

# The Routledge Handbook Of Parliamentary Administrations

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## Chapter 1

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**Introduction: A Global Perspective on the Role of  
Parliamentary Administrations**

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### A Global Perspective on the Role of Parliamentary Administrations

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#### 1.1 Introduction

The idea of “parliamentary administration” might appear, at first sight, like an oxymoron: parliaments are the domain of politicians, the elected representatives of the people, whereas administrations are commonly understood as the executive bureaucracies carrying out the tasks of governments. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, also the work of parliaments, approving legislation and holding governments to account, requires administrative support, especially and increasingly in the modern age when the functions of public powers, and hence the demands on parliaments, have expanded significantly. Indeed, parliamentary administrations are essential for the proper functioning of representative democracy, albeit by a degree of separation: just as parliaments are central in the operation of a representative democracy, capable administrative support of elected representatives is critical for a meaningful execution of parliaments’ functions. Or, to put it in reverse, in the context of the modern state, a parliament *without* adequate support from a dedicated staff – facilitating meetings, providing logistical assistance, undertaking research, keeping public records, offering legal advice, managing public relations and international liaisons – would be in no position either to legislate or to hold the executive effectively to account.

Yet, while this argument about the significance of parliamentary administrations can be easily made, the academic literature has paid surprisingly little attention to them. Perhaps in part due to the disciplinary separation between *parliamentary studies* and *public administration*, scholars have tended to focus either on the political and constitutional dimension of parliaments, or on the (dominant) executive dimension of public administration. Thus, on the side of parliaments, neither the *Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies* (Shane, Saalfeld, and Strøm, 2014), nor the *Oxford Handbook of the American Congress* (Edwards, Lee, and Schickler, 2011), nor the *Handbook of Parliamentary studies* (Benoît and Rozenberg, 2020) devote any specific attention to their administrative dimension. In the same vein, on the public administration side, both the *Routledge Handbook of Public Administration* (Hildreth, Miller and Lindquist, 2021) and the *SAGE Handbook of Public Administration* (Peters and Pierre, 2012) do not contain chapters on the administrations of parliaments.

There have been selected publications on specific aspects of the topic,<sup>1</sup> to which also the editors of this volume have contributed (Christiansen, Griglio and Lupo, 2021; Högenauer, Neuhold and Christiansen, 2016), individual chapters in edited books (Egeberg, Gornitzka,

Trondal and Johannessen, 2015; Wise, 2003; Yong and Petit, 2018) and official/non-academic publications (ECPRD and Italian Chamber of Deputies, 2003; Grudzinski and Staskiewicz, 1992; IPU, 2020; Verrier, 2007; Vilella, 2019). However, no comprehensive or systematic account of the nature, the role, and the functions of parliamentary administrations has been published. It is in this regard that the present Handbook fills a gap in the literature and seeks to provide a definite account of the organization and work of parliamentary administrations around the world. Based on what was stated above, this volume contributes to our understanding of what makes representative democracy work, as well as highlighting the many challenges that need to be confronted.

While the systematic study of parliamentary administrations concerns to a large extent procedural, organizational, and technical aspects, it is also a highly political matter. A very basic question in this regard concerns the position of parliaments within a state's constitutional setting. Parliaments are ubiquitous around the globe, yet liberal democracy is not. Indeed, according to latest data published in 2022, democracy has been in retreat, with growing numbers of "fully democratic" states being downgraded to "flawed democracies" or worse (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021). Although also non-democratic regimes often maintain parliaments for a variety of reasons, our scholarly interest – and hence the coverage of this Handbook – is mainly focused on democratic polities, in which the function of parliaments is genuinely about representation of the people, and in which parliaments exercise essential functions such as providing a forum for public debate and holding executive institutions to account.

Within the wider understanding of liberal democracy, a further distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems can be made. As the name suggests, parliaments are – at least in principle – the centre-piece in parliamentary democracy, with governments depending on a majority of the elected members for their legitimacy and decision-making. The result is often a "fused system" where the government is closely allied with the majority in parliament. Presidential systems, by contrast, have alternative and independent channels of legitimation for the executive and the legislature. A system of checks and balances, and potentially competition between the two branches, results from such an arrangement.

## **1.2 The Content of the Handbook**

Either way, parliaments are central in both of these systems of representative democracy, and hence also the presence and the good functioning of administrations to support their work matters. Consequently, the present Handbook, while focusing on the discussion of arrangements in democratic polities, includes contributions on both presidential and parliamentary systems. In providing the most comprehensive coverage of the topic, the volume includes individual studies from 50 countries around the globe, alongside a number of horizontal chapters that provide cross-cutting analysis of some of the key challenges that are common to contemporary parliamentary administrations.

