing, comparative case design, quantitative text analysis of legislative and administrative documents, or the construction of new indicators. The audit relationship is of particular methodological interest here, because audit findings, committee recommendations and departmental responses generate a dated documentary trail against which follow-up can be traced, which makes the activity-versus-effect distinction unusually tractable.

4) The audit dimension, which the panel now treats as a distinct line of enquiry, connects the foregoing three. Auditing is in most systems a legislative function exercised at one remove, in that a supreme audit institution reports to the legislature and a public accounts or equivalent committee determines what follows. It is through this relationship that legislatures acquire independent information about implementation, and it is therefore the principal institutional channel by which the legislature can act upon implementation failure after enactment. Comparative evidence establishes that the arrangements governing audit institutions differ widely in mandate, independence and reporting relationship (Ferry, Hamid & Hebling Dutra, 2023), and that variation supplies the panel with a natural source of comparison. Evidence from oversight practice also indicates that recommendations frequently fail to produce administrative change where enforcement authority is limited and mandates overlap (Matlala, 2025), which is precisely the activity-without-effect problem the panel is organised around. Audit accordingly belongs in this panel not as an additional topic but as the clearest case of the mechanism it seeks to explain.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites theoretical, methodological and empirical papers examining the legislature as a policy actor. We welcome single-country studies, paired and small-N comparisons, large-N analyses and methodological contributions. Papers grounded in legislatures underrepresented in the comparative literature are particularly encouraged, as are papers that report negative or null findings, since the conditions under which legislative instruments fail to shape outcomes are as informative as those under which they succeed.

Contributions are invited on, though need not be confined to, the following themes:

· Committee systems and policy substance: how committee specialisation, jurisdiction, chairmanship and permanence shape legislative contribution to policy formulation and revision.

· Post-legislative scrutiny in practice: the design, operation and consequences of ex-post review mechanisms, including statutory review clauses, sunset provisions and dedicated scrutiny committees.

· Legislatures and implementation: the instruments through which legislatures monitor, correct or obstruct the implementation of laws they have enacted, and the conditions under which such intervention alters administrative behaviour.

· Budgetary scrutiny as policy influence: appropriation, amendment and the work of public accounts and parliamentary budget offices as channels of policy control.

· Audit and the legislative correction of implementation failure: the relationship between supreme audit institutions and legislative accounts committees, the determinants of follow-up on audit findings, the treatment of repeat and unresolved findings, and the conditions under which audit-based recommendations alter administrative conduct rather than merely recording its deficiencies.

· Audit independence and institutional design: how the appointment, tenure, funding and reporting arrangements of audit institutions condition the legislature's capacity to scrutinise implementation, and what the observed variation in those arrangements implies for comparative theory.

· Legislative capacity: the contribution of research services, committee secretariats, legislative staff and information infrastructure to policy performance, together with the effects of turnover and tenure insecurity on institutional memory.

· Executive-legislative relations and policy outcomes: how alignment, division and coalition arrangements condition legislative policy influence, and whether cooperation improves outcomes or merely accelerates them.

· Legislatures in the Global South: policy influence under conditions of executive dominance, constrained resources, high membership turnover and donor-funded capacity building.

· Evidence use in legislative decision-making: how research, data and expert testimony enter legislative deliberation, and what determines whether they affect the resulting policy.

· Measuring legislative policy influence: conceptual and methodological contributions addressing identification, indicator construction and the activity-versus-effect problem.

· Legislatures and cross-cutting policy agendas: the legislative contribution to climate, health, digital governance and other domains requiring sustained oversight across successive parliaments.

Proposals should state the research question, the case or cases examined, the data and method employed, and the argument advanced. Papers at an advanced stage of development will be preferred, though well-specified work in progress is welcome where the empirical strategy is clear. The panel will accept between four and fifteen papers in accordance with the conference guidelines, and accepted contributors will be asked to circulate full papers in advance so that discussion can proceed from a shared basis. Contributors are encouraged to situate their papers explicitly in relation to the literature cited below, so that the panel’s cumulative contribution can be assessed against an identified body of work rather than asserted.

Proposed Session Structure

Should three sessions be allocated, the panel will be organised as follows:

· Session One - Mechanisms. Papers examining specific legislative instruments, including committee inquiry, statutory review, budgetary amendment audit and accounts committee follow-up, and oversight summons, and their observable effects on policy.

· Session Two - Conditions and Capacity. Papers examining the institutional features that determine whether those instruments carry force, including staffing, specialisation, tenure, turnover the independence and reporting arrangements of audit institutions, and executive-legislative alignment.

· Session Three - Underrepresented Cases and Measurement. Papers reporting evidence from legislatures outside the established comparative literature, together with methodological contributions addressing the identification of legislative policy influence.

Should only two sessions be allocated, the audit and post-legislative scrutiny papers will be convened together as a single session on ex-post instruments, since both address the correction of policy after enactment and the same measurement problem arises in each.

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