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Legislative Scholars Should Study Extra-legislative Outcomes*

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As legislative scholars, we spend the majority of our efforts studying choices made within parliamentary chambers. We study how committees are organized ([Fernandes, Goplerud and Won 2019](#)) and the allocation of their seats ([McGrath and Ryan 2019](#)); who authors legislation ([Däubler, Bräuninger and Brunner 2016](#)) and which members co-sponsor ([Muraoka 2020](#)); whether or not the roll is called ([Egar 2016](#)) and its outcome ([Senk 2020](#)); and, just as importantly, the rules conditioning all of these choices. Of course, these questions are important to understanding the legislative

*Articles for this special issue were first presented in a conference organized by the Department of Political Science and the European Union Center at Texas A&M University called The Political Economic Implications of Legislative Institutions. Fortunato and the contributing authors are very grateful to the Department of Political Science, the EU Center, and Guy Whitten for funding and organizing and the conference. Each of the articles in the special issue (and quite a few others that will appear in other venues) were made better by fantastic comments and feedback by participants, including: Molly Ariotti, Timm Betz, Jon Bond, Zè Cheibub, Mallory Compton, Scott Cook, Allison Craig, Casey Crisman-Cox, Brian Crisp, Kostanca Dhima, Johanna Dunaway, Maria Escobar-Lemmon, Sarah Fulton, Kirby Goidel, Spencer Goidel, Christian Grose, Matthew Hayes, Florian Hollenbach, Indridi Indridason, Andrea Junqueira, Ali Kagalwala, Kris Kanthak, Mark Kayser, Paul Kellstedt, Justin Kirkland, Mary Kroeger, John Kuk, Jonghoon Lee, Christine Lipsmeyer, James Lo, Janica Magat, Alejandro Medina, Nathalie Mendez, Thiago Moreira, Diana O'Brien, Benjy Ogden, Alex Pacek, Brittany Perry, Ben Peterson, Erik Peterson, Jordan Carr Peterson, Pablo Pinto, Christy Phillips, Amy Pond, Tessa Provins, Gisela Sin, Daniel M. Smith, Flavio Souza, Randy Stevenson, Keigo Tanabe, Misha Taylor-Robinson, Joe Ura, Mona Wakilifathi, Guy Whitten, Laron Williams, Weiwen Yin, Sam Zuhlke and others. Good things happen when so many smart people come together to contribute to the scientific endeavor.

process and governance more generally. But we have more to offer. These choices determine a set of observable outcomes that shape the lived experience of the governed, and we have spent comparatively little time and energy studying these outcomes. Because we have paid comparatively little attention to them, other scholars have filled the void, meaning that, while we have dominated the study of legislative processes, the implications of these processes, such as environmental regulation, inequality, and public debt and spending, are more likely to be studied by economists, public policy scholars, sociologists, etc. It goes without saying that these scholars bring their own strengths to bear on the study of these outcomes, but our strengths are still needed.

Apart from our substantive interests and expertise, we are generally united in our embrace of a common methodology, rational choice institutionalism, and an appreciation and desire for theoretical and empirical rigor. This has led us to cultivate an admirable set of theoretical and empirical tools to overcome substantial hurdles to inference, including diffusion, partial observability, and selection bias. We theorize solutions to difficult coordination problems ([Diermeier and Feddersen 1998](#)), measure intangible qualities ([Poole and Rosenthal 1985](#)), and estimate counterfactuals ([Hall 2015](#)). These strengths offer great promise for pushing forward scientific research into the legislative roots of extra-legislative outcomes — and vice versa — to broaden our collective understanding of those outcomes in particular and the implications of legislative choices and procedures more generally.

This is not to say that legislative scholars have ignored these kinds outcomes. [Betz, Fortunato and O'Brien's \(2020\)](#) research on gender representation and import taxation, [Fourinaies's \(2018\)](#) research on the distribution of agenda control and industrial campaign donations, and [Martin and Vanberg's \(2020\)](#) research on committee powers and welfare generosity are just a few recent examples to the contrary. What is being advocated for here is a reallocation of our collective effort toward studying extra-legislative events resulting from (or contributing to) legislative institutions and processes. Let us briefly consider the development of scholarship on legislative capacity (institutionalization, professionalization, etc.), which occurred principally in this journal over the past few decades, as an example of a move to a more even division of effort between legislative and extra-legislative outcomes.