The study of such a large number of country-specific experiences is valuable for a number of reasons. First, it provides a useful reference to the detailed arrangements that are being made in individual countries. While there has been access to information for some of the larger states and better-known parliaments, say the US Congress, the German Bundestag or the European Parliament (EP), for many others this kind of knowledge has been limited or non-existent, at least in the English language.<sup>2</sup>

Second, beyond the value of understanding individual cases better, the Handbook also provides a unique comparative perspective. The authors of country-specific chapters have followed a common approach in selecting the relevant data and structuring their discussion, making it possible to identify both common themes and crucial differences across these many systems. In this regard, each chapter addresses (within the context of what is meaningful in each particular case) the following aspects:

- the historical evolution of the parliamentary administration
- key organizational aspects, including questions of hierarchy and resources
- the role of the administration in the context of parliamentary work, for example assistance in the context of legislative procedures
- the involvement in managing inter-institutional and external relations
- current challenges facing the parliamentary administration, including in particular the response to the Covid pandemic and its impact on parliamentary work

This collection of comparable data on a large number of national and, in the case of the EP, supranational systems facilitates comparative analysis, categorizing different models and drawing more general conclusions about strengths, weaknesses, and risks involved in the administration of parliaments.

Third, there is also a diachronic dimension to this analysis, as the various chapters present the historical trajectory of parliamentary administrations and chart the changes that have occurred over time. In the process, it becomes apparent how parliamentary administrations have needed to adapt to changing circumstances, ranging from constitutional reforms, societal change, technological progress to globalization, and new systemic and physical threats. It shows that parliamentary administrations, just like the representative democracies they serve, are living entities whose capacity to reform also determines their ability to perform.

For reasons of space, this Handbook could not include chapters on every parliamentary system in the world – a selection has had to be made, which reflects both editorial judgements (and perhaps bias) and the availability of relevant expertise. While the vast majority of the contributions deal with Western states, every effort has been made to also include chapters on key countries of the non-Western world and the Global South. The Handbook provides insights into experiences from every continent, with complete coverage of North America and the European Union and selected countries from the rest of Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

Europe receives extensive attention in this volume, partly not only because of the large concentration of parliamentary systems that can be found here but also because in the process of European integration a particular arrangement of multilevel governance has developed here. This has involved the creation of a transnational assembly that eventually evolved into the first ever directly elected supranational parliament with proper law-making and budgetary powers (Jacobs and De Feo, 2022). Beyond the emergence of this European Parliament as a novel kind of institution, the integration process also had repercussions on national parliaments in the EU's member states, involving both the threat of disenfranchisement and the creation of new opportunities for parliamentary cooperation. To varying degrees, national parliaments – and their administrations – have undergone a process of “Europeanization” as a consequence of these challenges (Christiansen, Griglio and Lupo, 2021; Högenauer, 2021). It is also due to this particular experience in Europe and the demands that it puts on parliamentary administrations that the Handbook includes

contributions on all EU member states, as well as most of those countries that have candidate status or special arrangements with the European Union.

In terms of the cross-cutting analysis, authors have contributed to “horizontal” chapters on some of the key challenges that have been identified in the country-specific chapters and indeed have based their analysis on some extent on the information provided in the country chapters – this kind of cross-fertilization between individual country studies and cross-cutting analysis being the added value from a comparative perspective referred to above. The key challenges identified and addressed in this first part of the Handbook are:

- the impact of the distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems on parliamentary administrations
- the relationship between the speaker (or president) of parliament and the administration
- the peculiarities of the administration of parliaments in bicameral systems
- the challenge of digitalization
- the provision of scientific expertise in the context of parliamentary work
- parliamentary diplomacy and the facilitation of transnational parliamentary work (in the global and the European contexts)

Following this first part with “horizontal” analyses, subsequent parts of the Handbook discuss the individual experiences of parliamentary administrations around the world, distinguishing between EU member states, other states in Europe and, finally, around the world.

While this volume, designed as a Handbook and as such as a reference work, does not contain a concluding chapter, the following sections of this introductory chapter provide a discussion of the key findings that can be gathered from both country-specific and “horizontal” analysis. The following section engages more deeply with debates about the significance of parliamentary administrations and the relevance of systematic analysis. The next section then brings together the empirical insights from across the various country chapters, highlighting the value of a comparative perspective. A subsequent section addresses the current and future challenges for parliamentary administrations that have been identified across the Handbook’s contributions, before a concluding section summarizes these findings and provides a future outlook.

### 1.3 The Significance of Parliamentary Administrations

The historical development of parliamentary administrations has taken different forms in different countries, making it difficult to generalize. Nonetheless, broadly speaking, we can observe that over time there has been a steady increase of the size and functions of parliamentary administrations. Initially, in 19<sup>th</sup> and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the parliaments of nascent liberal democracies in Europe were supported by administrative staff in a variety of ways: assisting elected members during their meetings, providing procedural and logistical assistance, and collecting the required documentation, both *ex ante* through the management of parliamentary libraries and *ex post* by recording proceedings (minutes, reports of the debates, and voting results). As a matter of fact, members of parliamentary administrations developed high levels of excellence regarding the skills required for carrying out these initial tasks: many of the best librarians, stenographers, procedural experts – and even the founders of “parliamentary law” (Lupo and Thiers, 2020) – are among these first parliamentary administrators.

