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The functions of Parliament: reality challenges tradition[1]

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The functions of parliaments have been variously described by scholars and in parliamentary documents but there have been few, if any, reported studies of how parliamentary practitioners see their own institutions. This paper reports practitioner perceptions of contemporary functions of fifteen selected national legislatures. The research is embedded in a wider project on parliamentary careers that looks at a total of 60 national parliaments. It investigates what knowledge, skills and abilities assist MPs in successfully fulfilling their responsibilities, the nature and content of professional development programs available to MPs and the effect these programs have on enhancing knowledge, skills and abilities.[2] The responsibilities of MPs relate to the functions of the parliamentary chamber to which they have been elected. Hence, for consistency reasons, the research focused only on national parliaments.

Definitions, scope and terminologies

Mezey (1979, 6) defines a legislature as a 'predominantly elected body of people that acts collegially and that has at least the formal but not necessarily the exclusive power to enact laws binding on all members of a specific geopolitical entity'. In line with his description, our sample of 60 national parliaments worldwide contains only such chambers that are legitimated directly by the people. For example, this applies to the British House of Commons but not the House of Lords, and to the German Bundestag but not its second chamber, the Bundesrat, which draws its members from the state governments. In the Malaysian Dewan Raykat the members of Malaysia's second chamber, the Dewan Negara, are indirectly elected by the states or appointed by the King, thus rendering that assembly ineligible for our sample. Most parliamentary scholars take Walter Bagehot's (1867) description of the British House of Commons as holding a 'elective', 'expressive', 'teaching', 'informing' and 'legislative function' as a starting point for defining parliament's functions in more detail. Hazell reports that there are seven classic functions of legislatures

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(2001, p. 16). These are: Representation; Legislation; Deliberation; Scrutiny; Budget setting; Making and breaking governments; and Redress of grievances.

However, as Mezey (1979) highlights, parliament is 'a flexible institution capable of performing several different functions within a political system.' Indeed, looking at the web-pages of only a few of the assemblies in our sample reveals significant differences in the type of activities the different parliaments put at the core of their work:[3] The British 'Parliament examines what the Government is doing, makes new laws, holds the power to set taxes and debates the issues of the day' (United Kingdom Parliament, 2011); The Australian Parliament's website lists 'five important functions of parliament: to provide for the formation of a government; to legislate; to provide the funds needed for government; to provide a forum for popular representation; and to scrutinise the actions of government' (Australian Parliament, 2011); The US Congress 'makes all laws, declares war, regulates interstate and foreign commerce and controls taxing and spending policies' (United States House of Representatives, 2011). The website of Vietnam's National Assembly describes the institution as 'the Supreme Organ of state power' the functions of which include 'determining the State Budget and contributing to the development of the economy, society, culture and education. The National Assembly has also issued policies on ethnic issues, national security, defence and foreign affairs and exercises the supreme supervisory power over the implementation of the constitution and laws' (Vietnam National Assembly, 2011). The Jordanian parliament's functions include oversight, legislation, adopting the draft state budget law, 'and controlling taxations and concession contracts' (Jordan Parliament, 2011) whereas Uruguay's Lower House puts deliberation at the core of its business (Uruguay Parlamento, 2011). Finally, the German Bundestag sees itself as 'the forum where differing opinions about the policies the country should be pursuing are formulated and discussed' while listing 'the legislative process and the parliamentary scrutiny of the government and its work' as its most important tasks. Further tasks mentioned are the decision on the federal budget, deployments of the Federal Armed Forces outside Germany, and the election of the German Federal Chancellor (Vidal, 2011).

While definitions vary, most revolve around the three core activities of legislating, representation and system maintenance through the recruitment and socialization of political elites and determining who forms government (Mezey 1979, 7ff). Notwithstanding the different foci of the individual parliaments, a number of common themes emerge from the definitions and descriptions above. They relate to the three basic functions of representation, legislating, and oversight with four functions — deliberation, budget setting, making and breaking of government, and redress of grievances — either being subordinated to one of the core functions or combining them. These correspond to the seven functions identified by Hazell (2001) and provide a convenient summary of the functions described above. They are used in this article.

