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David Epstein; David Brady; Sadafumi Kawato; Sharyn O'Halloran

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# *A Comparative Approach to Legislative Organization: Careerism and Seniority in the United States and Japan\**

David Epstein, *Columbia University*  
David Brady, *Stanford University*  
Sadafumi Kawato, *Tohoku University*  
Sharyn O'Halloran, *Columbia University*

*Theory:* This paper provides a comparative study of legislative institutions in the United States and Japan. It explains the rise of committee-based legislative organizations as an institutional choice made by rational legislators deciding how best to regularize their career advancement subject to electoral and constitutional constraints.

*Hypotheses:* We argue that the rise of careerism within a legislature leads to a regularized system of career advancement, or a seniority system. Furthermore, the details of this system depend on the heterogeneity of intra-party preferences and each country's electoral and constitutional system. To the extent that parties can offer members electoral security and influence over policy, they will retain control over the policy-making process. Otherwise, control will devolve to smaller organizational units, such as committees.

*Methods:* We develop a new measure of seniority within committees. We present statistical evidence linking a rise in average tenure within both legislatures to a regularization of careers, and detailing the nature of committee-based seniority in each country.

*Results:* In the United States, single-member electoral districts, alternating party control, and a separation of powers system gave legislators an incentive to create committee-based policy jurisdictions. In Japan, multi-member districts, single-party control, and a parliamentary system led to a unique two-tiered seniority system in which members rise first through committees and then through cabinet posts.

## **Introduction**

Max Weber observed early in this century that politics was becoming a vocation rather than an avocation. His observation was an accurate predic-

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tion of the rise of career politicians. Legislative bodies once staffed by farmers, lawyers, businessmen, and local notables are now dominated by professional or career politicians. With the advent of careerism came the need to reduce career uncertainty. Members pursued this goal in part by creating legislative institutions that regularized career advancement and promotion; i.e., a form of *seniority system*. The specific type of seniority system adopted, in turn, had profound implications for legislative organization, dividing power and influence over the policy-making process between a centralized party structure and decentralized committees.

In many countries, the existing party system of government has been able to accommodate the rise of career politicians without fundamental changes within the legislature. That is, politicians may be members of legislatures, but their careers are within their political party. In the British system, for instance, Chris Patton lost the support of his constituency but maintains his career with an appointment as Governor of Hong Kong. When parties are able to serve members' needs for reelection and influence over policy, they will retain control over the policy-making process, allowing for strong parties and relatively coherent, unified policy-making (King 1981, 87–9).

In other political systems, though, and especially those where members of the legislature cultivate the personal vote (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1987), parties alone cannot assure members of reelection—the *sine qua non* for a career. In these systems the solution to careerists' desire to reduce uncertainty may be to enhance the policy-making role of extra-party organizations within the legislature, such as committees, and then regularize members' careers within these committees. In these cases, parties will be forced to relinquish part of their control over policy to smaller decision-making units, leading to weakened legislative parties and less coherent policy-making.

This paper examines two major countries in which parties do not play as central a role in controlling members' reelection—the United States and Japan. We argue that in each country, the lengthening of members' electoral careers was closely followed by the institution of a seniority system, or a regularized system of advancement. We further argue that intra-party heterogeneity, along with each country's constitutional and electoral systems, led to seniority systems which operate more within committees than parties. Thus we explain the rise of these committee-based legislative organizations as an institutional choice made by rational legislators deciding how best to regularize their career advancement subject to electoral and constitutional constraints.

The remainder of this paper models the choice of seniority systems within a professionalized legislature. Two central hypotheses emerge: first,

*the rise of careerism in a national legislature gives rise to a seniority system; and second, heterogeneous parties, the personal vote in elections, and a constitutional system of separate powers lead to decentralized (non-party based) seniority systems.* To test these hypotheses, we offer a new, continuous measure of seniority violations, and then employ this measure to show that in the years following a rise in careerism—the turn of the century in the United States and the years following World War II in Japan—advancement through committees also became regularized. We provide further evidence to suggest that the emergence of intra-party heterogeneity, along with constitutional and electoral factors, determined the degree of control parties in each country exercised over the policy-making process. We conclude with some implications of our work for the broader study of legislative organization and policy formation.

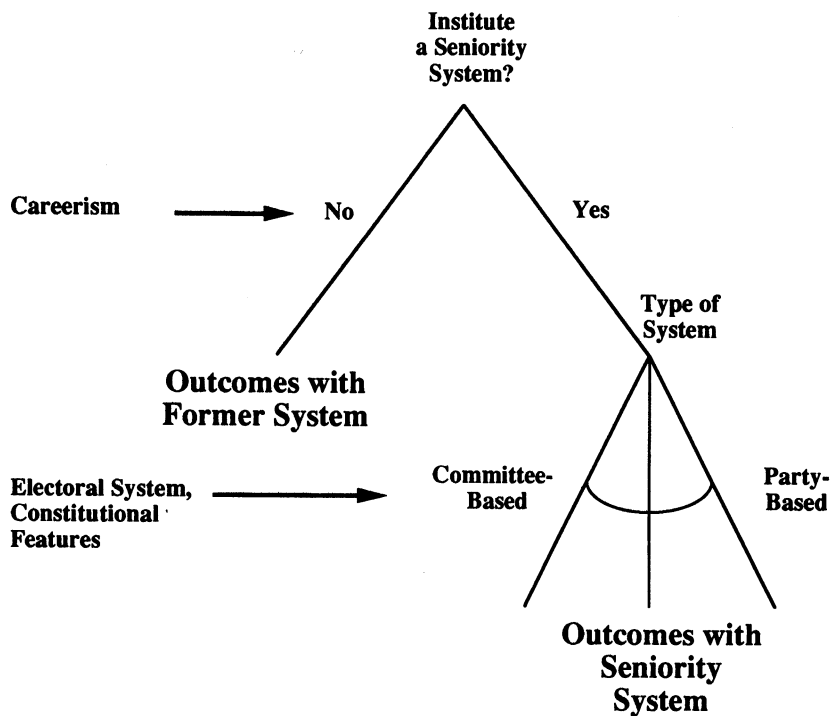
### **Legislative Organization and the Rise of Seniority Systems**

Two questions must be addressed: why do seniority systems arise, and what form do they take? The logic of our argument is illustrated in Figure 1. To the first question, we propose that seniority systems will be instituted when legislative careerism rises. The answer to the second question is more complicated: the details of the system will depend on a number of basic political factors, including the electoral system and constitutional provisions of policy-making. The rise of seniority can thus be seen as a two-stage institutional choice, where members initially decide whether or not to establish a seniority system and then, if so, what type of system to institute. The rest of this section outlines our argument in greater detail.

#### *Careerism and Seniority*

When average tenures of service are low, rank-and-file legislators will not expect to have a large impact on public policy. They will, instead, see service in the national legislature as part of their local career, possibly in business or local politics (Brady, Buckley, and Rivers 1995; Kernell 1977). Power in the national legislature will then be disproportionately influenced by the relatively small number of careerists who have served for many terms, as they have expertise both in the issues under discussion and in the techniques of constructing and passing legislation (Chiu 1928; Follet 1896; Rothman 1966). Under these conditions we would expect to see power and decision-making centralized in a leadership structure such as the legislative party (Cooper 1970). Committees will be filled with members who agree with the leaders' policy positions—that is, the committee and party systems will merge—and individual legislators will have little input on matters of national policy.

But when the national legislature becomes an attractive career in itself,

**Figure 1. The Rise of Seniority Systems**

rank and file members will desire a means through which they can influence policy, especially in areas important to their constituents. They will no longer be content allowing leaders to “stack the deck” in committee appointments. Rather, they will prefer an arrangement by which their long-term career prospects are regularized and leaders’ discretion is diminished. That is, they will institute a “seniority system.”