Beyond this administrative support, parliaments might rely on the personal skills and networks of relationships of elected MPs, who were usually chosen from among the most

notable persons on each constituency – something which usually implied that they had the personal resources to hire one or more secretaries or support staff to manage their activity in their constituency. Fast forward to the present day, it clearly emerges – also from the contributions to this Handbook – that parliamentary administrations have grown significantly in size and are much more articulated and differentiated, both in terms of their functions and of their organizational structures.<sup>3</sup>

However, it is important to emphasize that the evolution of parliamentary administrations has not always been straightforward, registering both ups and downs, with their size depending on multiple factors (Otjes, 2022). What is also worth remarking is that this process has fallen significantly short of the growth of functions and dimension of the large bureaucracies that make up the executive branch of states. The expansion of state functions has led to an exponential increase in the quantity and nature of public structures as well as the number of officials working for them (Becker and Bauer, 2021), ironically while these are often barely politically accountable to legislatures (Benoît, 2020).

The development of the functions of parliamentary administrations is ongoing. Just a look at the effects of the Covid pandemic since 2020 illustrates the challenge on parliamentary administrations to adapt to changing circumstances, accelerating the digitalization of procedures and organization and requiring new human and material resources to manage all these largely unforeseen innovations.

Moreover, also as a consequence of digitalization, parliamentary administrations have been called upon to play new roles. The meaning of the “public” has expanded dramatically, not anymore limited to the press – or, better, to specialized journalists, asked to regularly report on parliamentary activity – but now including also the internet, social media, and potentially every individual citizen. The “public” of parliaments has been empowered by access to the internet, allowing citizens to follow parliamentary activity and thus of the positions expressed by individual MPs without much effort. In other words, “forced increased transparency” of parliamentary activity, depending on the opportunity to use old and new media as channels of institutional communication with citizens (Lupo and Fasone, 2015), has transformed the traditional features of legislative work, especially within standing committees, requiring new balances between efficiency and transparency (Voermans, ten Napel and Passchier, 2015).

Even some traditional functions of parliamentary administrations have been recently re-interpreted in profound ways due to contemporary challenges. One case in point concerns of the functions aimed to ensure the security of parliamentary activity. The risks deriving first by the renewed terrorist threats and violent manifestations – with the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 and the attack on Brazil Congress on 8 January 2023 as prime examples – have been reminders that the integrity of the symbolic and actual seats of representative democracy cannot be taken for granted and needs to be adequately protected. At the same time, this has to be balanced with the defence of parliaments’ traditional autonomy and therefore without leaving this task entirely to the security forces directly controlled by the executive.

Another trend charted by the chapters in this Handbook is the increase of the functions of parliamentary administrations aimed at supporting the external role of parliaments. As parliaments, especially in the last three decades, have been developing interparliamentary cooperation (IPC) and the so-called parliamentary diplomacy, this has obliged their administrations to strengthen their specialization on international relations. Although the plenary chamber maintains its symbolic centrality, the attention of the parliamentary staff is more and more focused on other kinds of meetings, involving of course MPs but also foreign representatives and/or taking place outside the national borders (Stavridis, 2021).

The most delicate issue regarding parliamentary administrations concerns the nature of the activity they perform. The degree of impartiality and the mechanisms aimed at granting this impartiality within an institution that is inevitably highly politicized, fully pluralistic, and often strongly characterized by partisanship probably represent the most crucial and intriguing academic puzzle regarding parliamentary administration.

This is arguably the perspective from which most of the features of each parliamentary administration need to be analysed, be it comparatively or conceptually. Starting from the status of the parliamentary officials composing it, with their status similar to that of all other public officials – often with stronger mechanisms aimed at ensuring their independence and impartiality – or the staff directly supporting individual MPs or the various parliamentary groups, making their work by definition more politicized. Moving to the core role of parliamentary administration, this is very rarely entitled to a proper political function, but normally called upon to be in support of the many, often intertwined functions assigned to parliamentary institutions. Eventually, also its internal organization and hierarchy can be seen as a way to address the issue of impartiality, each time in consistency with the characteristics of the respective political system, its customs, conventions, and traditions.

#### **1.4 A Comparative Perspective on Parliamentary Administrations**

The comparative analysis of the data contained in the various country-specific chapters demonstrates several commonalities and differences in relation to certain fundamental organizational and functional options of parliamentary administrations. This initial overview of the contributions to the Handbook constitutes an opportunity to engage in a systematic comparative analysis, and this section provides some insights on this regard.