Representation can conflate at least two distinct functions: representing the public interest in decision-making and what Hazell describes as seeking the redress of grievances. Deliberation also often involves representing the public interest in debating a particular question.

Legislating is more straightforward: parliaments are generally legislatures. They debate and pass the laws that enact public policy, or at least the primary legislation, including authorising the creation of secondary/delegated legislation. Depending on the role of committees the parliament's engagement may vary from simply discussing details of legislation — and referring contested parts back to the department in charge for drafting the legislation — to making extensive changes to the content of legal draft bills. There is an obvious link to representation here as democracy is intended to provide responsive rule, which in turn requires that constituents 'felt interests' are reflected in decision-making (Saward 1996).

Some constitutions provide for an executive President to issue decrees which have the force of law, but in most cases each decree must be ratified by the legislature within a limited period.

Oversight is generally synonymous with scrutiny. It 'involves monitoring executive activities for efficiency, probity, and fidelity' (Johnson and Nakamura 1999). The variations between parliaments largely relate to the description of the function rather than rejecting it as an expected function.

Deliberation is the debate of matters other than legislation, such as the consideration that took place in October 2010 by the Australian House of Representatives of a statement by the Prime Minister concerning the nation's continuing participation in the war in Afghanistan. The Parliament deliberated but was not required to enact a new policy or to change one. Most parliaments have formal provision for deliberation, although it does not occur frequently.

Budget setting is, technically, simply a particular element of parliament's legislative function. It is the legislation that authorises revenue collection and the expenditure of public funds. However, the Budget is treated separately due its significance. Its legal instruments determine the allocation of the polity's resources and the direction of economic and other policies. Although not explicitly mentioned in Johnson and Nakamura's list, it is not necessary if one accepts that the budget is part of the legislative process.

Making and breaking governments is reserved for parliamentary systems. In Westminster-style assemblies the leader of the majority party automatically gains the right to form a government but may be removed as head of the executive if his or her party votes in a different leader. However, if no party or coalition is assured of the support of half plus one of the members of that chamber, a vote may well determine who holds executive government and in those circumstances the parliament is making or breaking government. In recent years, New Zealand,

Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom have all formed governments with major parties lacking an overall majority and thereby needing to rely on minor party and/or independent MP support to constitute a government. MPs in other parliamentary democracies actively elect their head of government into office and may effectively break the government of the day only if a majority support a different candidate. In executive presidencies, the election of the head of government is left to the people instead of MPs, whose only power for removing the president is by impeachment. This is usually done on the basis of misconduct.[4]

The final function described by Hazell is Redressing Grievances. In the Westminster system, the right to petition Parliament for the re-dress of some grievance — an injustice, the lack of a public service or facility or other matter with the capacity of the Executive — is an ancient right. It also finds expression in MPs raising such matters in Parliament with the intention of seeking remedial action by the relevant Minister. This is highly appropriate in a parliamentary system where the legislature and executive are fused.

This raises the question of whether the legislature of a presidential system is an appropriate institution in which to raise matters for redress? It can be argued that the separation of Executive and Legislature requires that grievances be taken up directly with the Executive, not via the parliament. Indeed, this line of argument can be extended to suggest that it may be improper for an MP to take up matters of public administration on behalf of a select part of that MP's constituency rather than limiting the MP's representation to legislative proposals affecting all. Accordingly, redressing grievances is not universally accepted as a function of parliaments.

Further functions — judicial; constitutional; and electoral — have been described (DasGupta, undated) but were not mentioned by respondents in this study. The judicial function refers to the impeachment or removal of incapable or corrupt judicial officers. The constitutional amendment function, relates to a special and highly significant class of statutes. It is of lesser relevance to Australia as the national Constitution Act can only be amended by referendum, albeit initiated by the Parliament. However, statutes affecting the structure and operation of a state's constitution are not necessarily limited to the formal Constitution or Basic Law. Constitutional amendments often require approval by a special majority e.g. two thirds. Like Budget-setting, the constitutional function is of such importance that there is a strong argument for treating it as a distinct function. The Electoral Function, in which the Parliament acts as an electoral college to elect certain office-holders, such as President, is a distinct legitimate function, albeit not universally relevant.