Such an argument has already been advanced by Polsby (1968, 145), in his classic exposition on the institutionalization of the House, where he links a rise in terms served with a division of labor and “automatic rather than discretionary methods for conducting [the House’s] internal business.” It also accords well with modern approaches to organizational theory, which argue that governance structures, or institutional arrangements, will grow to reflect changes in the institutional environment of any organization. In particular, organizations with a stable membership will become

bureaucratized, developing routine methods of allocating resources and providing for regular chains of internal advancement.<sup>1</sup>

Thus under the pressure of careerism, the older systems, which allowed power to be exercised by a few members, will no longer be seen as acceptable, and new organizational forms will replace them. These institutions should be as regularized as possible, so as to decrease the uncertainty over long-term career prospects. Yet they should also retain some flexibility, to provide incentives for the advancement of those members who showed superior skills and to encourage hard work. In other words, the system should be fair, yet effective.<sup>2</sup>

### *Party vs. Committee Seniority Systems*

Assuming that legislators' preferences favor the establishment of a seniority system, the next question is whether or not seniority will apply within the preexisting party structure, or whether it will devolve to smaller organizational units such as committees. We argue that party-based seniority systems will arise in those cases where parties can accommodate members' increasing desire for reelection and policy influence. When they cannot, the result will be a more decentralized, committee-based system.

To begin with, pressure for leaders to share power will be intensified when members of the majority party factionalize along major policy issues. When preferences are homogeneous, it does not necessarily matter who holds important legislative positions, as similar policies will result in any case (Brady, Brody, and Epstein 1989). But if members disagree, then the division of key posts among factions will become of critical importance, and members will no longer abide by the leadership's stacking committees in their favor. Thus intra-party heterogeneity of preferences should be linked with a less party-based system.

The constitutional and electoral rules in many parliamentary systems allow parties more control over members' electoral fates, and thus favor party-based seniority.<sup>3</sup> In party list systems, for instance, members with more seniority can be placed higher on a party's list, thus virtually assuring a core set of members that they will be reelected. Similarly, in Britain, more senior members can be moved to safe districts, again improving their

<sup>1</sup>See the discussion in Williamson (1995) Chapter 9, building off the earlier work of Davis and North (1971).

<sup>2</sup>In this respect, a seniority system bears a close resemblance to internal labor markets in firms; general rules of advancement are established, but management always retains some flexibility in promotions to provide incentives for hard work. See Milgrom and Roberts (1992) Chapter 11, for a discussion of the relevant issues from an economic point of view.

<sup>3</sup>For examples, see Barnes (1977) on Italy; Doring and Smith (1982) on West Germany; and Weil (1970) on the Netherlands.

reelection chances (Ranney 1965).<sup>4</sup> Critical to parties' retaining control over elections is the lack of a *personal vote* for legislators—that is, a vote that adheres to the individual politician more than the party (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1987).

Also, most parliamentary systems are essentially unicameral. Thus a party that wins an electoral majority or enters into a ruling coalition is assured of direct control over some elements of policy. Intra-party factional disagreements over policy and bargains among partners in a ruling coalition are resolved prior to either the election or the formation of a government. In competitive parliamentary systems, then, members can rise steadily through cabinet or shadow cabinet posts and eventually be in a position to directly affect policy outcomes (Pulzer 1977).

Other electoral systems, though, give rise to the personal vote and thus are biased away from strong parties. When members of the legislature are elected from single-member districts with residency requirements, for instance, politicians pursuing reelection will attempt to cultivate direct voter loyalties. Parties may be able to assist members in their quest for reelection by providing funds and attractive candidates higher up on the ticket, but they cannot assure members of reelection to the same extent as in party list systems.

Furthermore, in presidential systems, parties lose some measure of control over policy outcomes. Even in times of unified government, when the executive and legislative branches are controlled by the same party, different electoral constituencies will tend to lead to inter-branch conflict. In these circumstances, parties will no longer be able to guarantee their members that bargains embodied in a party's platform will be transformed into policy. Similar considerations apply to bicameral as opposed to unicameral legislatures.<sup>5</sup>

Here, we would expect that rational legislators will no longer be willing to tie their fates to the whims of party leaders. Instead, they will prefer to enhance their reelection chances by decentralizing power into committees and self-selecting onto those committees that most directly affect their key constituents.<sup>6</sup> These committees will become *transformative* in the sense

<sup>4</sup>On the general issue of electoral systems and cleavages, see Rae (1976), Taagepera and Shugart (1989), and Cox (1987, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>This view is also supported in Diermeier and Myerson (1995), who derive the theoretically important result that the greater the number of veto players outside a legislative chamber, the more power delegated to committees within that chamber.

<sup>6</sup>One implication of this statement is that, after seniority systems have been instituted, more senior members will have greater chances of reelection, all else being equal. This proposition has been modeled formally in Shepsle and Nalebuff (1990) and in McKelvey and Reizman (1992).

that policy changes made in committees will affect the shape of final legislation (Polsby 1975). Although parties will still have an important role to play in coordinating the actions of the various committees, much of their policy-making authority will devolve to committee leaders (Cox and McCubbins 1993).

This section outlined a theory of whether seniority systems will be party- or committee-based. These two possibilities should not be taken to be stark alternatives, but rather as the end points along a continuum. In general, career advancement will be regularized within parties to the extent that parties can provide members with their basic political needs: reelection and control over policy. When parties cannot credibly commit to providing these, or when factionalism within a party creates a high degree of policy uncertainty, legislators will prefer to move to a more committee-based seniority system.

### **Evidence from the United States**

We argued above that committee-based seniority systems are established when careerism rises and parties cannot meet members' electoral and policy demands. We now provide evidence that these conditions characterized both the United States House and the Japanese Diet at different times. The turning point in the United States came after the Cannon Revolt of 1910. In Japan, it came in 1949, when the Liberal Party won a majority in the Japanese Diet; it later merged with the Democratic Party to form the LDP (Fukui 1988; Soma 1986). Thus both the United States House in 1910 and the Japanese Diet in 1949 faced an institutional design problem: how to create a system of career advancement which would satisfy members' needs for reelection and influence over policy.

For each country, we begin with a brief legislative history and an outline of the electoral and constitutional systems. We then move to more concrete data analysis testing the hypothesis that increased careerism, heterogeneous preferences, and the personal vote weakened legislative parties and led to the institution of a committee-based seniority system.

#### *The Rise of the United States Seniority System*

The United States House of Representatives at the end of the nineteenth century was partisan, majoritarian, and largely populated by members serving less than three terms, with power centralized in a small cadre of Republican party leaders. Rothman's (1966) characterization of the United States Senate at the turn of the century reveals a similar institutional arrangement. The post-World War I House and Senate have been much less partisan, more egalitarian, and populated by careerists, with power decentralized in committees (Shepsle 1988). The turning point in the development of the

modern Congress occurred in roughly the years immediately before and after 1910. During this period both branches of the United States Congress became careers for their members, and these members changed the institution by stripping the Speaker of his committee appointment power.

In both the House and Senate at the turn of the century, the party and committee systems were structured such that the party leaders were also the committee leaders. In the House, the member with the most votes in the majority party's caucus was Speaker and Chairman of the Rules Committee. The member with the next most votes was majority leader and Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, whereas the next in votes was majority whip and chairman of Ways and Means or Judiciary (Brady 1973; McConachie 1898). The Speaker had the power under the Rules of the House to appoint all members to committees. The Senate in 1900 had a similarly partisan and centralized *modus operandi*.

There is broad agreement among scholars that it was also around this time that the length of legislative careers began to rise, the only point of disagreement being the reason behind this change. The usual suspects include: (1) a decline in partisan competitiveness following the electoral realignment of 1896 (Price 1971; Schattschneider 1960); (2) the adoption of ballot reforms and primaries (Alford and Brady 1993); and (3) institutional changes within the House itself (Polsby 1968). Recently, Brady, Buckley, and Rivers (1995) find support for all these causes at various periods between 1874 and 1930. They also attribute careerism partly to the decline of multi-county electoral districts, thus reducing the practice of "cycling in office" that was formerly present.<sup>7</sup>

Evidence of the increasing length of congressional careers can be seen in Figures 2 and 3, taken from the data provided in Polsby (1968). Figure 2 plots mean terms of service in the House from 1791 to 1965, while Figure 3 shows the percent of new members. Each chart also includes a 5-year moving average of the series. In each case, a significant movement in the direction of lengthening careers is observable during the critical years from 1880 to 1920.<sup>8</sup>

This same period saw the rise of intra-party heterogeneity among the Republicans. After winning the realigning election of 1896, the Republi-

<sup>7</sup>When an electoral district comprises more than a single county, there will be competition among local county elites for control of the seat. Cycling refers to the practice of rotating the seat between counties every two or three terms so as to reduce this competition. During the period in question, the number of multi-county districts fell, thus reducing the need for cycling.

<sup>8</sup>Brady, Buckley, and Rivers (1995) demonstrate that during this period, the percent of incumbents running for reelection and the percent of incumbents reelected rose significantly as well.