The very first observation in this context concerns the size of parliamentary administrations. Recent studies in this field (Otjes, 2022) debated the influence played by three factors (population, assembly size and parliamentary strength) on the size of parliamentary staff, demonstrating that population is a stronger predictor compared to the number of MPs, while the level of parliamentary powers does not act as a key explanation. In fact, as argued in the country-specific chapters, the ratio between the number of parliamentary staff and the number of MPs still remains a telling quantitative factor able to capture the scope and potential strength of the administration. Focusing on the staff/MPs ratio,<sup>4</sup> four groups of parliaments can be distinguished. A minority of parliaments (Malta, Spain and Switzerland) follows a ratio of approximately 1 staff/1 MP. In the large majority of parliaments, the ratio swings around 2 (with an interval of  $\pm 0.5$ ). In another minority of parliaments (Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Israel, Latvia, Mexico), the ratio stretches the threshold of 5. Finally, two parliaments outstand the average trend: this is the case of the European Parliament that has reached a ratio of 7.7 staff/MPs, and Australia, that shows a 9.1 ratio. These can be considered the two most (relatively) numerous and staffed parliamentary administrations if we limit our analysis to permanent bureaucracies.

As a matter of fact, beyond these cases, it is worth mentioning the experience of those parliaments where either permanent staff is extremely marginal and political patronage is the rule (this is the case of the US) or the distinction between permanent and temporary staff is blurred due to the strong osmosis between the two categories. All these cases clearly stand outside the above-mentioned four groupings, showing high ratios of 11.6 staff/MPs in Turkey, 27 in Brazil, 37 in the United States, and 38 in Argentina. It is interesting to note that all these four cases correspond to presidential forms of government.

A second dimension of framing the distinctive features of parliamentary administrations is the degree of budgetary autonomy. Most of the national chapters refer to the size of budget as a relevant factor in support to a proper administrative autonomy of parliament. However, in a diachronic perspective, parliamentary administrations seem to be at the crossroads of their historical development. As a matter of fact, some parliaments have reported in the last few years an increase in the level of funding aiming at addressing the upcoming challenges in the field of recruitment, digitalization, or research. This common trend links parliaments (Australia, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Spain, UK) with a rather different history and constitutional role. In sharp contrast stand those parliaments that have lately recorded a rationalization of budget and hence a downscaling of parliamentary staff. Whereas in South Africa this trend is part of a broader State process leading to the containment of public expenditure, in the case of Japan, budgetary curtails and staff cutting were considered consistent with the reduction of the number of MPs in 2013 and 2017; they have been interpreted as a factor contributing to the relative empowerment of the executive vis-à-vis the legislative branch.

The previous remark confirms that budgetary autonomy as a prerequisite for administrative autonomy is one of the pivotal factors supporting parliaments' independence vis-à-vis the executive. Historically, this has accompanied the parliamentarization of many countries in the European Union and is now significantly characterizing the transition of a candidate country such as North Macedonia, which in 2020 has started promoting the budgetary and financial independence of the National Assembly in order to ensure its independence from the executive branch.

The third perspective regarding the comparison of parliamentary administrations relates to the internal set of administrative arrangements, which depend on staff recruitment, organization, roles, and functions; the governance of administration, including its political control and oversight. The combination of these two arrangements provides an idea of the relationship that links each parliamentary administration to politics, spanning from a situation of complete administrative neutrality to strong partisanship and politicization.

For what concerns staff recruitment, organization, roles, and functions, comparative analysis shows that – apart from the atypical model followed by the US Congress relying almost entirely on political patronage for staff recruitment – in most parliaments two categories of “human resources” can be distinguished: on the one hand, permanent administrative staff who are civil servants, and, on the other hand, support staff hired under private law/political patronage supporting either individual MPs or political groups. These two categories are usually clearly separated in terms of status and career perspectives, but some exceptions are worth mentioning. For example, in Albania and Luxembourg, support staff benefits from the same conditions as the permanent staff. The relative size of both these categories may vary between the two houses in bicameral parliaments (see the case of the Netherlands) and it may vary over time, as the experience of Brazil – where the decentralized and partisan staff has significantly grown in the last decade to the detriment of a centralized, non-partisan bureaucracy – confirms.

The recruitment and status of the first category of permanent officials in its turn fall under two main models. In the majority of parliaments, administrative staff follows the selection procedures and the status of civil servants: in these experiences, parliamentary officials do not substantially differ from the other public employees serving the executive branch. Only in some cases (Croatia and Spain, among others), specific adaptations to the parliamentary context are provided for the officials serving the legislative branch. The alternative model, adopted by Belgium, Canada, France, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Poland, Portugal,



Romania, Turkey, UK, foresees the establishment of a special administrative regime for parliamentary staff, completely separated from the general civil service.