This review of the functions of parliaments applying in parliamentary systems and executive presidencies is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Functions of Parliaments

Parliamentary Function	Parliamentary system	Executive Presidency
Representation	✓	✓
Deliberation	✓	✓
Making or Breaking of government	✓	
Redress of grievances	✓	
Legislation (general)	✓	✓
Budget-setting and control	✓	✓
Scrutiny (oversight; holding to account)	✓	✓
Judicial (impeachment)	✓	✓
Electoral function	✓	✓

Research sample and method

Within a wider sample of 60 national assemblies that were quantitatively surveyed. In addition, qualitative semi-structured interviews with MPs, administrative staff and external organisations providing capacity building programs for assembly members were conducted at 15 assemblies. As Table 2 shows, the nations studied were selected to be broadly representative of constitutional models, global regions and the history of parliamentary practice. In total, 155 interviews were conducted. The data collected was analysed using codes developed following King's (2004) template approach. These codes covered central themes such as the MP's individual role, the organizational role of the assembly in question, any skills and knowledge required or obtained for performing their mandate, and the issue of training. To facilitate coding and analysis Maxqda10 — a program specifically designed for the management of large amounts of quantitative data — was used. Interviews with MPs focused on their role-expectations prior to taking office, the skills required to perform well in their work and the benefits of any training received during their parliamentary career. At the core of the interviews conducted with parliamentary staff and external providers were the planning and evaluation of training programs to enhance MPs' skills.

In addition, interviewees were asked to rate the seven traditional functions Hazell (2001, 16) ascribed to parliaments — representation, legislation, scrutiny, budget setting, making and breaking of governments, and the redress of grievances — along a score of 1 (being the most important) to 7 (the least important). It is this ranking, as well as the interviewees' individual comments on the seven functions, that builds the foundation of this article. However, while most of the interviewees commented at least on one of the functions, only 106 interviewees — all of them from parliamentary systems — actually contributed to the ranking.[5]

Table 2: Parliaments studied

Parliament	Number of interviews conducted	Parlia-mentary system	Presidential system	Established democracy	Emerging democracy	One Party State	Bicameral	Global region
Australia	9	✓		✓			✓	Oceania
Canada	10	✓		✓			✓	North America
Ethiopia	11				✓		✓	Africa
Indonesia	3		✓		✓			SE Asia
Jordan	14	✓			✓		✓	Middle East
Marshall Islands	13	✓			✓			Oceania
Papua New Guinea	11	✓			✓			Oceania
Romania	6	✓			✓		✓	Eastern Europe
South Africa	8	✓			✓		✓	Africa
Timor Leste	13	✓			✓			SE Asia
Tonga	11	✓			✓			Oceania
United Kingdom	12	✓		✓			✓	Western Europe
Uruguay	8		✓	✓*			✓	South America
Vanuatu	15	✓			✓			Oceania
Vietnam	11	✓			✓	✓		SE Asia

Interviews in total 155. *****democracy restored after military rule 1973–85

What they think

The interviewees' rating of parliamentary functions (as displayed in Table 3) shows, not unexpectedly, an overall agreement with representation, legislation and scrutiny being at the heart of their parliament's functions. However, these findings are indicative only, as the data is from interviews, not a quantitative survey. Of these 155 respondents, 93 thought legislation to be one of the two most important functions of parliament, closely followed by representation (80). While only four respondents thought scrutiny to be their assembly's most important function, a total of 51 interviewees ranked scrutiny as one of the three most important functions of their legislature.