Figure 2. Mean Terms of Service in the House of Representatives, 1791-1965

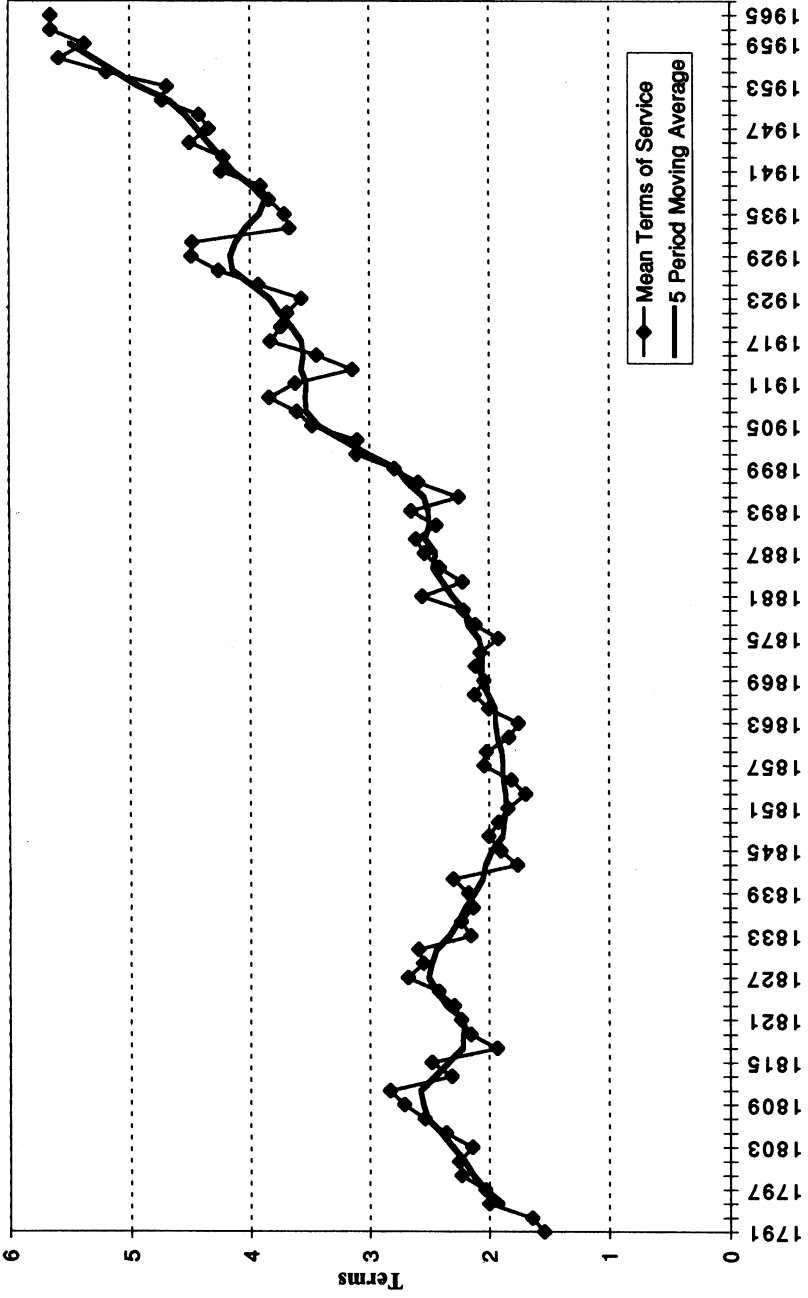
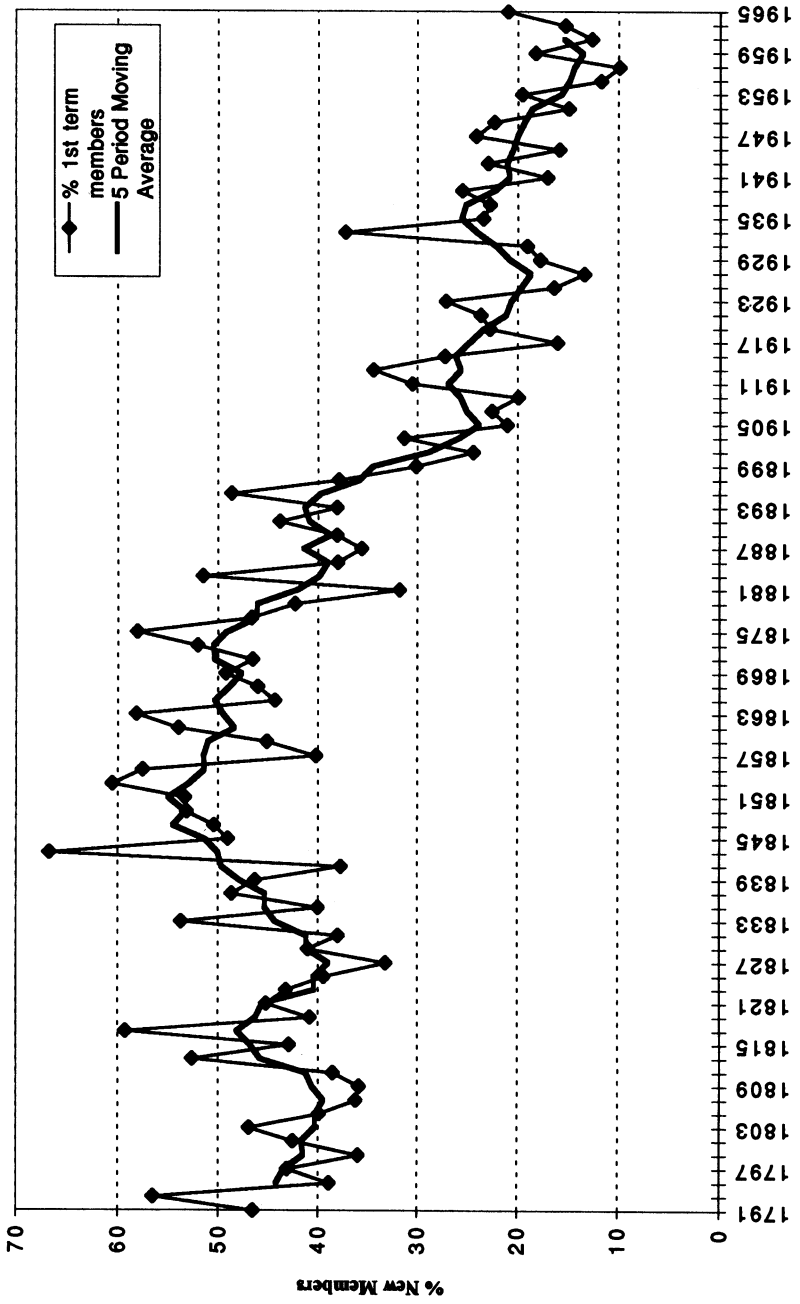


Figure 3. Percentage of New Members in the House of Representatives, 1791–1965



cans were remarkably united on most major issues. This unanimity broke down, however, with the rise of the Insurgent, or Progressive, Republicans from the Midwest across a series of reform issues including tariff rates.<sup>9</sup> The Stalwart Republicans held on to power until 1910, when the growing number of Progressives combined with the Democrats to overthrow Cannon. Since the fall of Cannon, no majority party has been so strongly united, and the United States has never again come so close to the classic model of responsible party government.

The major reason that Progressive Republicans joined the Democrats to strip the Speaker of his power is that during this period, the Stalwarts consistently discriminated against the Progressives in committee assignments. Table 1 shows committee assignments in the 61st House (1909–11) for Progressives and Stalwarts by seniority. The results clearly indicate a pattern of deck stacking. For instance, Progressives with five or more terms held no seats on the big three committees (Rules, Ways and Means, and Appropriations), while 22.4% of Stalwarts with similar seniority held big three posts. A full 77.6% of Stalwarts with five plus terms in the House were committee chairs, while only 20% of Progressives chaired a committee, and no important committees. Overall, Progressives had fewer desirable committee assignments at all seniority levels. The conclusion is inescapable: Progressive Republicans did not receive important committee assignments, and thus had ample incentives to change the committee system from one based on party loyalty to seniority-based assignments.