Whereas the existence of a separate administrative regime is considered indicative of the degree of administrative autonomy and independence enjoyed by parliament vis-à-vis the executive (IPU, 2020), other organizational and functional features may contribute to support or endanger this prerogative in the regard of politics in general. These may include the career paths of parliamentary officials, their administrative functions, and the daily connection with MPs and political groups. As a matter of fact, most parliamentary administrations interpret the role of their permanent staff as deeply non-politicized and non-partisan. This is particularly true in those systems following a special administrative regime that regulate every single aspect of the career and activity of their officials following a merit-based system. In other cases, where the parliamentary administration lacks a formal statutory guarantee of independence, it is only through concrete working practices, from communication to transparency, that it can prove its political neutrality (Austria). Whereas the majority of parliamentary administrations find their dominant logic in the non-partisanship, the Turkish experience confirms the existence of parliamentary administrations which rather depend explicitly on partisanship for their activity and career due to political contingent factors, including the concentration of power in the hands of the Speaker and the lack of political alternation in the last 19 years. The Argentinean Congress is another example of highly politicized organization, guided by a partisan principle, led by the Speakers of the Chambers, and greatly influenced by the Parliamentary Labour Union.

In those systems more directly adopting the non-partisan logic (including Korea, Italy, Iceland, Ireland, Montenegro and Portugal), specific rules are introduced in order to prevent parliamentary employees to publicly support or oppose a political party or candidate. A significant exception is made in Germany, where parliamentary officials are asked to be politically neutral in the performance of their work, although they are allowed to be members of political parties and even run in local elections.

The impartiality requirement does not exclude that, while performing their duties, parliamentary officials tend to establish cooperative relationships with political actors (Norway), acting in close contact with the representatives of both ruling and opposition parties (Japan). Whereas some administrative units mainly deal with what can be categorized as fully administrative matters (i.e. security, IT systems and housekeeping activities), other units are tackling more sensitive tasks, directly supporting the political functions of parliament, such as legislation, budgeting, control of the executive, and public relations. This explains why some administrative positions (particularly within the secretariats at committee level) may be potentially influential actors in their respective policy domains (Finland).

In order to reconcile the prerequisite of administrative impartiality in a working context deeply embedded in politics and often polarized, Iceland has significantly adopted a code of ethics for the Althingi staff, which emphasizes avoidance of conflicts of interest, promoting impartiality and objectivity. Similarly, with the aim of decreasing the possibility of malpractice and wrong application of procedures, a set of mechanisms such as Integrity and Risk Managers was established in Montenegro (although they still need to reach their full potential).

The independence of parliamentary administrations from the political sphere is also grounded on the internal governance structure and hierarchy. The apex of parliamentary administration may be either the Speaker or a collective body (named Bureau, Presidium, Commission) consisting of parliamentarians from all key parties or groups. These bodies usually address political (administrative) guidelines to the Secretary General, who usually enjoys

large margins of discretion in the daily administrative management but, at the same time, is responsible functionally and hierarchically of the whole bureaucratic sector, being answerable for the administrative performance before the political sphere.

The rules governing the appointment and removal of the Secretary general and of the other top officials are of great importance for the independence and autonomy of the administrative structure (Gianniti and Di Cesare, 2023). In most cases, the position of the Secretary General is rather stable, compared to similar positions at the executive level, being removable only through articulated procedures, involving broad political consensus. However, often beyond the narrative of independence and neutrality, forms of politicization can occur at the highest administrative levels. For instance, in the European Parliament, the staff policy of the Secretary General is closely monitored by the political authority (the Bureau of the European Parliament) which has come to exercise a strong political influence on certain nominations. Even the Canadian Parliament, which has a solid tradition of administrative neutrality, has lately experienced developments and controversies in the appointment of Clerks for both chambers, hinting at a possible new politicization of roles previously seen as highly impartial. Politicization of senior management may be spurred by competing behaviours of its members seeking for party group consensus aimed at renewing their position, as the experience of Austria, Bosnia, Brazil, and Czechia confirm. This reaches its maximum in the case of Turkey, where the many central units may be entrusted on external administrators, thus increasing the possibility of politicization and arbitrariness of administrative careers.

The general rule is that every parliament or house in bicameral parliaments has its own Secretary General, with the exception of France, Uruguay, and Mexico (in the Senate) where two SGs are present in each House (Gianniti and Di Cesare, 2023) and the opposite choice of Austria and Switzerland, which, consistently with the option for a joint parliamentary administration serving both houses, foresee the presence of just one single Secretary General heading up the entire administration of the bicameral parliament (Griglio and Lupo, 2023).

## **1.5 Contemporary Challenges for Parliamentary Administrations**

Reference has already been made to the changes that parliaments, and hence their administrations, have undergone over the past century. Looking more closely at recent developments, a number of contemporary challenges can be identified that parliamentary administrations have had to confront in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the following, five such challenges will be introduced that are discussed in more detail in various chapters of this Handbook.

First, there has been an intensifying pressure on representative institutions to be more transparent in how they work, and what they debate. As already discussed above, there has been a long trajectory that has sought to communicate parliamentary proceedings to the wider public, starting with the publication of official records, the provision of citizens' access to the chamber, and eventually the broadcasting of debates on radio, television, and the internet. The aspiration towards accessibility has also been expressed in the architectural choices of modern parliamentary buildings making use of walls of glass, symbolizing the transparency of the institution. However, in line with the recognition that also in parliaments significant aspects of the decision-making process occur behind the scenes, the agenda of achieving greater transparency has involved the accreditation of independent media representatives, the creation of registers for organized interests, and the publication of minutes and voting records of committees, opening up parliamentary business to the public beyond the plenary chamber.