Around three decades ago, the study of legislative capacity was focused on composition and productivity. Does professionalization favor a particular party (Fiorina 1994) or help in recruiting more black or women candidates into the legislature (Squire 1992)? And, are legislators in high capacity chambers better informed (Gilligan 1991) or do they work more efficiently (Hedlund and Freeman 1981; Squire 1998)? More recently, this literature has evolved toward consideration of how capacity shapes extra-legislative outcomes and their broader political economic impact. This includes, for example, the role of professionalism in the diffusion of policy instruments *between* legislatures (Shipan and Volden 2006; Desmarais et al. 2015), the behavior of street-level bureaucrats (Boehmke and Shipan 2015; Lillvis and McGrath 2017), and even how capacity can influence a state’s credit rating (Lewis 2012; Fortunato and Turner 2018). Scholars in this subfield expanded the array of processes and outcomes they study not only by broadening their view of the potential implications of legislative capacity, but also by doubling down on the centrality of the legislature in the function of government and therefore the impact of governance.

This special issue of *Legislative Studies Quarterly* is meant to promote research on extra-legislative political-economic outcomes, in all aspects of legislative studies, in a manner similar to the continuing evolution of research on legislative capacity. The articles represent a variety of approaches, contexts, and key covariates, each pushing legislative research in their own way deeper into questions and outcomes to which we have previously paid little attention. Two articles examine the broader roots and implications of the behavior of individual Congressional representatives. Craig (2021) analyzes how a representative’s accumulation of social influence, or connectedness, in the House can have positive spillover into their district by earning it priority in the allocation of federal grant money administered entirely by the bureaucracy. Peterson and Grose (2021) provide evidence that Congressional representatives’ voting decisions are conditioned by their expectations for how bills will influence aspects of the stock market and whether they may personally benefit from these market movements.

Three articles consider the compositional effects of legislatures. Ariotti (2021) examines how multiparty coalitions, relative to single party majorities, affect public sector size across African

democracies. Examining total government spending, she finds that coalitions agree to spend more than their single party counterparts, and, further, that the number of ministers with portfolio is unrelated to spending, which refines our understanding of the organizational strength of parties in African legislatures. [Barnes, Beall and Holman \(2021\)](#) draw a link between gender-occupational representation and policy outcomes by providing evidence that the number of representatives (and especially women representatives) with “pink collar” occupational experience (working class sectors traditionally associated with women, such as health care support and education) is strongly associated with increases in education and social services spending. [Hajnal and Kuk \(2021\)](#) examine the effect of partisan representation on individuals’ economic outcomes and reveal that the election of a Democratic majority in states houses leads to a pronounced reduction in gender inequality as manifest in income and employment.

Two articles study how exposure to public preferences shapes legislative activity. [Harden, Kirkland and Shea \(2021\)](#) provide evidence that transparency laws, which open legislative processes to the observation and scrutiny of the electorate, may inhibit a legislature’s ability to efficiently respond to changing economic circumstances and that this is manifest in their state’s general obligation bond assessments. This implies that responsiveness to voters may come at the expense of responsiveness to credit market demands. [Kayser and Rehmert \(2021\)](#) present evidence for responsiveness by assessing how differing levels of public support for parties shift the distribution of bargaining power in multiparty parliaments, showing that public sentiment changes that increase Green Party bargaining power lead to stronger environmental protections, whether or not the Greens are part of the governing coalition. This is some of the strongest evidence yet for legislative responsiveness *and* opposition influence in multiparty parliamentary democracies. It may also provide us some incentive to rethink our approach to the study of policy congruence ([Powell 2018](#)) — parliamentary and even government compositions are not the end of the story.

In sum, the articles contained in this special issue examine the legislative implications for, or consequences of credit ratings, environmental regulation, executive-administered granting, gender inequality, government spending priorities, occupational histories, public sentiment, stock perfor-

mance, and total government spending and provide strong evidence that legislative choices, compositions, and rules have wide ranging effects on the broader political environment and therefore lived experience of the governed. The hope is that this collection of articles, demonstrating the utility and possibility of examining a wider array of inputs and outputs to the legislative process, will begin to persuade our community of legislative scholars to devote more energy to these and other political economic phenomena. Legislatures are the engines of democratic governance and possess the ability to profoundly reshape, directly or indirectly, educational attainment, inequality, international conflict, lending markets, public health outcomes, trade, and more. Who better to study these processes than legislative scholars?

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