### *Electoral and Constitutional Constraints in the United States*

United States Representatives are elected from single-member districts every two years. This forces reelection-seeking legislators to concentrate on policy areas directly relevant to their key constituents (Fiorina 1977; Mayhew 1974). In the years prior to the Cannon Revolt of 1910, district-specific benefits for the “Regular” Republican majority were not hard to come by. Since intra-party policy preferences were homogeneous, the Republicans were able to pass a coherent policy program with little effective opposition. Legislation drafted in committee would pass on the floor, and Republican representatives obtained their preferred policies. The only question was whether or not the Regular Republicans would continue to control a majority of the House, as the rise of the Insurgent Republicans threatened to undermine their support.

In addition, the United States has a separation of powers system with a bicameral legislature. This introduces a maximal fragmentation of policy-

<sup>9</sup>This divergence is detailed in Brady, Brody, and Epstein (1989). See also O’Halloran (1994) for a discussion of party differences and their impact on the tariff during this period.

**Table 1. Republican Committee Assignments in the 61st House (1909–11) (By Seniority and Progressive-Stalwart)**

Terms	Progressives				Stalwarts				
	Number	Chairmanships	Big three Assignments	Number	Chairmanships	Big three Assignments	Number	Chairmanships	Big three Assignments
5+	10	20.0%	0%	67	77.6%	22.4%			
4	9	11.1	0	25	24.0	12.0			
3	7	0	0	28	17.9	3.6			
2 or less	19	0	0	78	2.6	1.3			

making authority, making it difficult for any one branch to impose its will on the others. Again, this structural feature points in the direction of weakened legislative parties.

After the Cannon revolt, then, two natural contenders for the basis of the seniority system were committees and the party. As argued in the previous section, district-based elections and a bicameral, separation of powers constitutional system meant that parties would be able to offer legislators relatively little electoral security. Furthermore, party influence over the electoral fortunes of its members had been substantially eroded by reform movements in the late 19th century instituting open primaries and the Australian ballot, which removed party leaders' control over ballot access and permitted split-ticket voting, respectively. Party power was also diminished by the passage of the 17th Amendment to the Constitution, allowing for the direct election of senators. Thus our theory would predict that in the first two decades of this century, the United States Congress would develop a seniority system that was heavily tilted toward committees rather than parties.

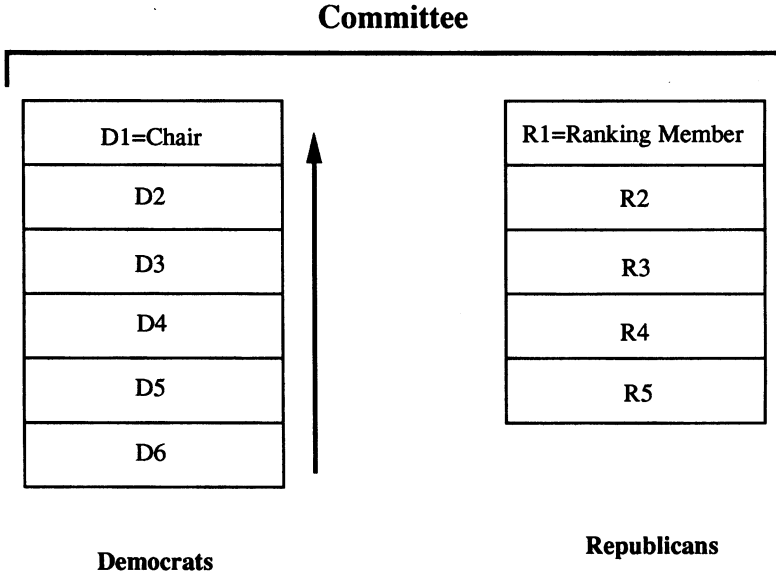
#### *Seniority in the United States: Evidence from Two Major Committees*

In fact, in the decade from 1910 to 1920 legislators did establish a seniority system within committees. Each party had a list of members on each committee, and as long as these legislators could keep winning reelection, they would rise through the ranks as more senior members either left Congress or transferred to another committee (see Figure 4). As a result, committees became more powerful in the House, and parties were relegated to more of a coordinating role. The committee and party systems separated; a member could choose to make his or her career in either one, but not both.

*Measuring Seniority.* We now provide evidence to support our contention that advancement within committees became regularized in the decade following the Cannon Revolt. Although the general idea of seniority is easily understood, a number of conceptual and technical problems make the measurement of a seniority system (and deviations from it) difficult in practice. Most importantly, one must separate a seniority system from an expertise system. In the former, members move up the ladder based on their years of continuous service on a committee. In the latter, members rise according to their ability to fashion policy effectively, a task which depends on their substantive knowledge of the subject area. The problem is that these theoretically distinct systems may be observationally equivalent: those members with the most accumulated tenure on a committee may rise to the top of the list in either case.

Seniority and expertise can be separated, however, when a member leaves the legislature and then returns. Take the example of Joe Cannon

Figure 4. United States Seniority System



himself. After having served 12 years in the House, Cannon lost his bid for reelection in 1890. When he returned in 1892, however, he was restored to his former position and rank on the Appropriations Committee; this is an expertise system at work. Cannon then lost again in 1912 and was reelected in 1914. Consistent with our hypothesis that the House moved to a true seniority system, Cannon was placed at the bottom of the committee list and had to work his way up the ladder again.

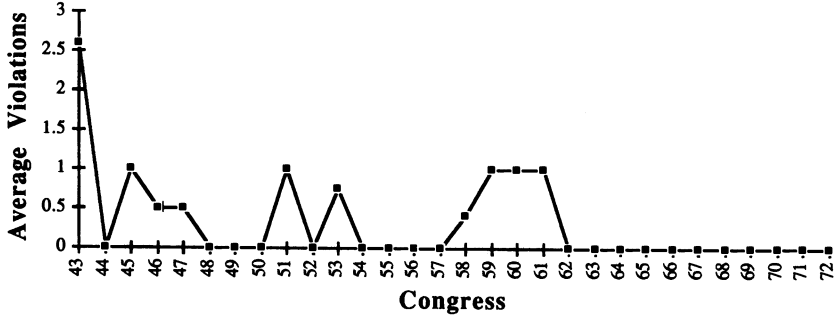
To disentangle competing systems of orderly career advancement, we first develop a new measure of seniority violations, as described in the Appendix. This method provides a continuous (as opposed to dichotomous) measure of the degree to which seniority is violated on a given committee, taking into account the position and magnitude of all uncompensated violations.

*The Rise of Seniority in Congressional Committees.* We then applied our measure to the House Ways and Means and Appropriations Committees from the 43rd Congress through the 72nd Congress, covering the period from 1873 to 1930.<sup>10</sup> According to our hypothesis, uncompensated seniority

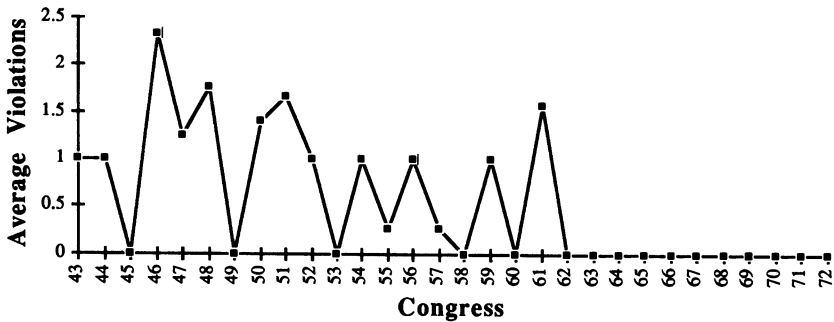
<sup>10</sup>The data were compiled by the authors from the *Congressional Record*, *House Journal*, *Congressional Directory*, and the *New York Times*.

**Figure 5. Ways and Means**

**Ways and Means - Republicans**



**Ways and Means - Democrats**

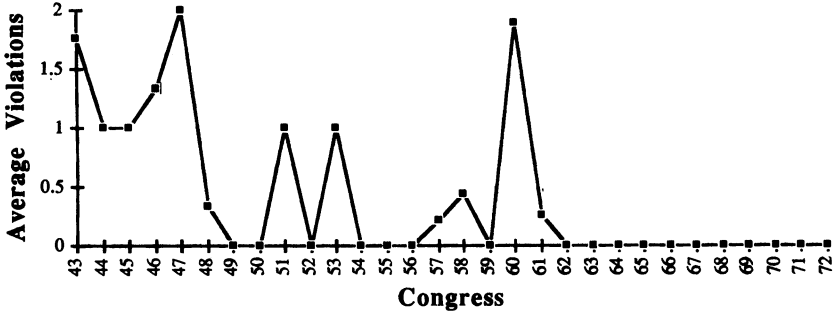


violations should decline after the fall of strong Republican rule, as members instituted a new system of career advancement. The results are displayed in Figures 5 and 6.