Transparency, rather than being an end in itself, is a tool towards a wider aim, namely enabling citizens to follow closely the activities of their elected representatives. Arguably, this capacity of the electorate to understand and evaluate the behaviour of MPs is elementary in ensuring that the choices being made at the ballot box are well informed. However, beyond this rather passive relationship between transparency of parliaments and the voting choices of citizens, there is also a more proactive dimension of this link, namely the direct engagement with citizens.

The aim of citizen engagement has led many parliaments to open up their proceedings and indeed their buildings to the public. Visitor galleries, guided tours, and organized visits for school classes are now common place for most parliaments. On a more substantive level, letters to elected members, petitions, and similar instruments allow citizens to comment on legislative affairs. What this means for parliamentary staff is the need for additional skills and resources in order to deal with the increased workload. Effective management of citizen engagement and a capacity to respond to petitions and individual requests can be seen as important at a time when political mobilization increasingly takes place through extra-parliamentary channels.

Another area of growing importance that places greater demands on parliamentary administrations is that of parliamentary diplomacy and IPC. Diplomacy is, of course, the traditional domain of the executive, conducted by heads of state, foreign ministers, and diplomats. Indeed, given its declaratory and secretive nature, foreign and security policy is traditionally an area in which parliaments have limited influence, though considerable constitutional variation exists in this field. However, parliaments themselves have developed a practice of engaging with matters of foreign policy. This includes activities such as passing resolutions that refer to current or past developments in other countries (e.g. condemnations of *coup d'états* or the recognition of historical crimes as genocide), addressing speaking invitations to foreign leaders or international figures, sending delegations of parliamentary representatives abroad. Such activities, when carried out by parliaments without involvement of the government, do not formally commit the country, and as such are largely symbolic. However, such acts of parliamentary diplomacy can have a profound impact, especially in the context of highly sensitive or contentious matters.

IPC is more routine in that over the past century the regular interaction between parliaments have become institutionalized. Various international and regional fora have been set up that facilitate the regular exchange between representatives of parliaments. IPC offers the opportunity to parliamentarians – and their staff – to learn from their respective experiences, to establish best practices, and to identify opportunities for joint action. This can be useful both in terms of procedural and constitutional matters (e.g. defending parliamentary prerogatives vis-à-vis the executive) or on substantive matters (such as the promotion of the rule of law). To a certain degree, IPC has become institutionalized by the work of international organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union or regional initiatives such as IPEX, the EU's “platform for inter-parliamentary exchange”. At the same time, at a time when liberal democracy is in retreat in some countries, IPC may also constitute a support structure for beleaguered legislatures.

What matters in the current context is that parliamentary diplomacy and IPC activities also depend on skilled administrators to make these work. These international exchanges require knowledge about other countries' political and constitutional systems, a high degree of political sensitivity in engaging in the world of diplomacy, the presence of the requisite language skills, and the capacity to rely on or establish personal networks across national borders. With elected members being generally focused on their domestic electorates, it

often falls on administrators not only to support MPs in their international activities but in fact also to take the initiative to create such contacts and initiatives in the first place.

A further issue that has come to prominence in the management of parliamentary affairs in the course of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the security of parliaments. What happened in Washington DC on 6 January 2021 when a violent mob attacked the US Capitol to interrupt the declaration of the results of the presidential election – in what was an apparent insurgency against the democratic process of the United States – demonstrated vividly the vulnerability of legislative institutions, and the need for physical protection of their structures. A strikingly similar assault on the premises of the parliament (and the buildings of other state institutions) occurred in Brazil on 8 January 2023. While such events have been exceptional in the context of modern democratic systems, there have been other breaches of the security of parliamentary buildings, including both politically motivated (such as the far-right protesters storming the steps of the Reichstag, the home of the German Bundestag in August 2020) and simply criminal instances (such as a bank robbery inside the European Parliament in 2009).

What these examples show is the need for parliaments to provide for security, not only for its members and staff but also to protect the democratic process and constitutional integrity of the institution of parliament. Given that public security is normally the domain of the executive, many parliaments have established their own police force or security agency in order to maintain their independence and ensure the separation of powers. In the context of greater polarization and increasing propensity for political violence, ensuring the physical security of parliamentary spaces has become a major challenge for parliamentary staff, coming together also with the heightened concern and additional responsibilities related to the personal safety of members and staff during the Covid pandemic.

Beyond these issues surrounding physical threats to parliaments, another growing concern for administrations has been the need to ensure a secure environment for data storage and transmission. As many institutions in both the private and the public sector, parliaments have been subjects of cyber-attacks which – again – are potentially particularly harmful given their centrality to the democratic process. Such attacks can be about accessing confidential or privileged information or seeking to influence the decision-making process. In a fast-evolving threat environment, the provision of cyber-security for parliaments is a demanding task that administrations need to adapt to on a constant basis.