Table 3: Parliamentary functions rated by interviewees

Rating of function by interviewee	Representation	Legislation	Scrutiny	Making or breaking government	Deliberation	Redress of Grievances	Budget setting
Most important	62	43	4	4	4	3	3
Second most important	18	50	23	0	16	7	15
Third most important	16	20	24	4	33	8	25
Fourth most important	9	4	29	8	18	9	18
Fifth most important	10	4	22	12	23	11	23
Sixth most important	4	0	10	25	10	36	11
Least important	1	1	3	50	5	31	4
Total number of answers	120	122	115	103	109	105	99

Perhaps of greatest significance is that for each of representation, legislation, and scrutiny, the combined first, second and third rankings was much stronger than for any other function.

The tasks thought by the majority of interviewees to be least important for a functioning parliament were redress of grievances and making or breaking government. The low priority given to making and breaking government reflects the different status these functions have in a Westminster style assembly where, by electing a majority, the people effectively determine who governs (see discussion above). It also attracted a low priority from parliaments where the political party that formed government had a very healthy majority of seats. For example in South Africa where the African National Congress (ANC) has a comfortable majority, parliamentarians of different political persuasions did not consider the breaking of governments as a serious possibility. Redress of grievances is a function that many interviewees saw as something subordinate to their representational task.

The interviews show considerable differences both in what interviewees see as the main functions of parliament and in how they see the intertwined relationships between the seven classic functions. In addition, the interviews reveal significant variations in terminology even amongst English-speaking parliaments.[6] This

becomes an even more important issue when studying parliaments that operate in other languages. For example, when interviewing MPs and other personnel in South America, interviewees did not recognise 'scrutiny' as a function of parliament for two reasons. Firstly, in South American use of Spanish, scrutiny refers to scrutineering of votes cast in ballots. Secondly, when scrutiny was explained as holding executive government to account, interviewees insisted that their legislature did not do that but rather, it controlled the executive. When elaboration was requested, the 'control' sounded very much like holding the executive to account. The lack of a common understanding of certain words/phrases also highlights the difficulties for researchers wishing to undertake comparative parliamentary studies across a range of constitutional models & linguistic contexts. More strikingly, the analysis accentuated the different weights given to particular parliamentary functions by MPs, administrative staff and providers of parliamentary capacity building within one assembly. This is illustrated most strongly by the ratings shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Parliamentary functions: average rating

	Representation	Legislation	Scrutiny	Making or breaking government	Deliberation	Redress of Grievances	Budget setting
MP interviewees	2.2	2.0	3.7	5.9	3.8	5.4	3.9
Training provider interviewees	3.18	1.77	2.77	5.27	4.10	5.73	3.25

Note: 1 = highest rating (i.e. most important); 7 = lowest rating (i.e. least important)

MPs rated representation much more highly than did training providers; the latter rated scrutiny rather more highly than did MPs.

Representation

MPs widely agreed that 'representation clearly is front and centre' (CA 6, para 6) of their work and many of them stayed relatively close to the definition provided by Hazell in referring to representation as a way of articulating the public's views and redressing grievances. In this umbrella function, it is closely interlinked with the other functions performed by parliament. As one Indonesian MP pointed out:

> I would say the first role is representation of citizens' interests and then that goes into the formally established three roles of legislating, of oversight and budgeting. Obviously we can't do the other three functions without the first, otherwise you are just bureaucrats (Indo_1, para 100).[7]

The Uruguay MPs generally felt that in legislating it was their responsibility to represent the interests of their constituents. This they saw as responding to the public interest. However, depending on the constitutional setting, this interpretation varied as to who should be at the core of an MP's public interest. Members of the three Westminster systems, Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada, all clearly referred to their constituents as the main focus of their work and the re-dress of grievances was a central element of representing them. Interview responses suggested a clear distinction by members of political parties between two types of representation. On matters of policy, including legislation, MPs represent their party's view in the parliament and by implication a function of the parliament was to represent the views of the parties on such matters. However, many MPs also had a role in representing the particular interests of their constituents; these did not generally involve partisan policy or legislation. There were exceptions to the latter. In some executive presidencies (e.g. Uruguay), MPs saw constituency issues as matters to be taken up by constituents directly with the Executive, as it would be unethical for an MP to give favourable treatment to particular constituents. The second aspect of attitudes to representation is the difference between MPs and staff of parliaments. Most MPs (except in executive presidencies) saw representation and seeking redress of grievances as either the most important function or one of the first three ranked functions. However, staff generally saw legislation as the most important function, with representation being primarily as contributing to legislation. This is not surprising given that staff see almost nothing of MPs outside the parliamentary precinct and therefore have little knowledge of MPs constituency work.