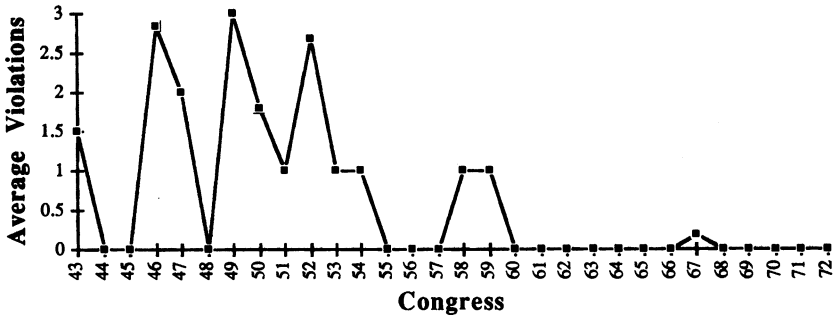
It is evident in Figure 5 that the 62nd Congress, the one following the Cannon Revolt, marks an abrupt end to seniority violations in Ways and Means. Before, violations of seniority were fairly regular, as leaders stacked the deck in favor of their policy programs. After the 62nd Congress, however, the only unusual move occurred in 1924, when Rep. Frear of Wisconsin left for the Indian Affairs Committee. This, however, can be explained by the fact that Frear's district became heavily populated with new Native

**Figure 6. Appropriations**

**Appropriations - Republicans**



**Appropriations - Democrats**



American voters and he asked to be transferred. Thus Frear's move is understandable, and we counted it as a compensated violation. The years in which Democrats controlled Congress were no different; no violations of a strict seniority system occurred.<sup>11</sup>

In Appropriations (Figure 6), the only apparent Republican violations

<sup>11</sup>In fact, this picture would be much less dramatic were one to count seniority violations in only the top three slots, as Polsby, Gallagher, and Rundquist (1969) did, since the top three positions were occupied by the same set of Regular Republicans from the 55th Congress on. This indicates that much of the strategic maneuvering from the 55th through the 61st Congresses occurred further down the ladder, grooming younger members for later ascension.

after the 62nd Congress occurred in 1919–20. These, however, also have an explanation. Following the Budget Act of 1919, the House recentralized all appropriations power back to the Appropriations Committee. Prior to this, appropriations had been parceled out to certain other committees, including the committees on Agriculture and Rivers and Harbors (Brady and Morgan 1987; Stewart 1989). Upon recentralizing, then, top members from the other appropriating committees were moved into Appropriations, thus producing the violations, which we counted as compensated. In fact, the only true violation for either party came in the 67th Congress, when the bottom two members on the Democrat's list, numbers 10 and 11, were switched, apparently as the result of a disagreement over which one was sworn in first.

To distinguish between seniority and expertise systems, we identified every member between the 80th and 101st Congresses who left the House and later returned. Of these 56 members, 20 served on different committees after they returned, making it impossible to separate out seniority considerations from expertise. Of the 36 remaining members, all 36 were placed at the bottom of their committee lists, as if they were freshmen. For instance, Sidney Yates (D-IL) first served from the 81st to the 87th Congresses, becoming the 15th ranked member on the Appropriations Committee. After he lost his bid for reelection in the 88th Congress and then got reelected in the 89th, he dropped back down to being the 33rd ranked member on the committee. Thus in every instance where the predictions of an expertise model would diverge from a strict seniority model, the latter was observed.

There thus seems little dispute that seniority violations fell dramatically following the Cannon Revolt.<sup>12</sup> The data presented above lend strong support to our view of seniority in the United States as a rational response of legislators to a changed political environment. Once members started to see Congress as a career and parties no longer provided a secure means of advancement and influence, a seniority system was put into place that allowed members to advance their careers without worrying about which faction of their party was dominant.

### **Evidence from Japan**

In the United States system, as we argued above, strict seniority is the norm, with expertise as a secondary consideration. In Japan, on the other

<sup>12</sup>Even though seniority violations ended with the start of the 62nd Congress, it is probably more accurate to say that the present seniority system was instituted over the course of the 1910 to 1920 decade, and was ratified when the Republicans reclaimed control of Congress in 1918 and chose to stay with the system that had been developed by the Democrats (Sundquist 1981).

hand, a two-tiered arrangement has been established. The first tier works like a seniority system, where members advance through committees in the Diet and the LDP related to their constituents' interests. The second part works like an expertise system, where party leaders can reward loyalty and hard work with appointments to low- and high-level cabinet positions. This method of career advancement is a direct result of Japan's having a parliamentary system—the leading party controls both the executive and legislative branches and so can enact its policy agenda—and one-party dominance—members can be assured that eventually they will be in a position of power.

### *The Roots of the Japanese Seniority System*

With the American occupation of Japan came a modification of Japan's (1925) medium-sized district Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system. The 1946 election was held as a large-district, limited vote election, in which prefectures were used as districts, and depending upon the number of seats allocated (4 to 14), voters were given two to three categorical votes. The result was a strong Socialist presence in the Diet (93 of 464 seats), most of whom were elected from large urban districts. In the hope of reducing the Socialists' power, Prime Minister and Liberal Party head Shigeru Yoshida prevailed upon MacArthur to return to the 1925 system (Fukui 1988). Conservative parties preferred the old system because they had in place the local organization necessary to capture the personal vote important for electoral success.

Despite these changes, in the 1947 election the Socialists became the plurality party with 143 seats in the Diet. The subsequent downturn in the economy with a Socialist Prime Minister leading the government, however, resulted in a large increase in the conservative parties' strength in subsequent elections. The conservative parties then gained a strong majority after the 1949 elections, and the Liberal Party led by Mr. Yoshida prevailed until Mr. Hatoyama defected to form the Democratic Party in 1954. These two parties were divided over the important question of Japan's future—a military-political world presence (Democratic Party) or Japan as an economic power with limited military capabilities (Liberal Party). Thus depending upon which party held the Prime Ministerial position, members' careers were subject to rapid promotions and demotions.

The merger of the two parties in 1955 allowed them to coordinate elections under the SNTV system.<sup>13</sup> But the problem of heterogeneity of preferences did not go away, as attested to by the fact that the LDP was formed

<sup>13</sup>Cox and Rosenbluth (1993) argue that the subsequent emergence of factions within the LDP was due to the need to coordinate fundraising in a system of multi-member districts.

without a president, in part because of different views on Japan's future. The issue was only solved by the death of Mr. Hatoyama's chief rival in 1956.<sup>14</sup> Under the merger of the parties and the heterogeneity of preferences between the parties, it is not hard to see why careerist members would prefer a system that allowed them to regularize progress through decentralized committee structures, which were the source of particularized benefits for their constituents (Calder 1988; Fukui 1987).

The LDP was the ruling party from the time of its formation until the summer of 1993. As shown in Figure 7, average turnover in the Diet showed a marked decline in this period, especially during the 1950s, and the average turnover of LDP members was even lower than the Diet as a whole.<sup>15</sup> The LDP politicians had thus started to build their careers within the Diet by getting reelected on a regular basis.

Over the 1946 to 1955 period (six elections), the average terms of service rose from 1.6 to 4.0 terms for all Diet members and continued to grow throughout the LDP period, as shown in Figure 8. The rise of career politicians far exceeded the prewar parliamentary average: in the past, from the Méji period until the military takeover, the highest average number of terms served never exceeded 4.0 terms. It is clear that by the time of the merger of the two dominant parties, there were a large number of careerists in the Diet.

Another strong indication of careerism is that starting around 1958 LDP members began establishing personal reelection support organizations (Koenkai), and shortly thereafter, other parties followed. Thus by the mid-1960s LDP politicians saw service in the national legislature as a career. They had personal reelection funds, and their terms of service had increased significantly from the prewar era. Added to the diversity of opinion within the LDP, many of the conditions for the emergence of a committee-based seniority system were in place.

### *Electoral and Constitutional Constraints in Japan*

As detailed above, since 1947 Japanese legislators have been elected from multi-member districts, and voters have a single, nontransferable vote. Thus intra-party rivalry among Diet members in the period from 1947 to 1993 was, if anything, more intense than in the United States: a few percent-

<sup>14</sup>Hatoyama was the head of the Democratic Party who replaced Mr. Yoshida (Liberal) as Prime Minister.