Beyond cyber-security, digital transformation more generally poses new challenges for parliamentary administrations. Digitalization is a process touching on all the aspects of administrative work but at the same time has important consequences also for the political role of parliament. This is why ongoing political and administrative drives to promote a digital organization can be considered a necessary premise for implementing the perspective of a “paperless parliament”.

Promoting a digital organization presupposes a radical change in the internal administrative machinery of parliament, and this change is not new to many parliamentary administrations (Israel, Ireland, Korea, Switzerland, among others), which have started this process quite a long time ago. Other bureaucracies can be considered latecomers in the digital challenge, but for all of them the pandemic has represented an accelerator of digitalization both in the field of the administrative procedures and daily practices and in the field of the political activity and connection with the society.

The transition to a digital parliamentary organization requires a series of adaptations both in terms of technology and human resources. On the one hand, it relies on the introduction of new technology infrastructures and equipment. For instance, in the case of Portugal, this has eventually led to the creation, in 2018, of a new Technology Infrastructure and Information

Systems Divisions, under the Information Technology Directorate. On the other hand, digitalization necessarily advocates the engagement of staff units with advanced digital skills (Greece) whose main task is granting parliament its own autonomy and technical capacity in the generation of IT resources and contents and in the IT management. In the pursuit of improving the IT support of parliament, Malta has promoted the collaboration with universities. By contrast, the experience of the Austrian Parliamentary Service that acts as service provider for the federal ministries (the entire public consultation procedure regarding draft bills is published on the parliament's website) witnesses how improvements in the digital administrative capacity of parliament may benefit the overall public sphere. Finally, the “human” challenge also includes the consolidation of a digital administrative culture both within employees (Ireland) and within MPs (Croatia), and in many cases, these may be long-term processes.

In a substantive perspective, similar priority goals are addressed by parliamentary bureaucracies in their approach to modern technologies and digital processes: openness and transparency of parliamentary activity (see for instance the applications to stenographic recording and minutes in Estonia and Japan); efficiency of parliamentary work; connection with the public and participation of civil society (see for instance the launch of e-petitions in Belgium, Estonia, Luxembourg, EP); modernization of parliamentary institutional communication (see for instance the opening of all parliaments to social media and the improvements in the use of podcasts and parliamentary TV programmes); digitalization of the legislative process (Bosnia, Brazil, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia); accessibility of parliamentary documents through the creation of open data platforms (France, India, Korea); and simplified datasets (France).

The pandemic has undoubtedly accelerated most of the digital processes that were already underway, and this resulted in formal changes in the political organization of parliament also. As a matter of fact, at the end of 2020, the Dutch Tweede Kamer established a parliamentary committee on Digital Affairs with its own parliamentary staff, including a clerk, information specialist, knowledge coordinator, as well as EU-advisor. In the same period, the Swedish Riksdag created a Sub-Committee on the Information Society and Digitalization within the Committee on Education, Science, Technological Development, and the Information Society. The possibility to have remote committee and plenary meetings, which was already among the administrative digital goals in some parliaments, has undoubtedly acknowledged a rapid acceleration under the pandemic. The backside of all these digital trends is – as mentioned before – in the increased exposition of parliament to cyberattacks, that's why – following some recent incidents – IT security has been incorporated by some parliamentary administrations (Norway, Italy) as one of the digital priorities.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

As stated at the outset of this chapter, there is no representative democracy without a parliament and – at least in contemporary democracies – there is no parliament able to work without its own administration.

The instrumental contribution to the smooth functioning of representative democracy is what distinguishes the presence and role of parliamentary administrations worldwide. However, the way in which this objective is achieved varies substantially between national jurisdictions. Indeed, the comparative perspective and comprehensive analysis provided by the contributions to this Handbook confirm that the organizational and functional solutions implemented in response to this common need are extremely varied, to the point that it is difficult to identify general reference models. As a matter of fact, many factors contribute to determining the nature and structure of parliamentary administrations: first, the process of

parliamentary institutionalization (Judge and Earnshaw, 2003) that led to the definition of the characteristic features of parliament; second, the form of government and its interaction with the executive power (Fasone, 2023); third, the reference legal system (belonging either to the common law or to the civil law families) and administrative tradition (Sager, Rosser, Hurni and Mavrot, 2012); and, fourth, the electoral system, party system, and presence of a majoritarian or consensual model of democracy.

None of these factors by itself would determine the shape of the administrative architecture of parliament. However, a combination of these factors allows us to distinguish between two main institutional solutions to the common need of “administering” representative democracy: the “bureaucratic model” and the “staffing model”.