Legislation

Almost all interviewees saw legislation as a core function of the parliament. Yet, to what extent they were actively involved in scrutinizing and changing drafts was influenced by the constitutional setting and the experience MPs in the assembly already had with legislation. In Vietnam, for example, legislation is drafted and reviewed to a large extent by external government agencies. Several of its many part-time MPs found it hard to debate legislative drafts in an effective manner, and legislation is seen as a weakness of the National Assembly. MPs in some smaller, less developed countries felt that they lacked the understanding and knowledge to make useful inputs into bills. They were content to leave legislation to those more expert than themselves, effectively abdicating the legislative function to public servants, expert advisers and the drafters of legislation.

Budget setting

Whilst MPs and parliamentary staff generally acknowledged budget setting as an important function, some saw it as little more than legitimating decisions made by and effectively under the control of the executive. Accordingly, responses were

mixed, reaching from replies like 'Budget setting, how would that apply to me?' (AUS_7, para 10) to 'without budget what can you do? Nothing' (SA_2, para 2). Many MPs saw budget setting as an integral part of legislation. Comments such as 'budget setting and legislation are not mutually exclusive because you set the budgets through budget bills' (AUS_8, para 44) were typical. As with legislation, budget setting was one of the functions where both MPs and providers of parliamentary training programs felt that a greater amount of education for MPs would be appropriate (UK_8, para 152; VIET_1).

Vietnamese MPs were clearly proud that the National Assembly had forced the government to accept quite significant changes to a basic feature of the budget strategy — the level of the deficit. MPs insisted on a lower deficit than proposed by the Government. A second example was pending at the time of the interviews: the Government had proposed a high-speed passenger train link between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, at a cost of approximately USD50 billion. The National Assembly did not agree to it, Members arguing that the project had not been justified (Ninh, 2010).

Scrutiny

In terms of 'Scrutiny', 'oversight', 'parliamentary control' or 'holding the government to account', the individual labels differed. This function was generally understood as a core one, but one where clarity of language is important as it means different things to different parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. One respondent expressed it this way:

> One of the things that they tend to do is to, very often they will just decide that they're going to be a very good representative, and they become a kind of ombudsperson for the constituency and they help them navigate the various bureaucracies at various levels, and so forth. And in that sense, they play a good kind of social worker role. But they're not really doing anything in terms of holding the government to account. Because that's a whole other exercise. And one I think that really frankly the parliament does rather badly. (CA 5, para 21)

Deliberation

Deliberation was not readily recognised by interviewees and many, including in English speaking countries, asked for further explanation or equated it with legislation. Typical comments included: 'In order to legislate you have to deliberate. And therefore it's the same thing' (ET 7 Mohai, para 16f.). Another MP saw it as a party-specific training for public speaking: 'Deliberation – Party training, debates, videos and then feedback and critique. It is often how you say it' (SA_8, para 66). The interviews with Australian MPs took place quite soon after the highly significant debate on Australia's military commitment to the war in Afghanistan, yet it was necessary to remind interviewees of the debate and that it was an example of deliberation being separate to legislating. Those who could relate to the term immediately disagreed about the extent to which deliberation is

part of the parliament's daily business and how well it is performed. One Australian MP in particular thought that 'the parliament excels when it displays that leadership role. Whether it be in times of grief, in times of celebration, I think we do it very well' (AUS_4, para 18). This contrasts with remarks by a member of the Canadian parliament's staff who expressed great concerns about parliament being too focused on small issues instead of great debate:

> I think there was a time when it was very much felt by the members who were here that they were engaged in nation building, and they were engaged in sewing the country together [...] That was a very important role that they played. [...] Instead of seeing an overall umbrella that is supposed to protect the whole community from one sea to another, you see various little wedge group umbrellas forming [....] and if you add to that you have the overlay of globalisation and all that that entails, well you have a kind of, a potentially catastrophic short sightedness, because you're not in a position to judge what might be in Canada's best interest in the larger sense. (CA 5 Rien, para 23–24)

Making and breaking of governments

One of the most surprising themes to emerge, or rather not emerge, was the making and breaking of governments. Even in the parliaments of Australia and the United Kingdom with their then fresh experience of an 'inconclusive' election result, in which no major party achieved a majority, this barely rated as a function of the parliament. In both cases it was the parliament that supported a major party leader and enabled that leader to form a government. In no instance did an interviewee from either of these parliaments recognise the role of the parliament in determining who formed government. As one British MP put it, making or breaking government is 'not something that I think is recommended in the job just as the first thing you try to do when you wake up in the morning. It's just not the first thing I see as important in the role' (UK2, para 260). Indeed, some MPs rejected the idea that the parliament had a 'making government' function at all. Rather, the comments suggested that the UK coalition and the Australian minority government were no more than the product of politicians doing deals. It was those deals that simply and unquestioningly predetermined the functioning of the parliament.[8] These comments may be a direct result of the sample selection that for established democracies focused on Westminster assemblies where parliament does not formally elect their head of government. However, the MPs' limited involvement with making and breaking governments equally shows that determining who governs remains the prerogative of the people who, by electing their MPs, take a decision on who holds the majority and therefore who should govern.

Constituency Development Funds

A function not found in the literature or listed as one of the seven functions of parliament in the interview questions, but which did emerge from interviewees' comments relates to the parliament as a channel for local development

funds, known generically as constituency development funds (CDFs). CDFs are reportedly 'found in a growing and diverse set of developing countries, such as Kenya, Bhutan, Jamaica, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, as well as in distributive politics (generally called 'pork barrel') in US national and state level policy making' (Center for International Development, 2009). The guidelines and controls over these funds range from virtually none to strict regulation of the allocation of funds to projects and auditing of their disposition. In the former, the MP may have direct personal authority to spend funds on things as personal as an individual constituent's medical treatment. In the latter case, the MP's role may be no more than selecting projects to be funded and administered by public servants. In either case, the allocation of the funds is directly related to individual MP's constituencies and is thereby associated with the parliament. It becomes a parliamentary function.

An overwhelming majority of the Vanuatu and PNG MPs interviewed ranked representation as the most important role they perform. Consequently, when measuring individual and parliamentary performances, they largely do so against their ability to execute their representative role. To them, representation generally means providing projects such as physical infrastructure in their constituencies. These include hospitals, town halls, tarmac roads and airports. These projects are usually tied to the CDFs which are annually disbursed to MPs in PNG (Allen and Hasnain, 2010) and Vanuatu (Morgan, 2004).

Discrepancies in perception between MPs and facilitators of capacity building

An additional matter, which has not previously been investigated to any great extent, is the various attitudes parliamentary officers, external providers of the MPs' capacity building programs and MPs themselves have toward proper preparation of members for participation in the legislature. For parliamentary officers, key issues focus on knowledge of parliamentary procedure, protocol, and management of entitlements. For political parties, some emphasis is placed on the ability of MPs to prepare and present speeches, to control committee business, and to deal with the press on party policy and matters of the day. Ultimately, however, party interests focus on the disciplining of members to appear when their votes are required, to participate in committees as required and to vote consistently along party lines. Recent research, in which retiring Members of the Canadian parliament were interviewed, suggests that individual members often feel ill-prepared for their role as MP, and take a considerable amount of time determining how they could be most effective (Samara, 2010).The interviews show quite significant discrepancies between how MPs perceive their workplace and the demands that are put upon them and what facilitators of parliamentary capacity building think that MPs should focus on. These discrepancies could be an important explanatory factor for why some MPs do not take as eagerly to training sessions as training providers think they should.