<sup>15</sup>To help visualize the data, a fifth-order polynomial fitted to the series is also included in Figures 7 and 8. All data on the Japanese committee system were graciously provided by Mathew McCubbins and Frances Rosenbluth. All other data on elections and the cabinet system were collected by the authors from original sources.

Figure 7. Average Turnover in Japanese Diet and LDP, 1947-90

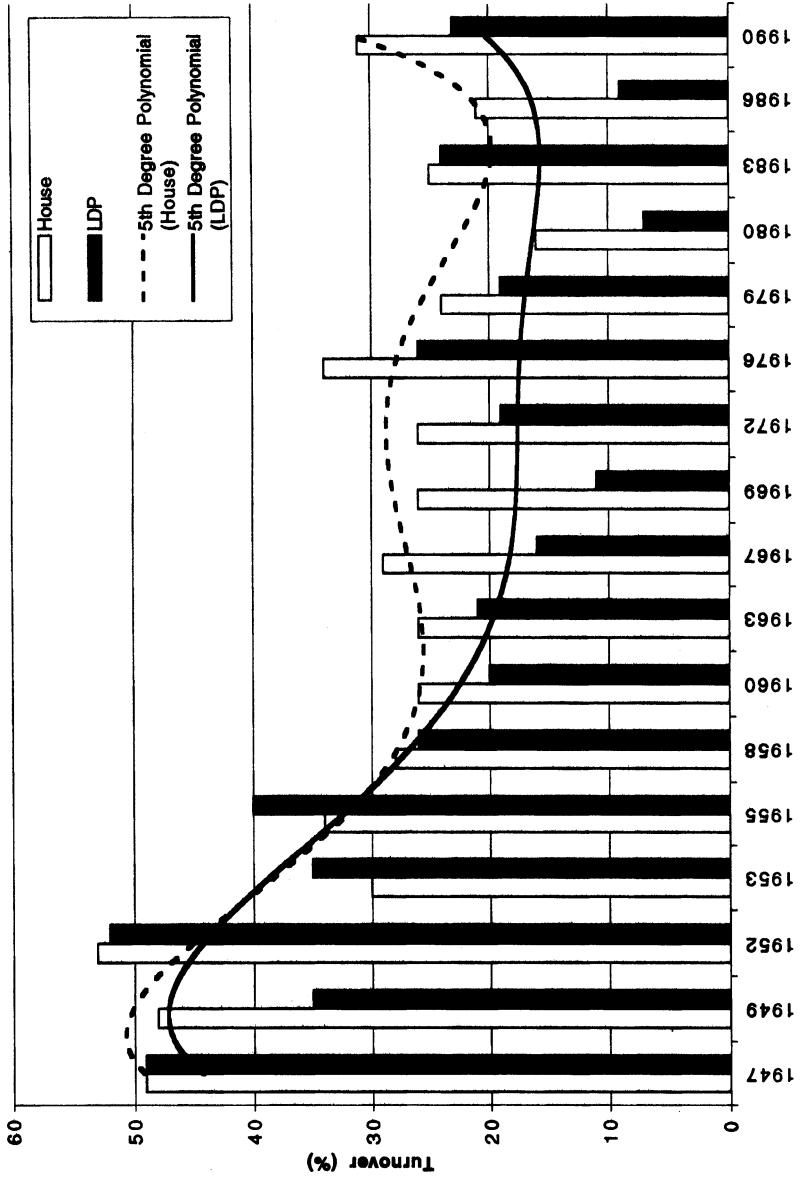
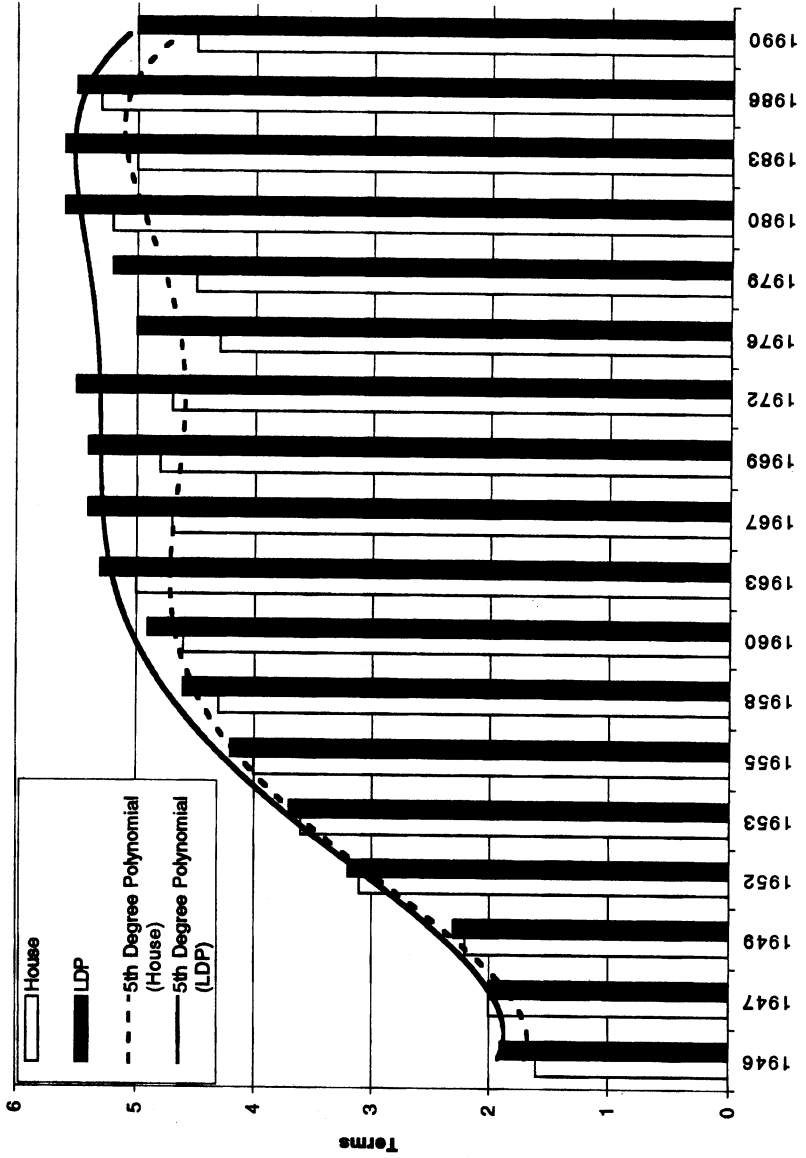


Figure 8. Average Terms of Service in Japanese Diet and LDP, 1946-90



age points could make the difference between victory and defeat, and legislators competed fiercely for voters' loyalty.<sup>16</sup> Thus in Japan, as well as in the United States, members sought reelection based on the personal vote and their ability to deliver benefits to their constituents (Baerwald 1986; Curtis 1988; McCubbins and Rosenbluth 1995; Tajima 1991).

But Japanese politics also differed from the United States in many important respects. After the Liberal and Democratic Parties merged to form the LDP in 1955, Japan experienced the longest period of single-party democratic governmental control of any postwar democracy. And Japan has a parliamentary system with a strong bureaucracy, in which many legislators later gain high-ranking positions. Both these features made Japanese parties relatively more attractive to Diet members as a source of long-term career opportunities, as LDP members knew that their party could ultimately supply them with influential cabinet posts (Kohno 1992). Thus our theory would predict that in the years following the formation of the LDP, the Japanese Diet would develop a seniority system that combines both committee-based and party-based elements.