The bureaucratic model involves the presence of a centralized administrative apparatus within parliament, selected through different recruitment procedures – either autonomous or derived from the state’s wider civil service – providing parliamentary officials with a permanent position, independent from politics. Institutionalization, centralization, political neutrality, autonomy from the political sphere, and hierarchical organization are the main characteristics of the bureaucratic model, which is the leading solution worldwide: it is the rule not just in most European parliaments (including Cyprus, which follows a presidential system) but also in extra-European parliaments, such as the Korean National Assembly, the Parliament of South Africa and, significantly, also the Mexican Congress, which has recently promoted the establishment of an autonomous parliamentary civil service.

The alternative of a staffing model is instead adopted by “legislatures” that follow the presidential model of the US Congress, including for example Argentina and Brazil. This model is based on a decentralized approach with staffers answering personally to individual MPs or political groups (Peters, 2023) and a limited number of non-partisan officials hired through public competition for permanent positions. Compared to the bureaucratic model, the staffing model shows on average a bigger size of personnel – and hence of budget – and, at least in the US experience, serves a “strong” parliamentary institution, solidly grounded in the constitutional architecture.

The two models differ in the emphasis that parliaments place on the activities, and hence on the administrative needs, of individual MPs (which are predominant in the staffing model) and of their collective structures and bodies (which prevail in the bureaucratic model). These alternative approaches raise some questions about the alignment of the administrative solution with the parliamentary archetype at stake given that the “legislatures” following the American presidential model are precisely the assemblies most inclined to operate – beyond the traditional internal political cleavages – on the basis of institutional (and therefore unitary) cleavages (Laver, 2008).

Notwithstanding these underlying differences, several instances of “contamination” across the two models can be identified. On the one hand, administrations following the staffing model are able to fulfil selected “shared” administrative needs associated with the collective dimension of parliamentary activities (mainly research and budget services) by establishing independent agencies (such as the US Congressional Budget Office). On the other hand, the bureaucratic model integrates the role of permanent officials selected through public competition with the presence of staff under the political patronage of party groups or individual MPs, whose size shows higher rates of increase compared to permanent officials (Fasone, 2023).

It is significant to observe how a sort of hybridization between the two administrative models has found success in the experience of the European Parliament. In the course of its institutionalization process (Corbett, Jacobs and Shackleton, 2016; De Feo, 2016), the European Parliament has tried to combine the aspiration to rely on a solid and well-funded

staffing system with the experience derived from the parliaments of EU Member States based on the recruitment of parliamentary officials through the *concours*. Even today, the continuous oscillation between these two opposing requirements supports the existence, in the internal administrative practices of the European Parliament, of an intense mobility between the staff of party groups and the permanent officials serving parliament as a whole (Jacobs and De Feo, 2023).

The comparative picture therefore confirms that matter how parliaments satisfy their internal administrative needs insofar they are able to do this autonomously. The autonomy of the internal administrative structure from external influences is indeed an indispensable requirement for the autonomy of parliament, which in its turn is the premise for setting an autonomous administrative organization. This was true historically, in the process of parliamentary institutionalization (Sisson, 1974), but it is still topical today, when legislatures see their institutional role deeply challenged within democracies under threat (Ginsburg and Huq, 2018). As a matter of fact, parliaments' administrative autonomy nowadays implies the capacity to address in an independent manner both old and new requirements, stemming from the drafting of stenographic records to digitalization, from the management of plenary and committee sittings to research and documentation. The ability to adapt to these administrative changes is essential to the protection of parliamentary identity facing some of the epochal challenges of representative democracy (Costa, Kerrouche and Magnette, 2004): preserving the role of parliament vis-à-vis increasing executive dominance at both supranational and national level (Curtin, 2014; Dan Wood, 2011); meeting the expectations for increased transparency and citizens' participation in order to combat electoral abstention and populism; responding to the nature of political decision-making in an ever more interdependent world which demands a more globalized parliamentarism.

## Notes

- 1 See the special issues published in *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1981), dealing with the growth of legislative bureaucracies in the United States and in Europe since the Second World War, and in *Revue française d'administration publique*, Vol. 68, (1993), focusing on the role of parliamentary administrations in France, with limited comparative case studies from Germany, Senegal, and United Kingdom. See also the "virtual issue" published by the European Consortium of Political Research – ECPRD (2013) – bringing together papers presented at the 2013 ECPR General Conference.
- 2 On the Spanish Parliament, see for instance Díez Picazo (1985). On the French Parliament, Coniez and Michon (2020). On the Italian Parliament, Zuddas (2004) and Pacelli and Giovannetti (2020).
- 3 On the US case, see Fox and Hammond (1979), Malbin (1980), Weiss (1989) and Lyons (2013). For the UK, see Ryle (1981) and Petit and Yong (2018).
- 4 In calculating the staff/MPs ratios, we refer only to the number of permanent staff for all parliamentary administrations. The categorization of staff is not always precise, which is why exceptions to this criterion have been made for some of the cases covered here, namely the US (whose staff is mainly under political patronage), Argentina, Brazil, and Turkey (where the relationship between temporary and permanent staff is rather blurred and does not enable to clearly distinguish the numerical consistency of the two categories).

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## Introduction

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