Conclusion

This research provides a rare comparative insight into the functions of parliament as seen from the perspectives of insiders: MPs, staff of parliaments and other providers of capacity building programs for parliamentarians. Responses indicate a wide range of perceptions, which in some cases reveal different understandings of the same English language word when translated into other national languages (e.g. 'control' used instead of 'accountability'). Some responses demonstrate rather different and in some cases a more limited range of functions recognised as legitimate for parliaments. The constitutional model is explicably a major influence on the functions of parliaments and MPs.

Differences between functions, highlighted by MPs and others interviewed for this research, are understandable in terms of their personal responsibilities and direct knowledge. Whilst superficially reflecting three basic functions, closer examination of the interview data challenges classical definitions. In particular, representation is revealed as a more nuanced and complex function than generally assumed, with one aspect being intimately associated with legislating and deliberation, and another aspect more closely related to redressing grievances.

Within each parliament, views of members concerning its most important functions can also be associated with the positions they hold: those in government are more likely to be actively engaged with the development and passage of legislation than those in opposition; those with shadow ministerial portfolios are likely to monitor the work of the executive more closely than those on the back-benches; whilst those in their first term may spend most of their time simply adapting to parliamentary and party cultures than in making a significant personal impact. However, a concern common to all members regardless of whether they are with the government or opposition or if they are in their first or last term, is ensuring that they communicate well with their constituencies and provide assurance to their constituents that their interests are known and promoted ('represented') within the corridors of power.

Whilst party leaders determine MPs' roles within the legislature, constituents determine whether they remain there. This concern may be stronger in electorates where constituents are more educated or have ready and reliable access to communication technologies. This concern may also be a factor when the constituency is remote from the capital city in which the national parliament is located as this places greater reliance on MPs to voice ('represent') their more remote constituents' needs and concerns. The widespread 'blind spot' in relation to making and breaking governments suggests that a little more knowledge about parliament's constitutional function would be beneficial as this is a powerful and important function in parliamentary systems.

A function not previously identified has emerged from the research study: the constituency development fund function. It is significant as these funds may be used corruptly or to advantage or disadvantage individuals and groups. In developing

countries in particular, this function should be recognised as important, as to ignore it could damage the reputations and legitimacy of particular parliaments. The identification of this function highlights the need for specific training in the management of constituency development funds as the proper use of these funds provides a channel that has considerable potential to form stronger links between parliament and community. In the reverse, the misuse of these funds could damage the reputation of a parliament. Research is needed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the constituency development fund models and to investigate and recommend ways of overcoming any shortcomings.

This work provides a rare insight into MPs' perceptions of their parliament's functions and reveals that these do not necessarily correlate with traditional accounts of these functions.

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Endnotes

[1] A number of quotations throughout this article are unattributed in order to keep the identities of the interviewees confidential.

[2] Australian Research Council Linkage Project LP0989714 *Parliamentary Careers: Design, Delivery and Evaluation of Improved Professional Development*

[3] For further research in this field see Leston-Bandeira 2009.

[4] That impeachment is rarely used to remove a head of government (the history of the United States shows, for example, only two, unsuccessful, attempts of impeachment against a president) underlines that it does not parallel the breaking government function found in parliamentary systems.

[5] While some of the interviewees didn't rank the functions due to limited time available for the interview, others refused to rank the functions as they felt they were all important and did not want to devalue any of them.

[6] Whereas British MPs would, for example, refer to their 'constituency', Canadian MPs relate to their 'riding' and Australian MPs to their "electorate".

7 In a similar spirit a South African MP stated: 'I think (...) foremost you will come here to represent people and in the process help legislate or put legislation that is in keeping with the needs of the people.' (Inte SA 1, para 37)

[8] The low emphasis MPs' placed on making and breaking governments was evident in comments such as 'I'm not sure that's our role' UK_1, para 173), 'You don't need any training for that. That's pure luck. There's an election' (UK2, para 260) or 'making and breaking governments [...] that's not the key role of a parliamentarian' (CA_10, para 2).

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