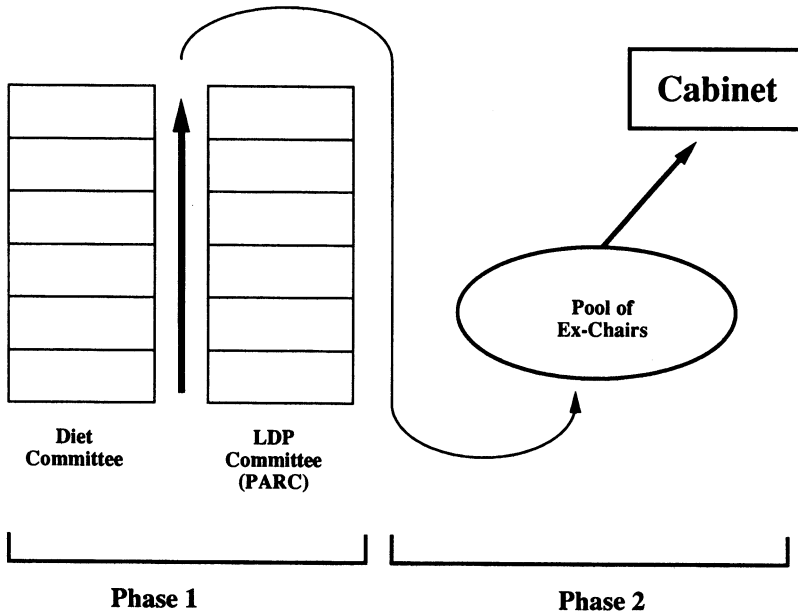
### *The Seniority System in Japan: The Evidence*

In fact, the Japanese solved their institutional design problem with a two-tiered seniority system that combined party-based and committee-based motifs in a unique manner (see Figure 9). The first four or five terms of a member's legislative career were dedicated to constituent-relevant policy areas. Upon election to the legislature, each member was appointed to a Diet committee and also to a parallel Policy Advisory Research Committee (PARC), which is a policy-specific committee within the LDP. These committee systems form parallel structures—for each Diet committee there exists an equivalent PARC—and both sets of committees have some influence over policy.<sup>17</sup> Members “make a great show of pushing for their constituents' interests in intra-party discussions, and claim credit for policy decisions that benefit their constituents” (McCubbins and Rosenbluth 1995, 44).

A member who had served four or five terms was assured a chairmanship of one of these two committees, and then served the following term as an Advisor to the Chair. Thus the first part of a Diet member's career looked similar to that of a House member, except that the Diet member rose to power much more quickly (a House member may not become a

<sup>16</sup>Cox and Rosenbluth (1995) present evidence that elections in Japan are more insulated from partisan tides than are elections in the United States or England.

<sup>17</sup>See Sato and Matsuzaki (1986) and Fukui (1987). See Okimoto (1989) for a detailed analysis of the nature of the particularized exchanges.

**Figure 9. Japanese Seniority System**

committee chair for several decades), and did so on dual tracks, one in the legislature and one within the party. Unlike the United States, then, in Japan the party and committee systems remained merged.

After a stint as chair of a committee, a Diet member dropped down into a group of recent ex-chairs. From this pool of talent party leaders chose members to appoint to high cabinet posts, which oversee the bureaucracy. Those who were chosen had lasting influence over a large range of policy, not necessarily related to their previous policy areas in committee.<sup>18</sup> Those who were not chosen retained posts on legislative committees and PARCs, but not in a leadership capacity.

Thus careers in the Japanese legislature had two distinct phases. Members were protected early in their careers by the promise of issue-specific influence. This gave them an opportunity to survive their first few elections

<sup>18</sup>It has been argued that the Japanese bureaucracy is a strong, independent policy-making institution in its own right apart from the Diet and the LDP. See Ramseyer and Rosenbluth (1993) for an argument that the bureaucracy actually responds to the policy preferences of its political overseers.

**Table 2. Average Terms of Service of Incumbent Office Holders**

	1967		1986	
	Average	Mode	Average	Mode
Minister	7.9	5, 6	6.7	7
Vice Minister	3.6	3	3.8	4
Committee Chair	7.2	7	5.5	5
Committee Director	5.1	2	3.8	3
PARC Chair	4.6	4	4.3	4
PARC Vice Chair	2.4	2	2.3	3

where, as in the United States, they faced the highest probability of defeat. After that, they could move on to greater levels of power by displaying high levels of leadership and expertise. Since Japan had a parliamentary system with single-party control, party leaders could make credible commitments that hard work early in one's career would be rewarded later on.

*Committees and Seniority.* The rise in careerism over the 1946–58 time period resulted in a seniority system wherein members were promoted toward the chair position in a systematic years-served fashion. As shown in Table 2, in 1967 the average House Committee Chair had served 7.2 terms while the average PARC committee chair had served only 4.6 terms. By 1986, these numbers had fallen to 5.5 and 4.3 terms respectively, showing an accelerated rise to the top. The period from the late 1960s on was characterized by a guarantee of a committee chair within the fifth election (Kohno 1992).

This rapid advancement came at a cost, however; once attained, the chairmanship would only last two terms. Analysis of turnover in the Diet committees and the PARCs shows that long periods of consecutive service were rare, indicating that contrary to the United States, serving consecutive terms on the same committee after being chair was not a part of the normal career path (see Table 3). Regularized promotion took place not only in relation to the committee system or the PARCs; it also took place within the LDP as a whole and within factions. And the balance of power between factions gradually guaranteed a regularized promotion system based on the terms of service. Thus committees in the Japanese Diet and the LDP were not the sole basis of promotion; rather, legislators saw these positions as rungs on a ladder that eventually led to a ministership within the cabinet.

*The Cabinet System and Seniority.* A cabinet is an executive committee within the Parliament. There has been an established tradition of rotating cabinet ministerships so that many members can assume those posts. The

**Table 3. Turnover in Selected Standing Committees, 1967-90**

Year	Diet Committee Turnover (LDP Members Only)*				PARC Turnover*		
	Budget	Finance	Agriculture	Social and Labor	Finance	Construction	Construction
1967	52	72	68	58			
1969	52	74	61	74	54		60
1972	65	71	60	76	63		40
1976	79	74	83	78	81		25
1979	68	76	65	76	55		43
1980	48	52	35	35	38		69
1983	61	52	52	61	49		35
1986	50	71	48	48	68		53
1990	70	83	71	63	77		37

\*Committee turnover: percentage of LDP committee members after the previous election not belonging to the committee after this election.

**Table 4. Average Terms of Service at the Time of First Appointment as Minister by the Year First Elected**

Year	Incumbents with Consecutive Service	Incumbents with Discontinuities
1937	8.0	5.0
1942	6.3	3.5
1946	7.3	6.8
1947	6.2	7.3
1949	6.4	6.6
1952	5.8	6.4
1953	6.5	7.7
1955	5.0	4.0
1958	5.9	5.8
1960	5.9	7.0
1963	5.6	6.1
1967	6.1	6.5
1969	6.0	5.9
1972	5.2	5.4
1976	5.4	5.0
1979	4.9	N/A

*Note:* Results after 1980 are not fully calculable from existing data.

cabinet is formally formed after the prime minister is chosen by the legislature (the Diet has supremacy over this designation). During the 38 years of LDP rule, there were 25 times when the prime minister was designated, and thus 25 cabinets were formally formed by 15 prime ministers. But if one counts all the cabinet reshuffles, one can say that there were 43 cabinets.

After serving as a committee chair, Diet members are usually appointed to a first cabinet position. This appointment is determined solely on the basis of number of times elected, making it an extension of the committee-based seniority system.<sup>19</sup> The first cabinet position tends to be in one of the minor departments, such as the Labor, Welfare, Defense, Land Planning, Hokkaido Development, Okinawa Development, Science & Technology, or the Environmental Agency.

As shown in Table 4, LDP members can expect to get appointed a minister after having served five or six terms. Furthermore, given their regularized system of advancement, this first ministership is a virtual certainty. The data show that almost every LDP member with more than several terms of service has been appointed a minister: as of June 1993, just before the

<sup>19</sup>Terms served in the House of Councilors (the upper chamber) for those members who switch to the lower house will also be considered.

election, there were only two members with seven terms or more of service who did not assume a ministerial position.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, after serving as a minister the first time there is no guarantee of serving again. Second cabinet appointments are much more valuable, as they tend to be in the more important ministries: Agriculture, MITI, Transportation, Construction, or Cabinet Secretary. Indeed, the number of members getting second appointments is not as large as those receiving first appointments. During the 38 years, the LDP produced 288 first ministerial appointments and 155 second ministerial appointments. The value of a second ministerial appointment is also clear: the average terms of service (lifetime) for those with one cabinet position is only 8.13 terms; with two positions or more it rises to 10.16 terms.

*Regularization of Promotion.* The increase in the number of eligible candidates for cabinet positions created pressure for a regularization of cabinet appointments and more frequent turnover in the cabinet posts. In the past, occasional leapfrogging happened because the leadership treated members preferentially and promoted them to ministerial positions (Kohno 1992). Thus the classes before 1955 needed longer terms of service on average to get cabinet positions, and during this time there was much irregularity in promotion. The classes after 1958, however, who became eligible for ministerships in the early 1970s, have a regularized pattern.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, after 1958 most of the variation in legislators' paths of advancement came from factional politics. Members belonged to various factions within the LDP, and bargaining over cabinet ministries traditionally occurred at the factional level. Thus members of weak factions took longer to rise to important positions than members of strong factions (this was partly counterbalanced by the fact that strong factions had more members).<sup>22</sup> Ministerships were allocated by seniority, by faction, and open slots went to the most senior members, regardless of their previous committee assignments. A useful analogy is to think of the United States seniority system as separate waiting lines at a bank, while the Japanese system is like a single line, waiting for the first available teller.

We collected data on advancement patterns for two groups of members: LDP members after the 1967 election and those after the 1986 election. We

<sup>20</sup>These were Sato Koko: convicted in the Lockheed scandal, but he took the position of Chair of the LDP executive committee, and Hamada Koichi: retired in 1993.

<sup>21</sup>It is generally said that regularization of appointment to cabinet, Diet, and party positions took place in the Sato Cabinet era which lasted seven years from 1964 to 1972, the longest continuous administration (see Sato and Matsuzaki 1986). Sato was thus dubbed "Jinji no Sato" (Sato, personal matters expert).

<sup>22</sup>See Cox and Rosenbluth (1993) for an analysis of factional politics, showing that the variations in electoral success among factions decreased over time.

examined when these members were first appointed to various important positions (see Table 5). This table provides a snapshot at each point in time of how long members should expect to serve before obtaining these positions. Note that the required terms of service are shorter in 1986 than in 1967. The most telling statistic in this table, however, is the difference in the standard deviations, which are smaller in 1986 than in 1967. This indicates that over time there has been less irregularity in advancement.

Overall, then, the Japanese Diet created a seniority system which varied considerably from the United States system. Members rose through committees and first cabinet posts as in a classical seniority system, enabling them to serve their constituents' needs. But after that they were uncertain of reaching a second, more influential cabinet post. Faction leaders often passed over more senior members for these high cabinet positions. This system of advancing through committees to the cabinet was regularized in the postwar era as length of service increased. Thus the Japanese Diet mixed seniority and expertise in career patterns, and, due to Japan's parliamentary system of government and one-party rule, the LDP continued to play a major role in members' career advancement and in policy formation.

### **Conclusion**

This essay takes a comparative approach to legislative organization. It argues that when members see service in the national legislature as a career, legislators will rationally institute a regularized system of career advancement. The form that this system takes will depend on the larger political environment, however. In the United States, a separation of powers system, alternating party control, and single-member districts led to a committee-based seniority system. This institutionalized committee power and reduced parties to a coordinating role. In Japan, a parliamentary system, single-party control, and multi-member districts led to a two-tiered system combining both seniority and expertise, with the LDP continuing to play a major role in the formulation of policy. In both countries, high intra-party electoral competition fostered the rise of the personal vote, which in turn reduced parties' leverage over their members' behavior.

Our findings shed some light on recent debates concerning legislative organization and the basis of committee power in the United States.<sup>23</sup> The discussion to date has mainly centered around the question of whether committee power derives from legislators' desire to spread benefits to all districts (the distributive view) or their desire to formulate reasonable policy in a complex environment (the informational view). It is clear, though, that

<sup>23</sup>For an overview of recent developments in this area, as well as a critique of competing viewpoints, see the essays contained in Shepsle and Weingast (1995).

**Table 5. How Long Would it Take to Get the Positions for Incumbents in 1967 and 1986?**

	1967			1986		
	Average	Std Dev	Mode	Average	Std Dev	Mode
Minister (First Time)	6.3	1.5	6	5.8	1.2	6
Minister (Second Time)	7.5	2.1	8	7.1	1.9	8
Vice Minister	2.8	0.9	3	2.5	0.6	2
Committee Chair	5	1.6	4	4.6	1.1	6
PARC Chair	3.7	1.3	3	3.6	0.8	4

legislators in all political systems will have both informational and distributional needs, as both are necessary for reelection. Yet most countries do not have a strong committee system. From a comparative perspective, then, the question is not so much *why* committees are powerful, but *why committees*, rather than political parties, are powerful.

Furthermore, our analysis describes party strength within a legislature as an endogenous rather than an exogenous phenomenon; an outcome rather than a cause. Parties may well solve certain collective dilemmas faced by legislators—such as the need to preserve the body's reputation, distributive benefits, and pass major legislation—but these dilemmas are universal, and it is clear that the degree of influence wielded by legislative parties varies across countries. The theory presented here asserts that the role parties play in the formation of legislation ultimately depends on the constitutional and electoral fundamentals of a political system. When parties cannot deliver on the basic political necessities of reelection and control over policy, their power will inexorably devolve to smaller decision-making units, leading to weakened parties and consequently, enhanced committees.

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## APPENDIX

### Measuring Seniority

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Our measure of seniority is constructed as follows. For a given party and committee, take the seniority list at the end of the previous legislative session, time  $t-1$ . Remove from the list all members who leave the legislature due to death, retirement, or electoral defeat, or who transfer to a more-preferred committee. Then consolidate the remaining members. If the party's slots on the committee are reduced and the consolidated list has more members than available slots, then delete the excess members. For the remaining members, this defines the expected committee position for member  $i$  at time  $t$ , which we represent as  $E_{it}$ . Measure  $E_{it}$  "from the bottom up," so that if there are 12 slots on the committee,  $E_{it} = 12$  for the chair or ranking member and declines to  $E_{it} = 1$  for the bottom slot.

Now compare this ordering to the actual order, and represent the realized committee position as  $R_{it}$ , with  $R_{it} = 0$  by definition if a member is off the committee. For all members for whom  $E_{it}$  is defined (those who previously served on the committee), the quantity  $SV_{it} = |E_{it} - R_{it}|$  measures the magnitude of the seniority violation (in either direction) for that member. Finally, average the violations over all  $N$  committee members to obtain:

$$\overline{SV}_t = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N |E_{it} - R_{it}|}{N}$$

This quantity is zero if there have been no violations of a strict seniority system, and it grows larger with the number of violations and their magnitude. Notice that our measure is also sensitive to the position of the violation: moving someone to the top of a list creates a ripple of violations all the way down, resulting in a higher value than an unexpected entry farther down in the seniority list.

For instance, assume that the six members for a given party on Committee X in one session are Abe, Barbara, Chuck, Donna, Ed, and Frances, in that order. In the next session, Barbara leaves to chair a more preferred committee, Ed is defeated in the election, and George and Harriet are added to the committee, so according to strict seniority the list should be: Abe, Chuck, Donna, Frances, George, and Harriet. In fact, the actual list is: Donna, Abe, Chuck, George, Frances, and Harriet. Then the necessary calculation for the average violation can be represented as:

Member	$E_{it}$	$R_{it}$	$ E_{it} - R_{it} $
Donna	4	6	2
Abe	6	5	1
Chuck	5	4	1
George	—	3	—
Frances	3	2	1
Harriet	—	1	—

So for this example, the average violation is  $(2 + 1 + 1 + 1)/4 = 1.25$ .

It should be noted that although our measure can detect when a seniority system is operating perfectly, we cannot separate out the following three possible reasons for violating seniority. First, a member who leaves the legislature and comes back (such as Cannon) would have to violate seniority to be restored to his former position; this is a violation for reasons of expertise. Second, violations may occur because leaders feel that a member is better suited to the task for reasons of expertise or temperament, such as in the recent ascension of Rep. Obey (R-WI) to the chairmanship of the House Appropriations Committee. Third, seniority may be violated due to policy differences between leaders and committee members; that is, for purely political reasons. For example, in 1894 Rep. Bland of Missouri was in line to chair the House Committee on Coinage, Weights and Measures. However, he was a silver Republican and Reed, the Speaker, was a gold Republican. When Bland announced that he intended to introduce a bill for the free coinage of silver, Reed denied him the committee chairmanship (in fact, he removed Bland from the committee altogether). Properly chastised, Bland promised that next term he would not introduce the measure, upon which Reed appointed him chair of the committee.

Our measure thus provides a convenient way to quantify deviations from a

pure seniority system. It differs from the classic measure of seniority for this period (Polsby, Gallagher, and Rundquist 1969) by including the full committee, rather than only the top three slots. And it differs from seniority calculations in the modern Congress (Abram and Cooper 1968; Cox and McCubbins 1993) by providing a continuous measure, rather than a dichotomous Yes/No on seniority violations.

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