Committee Assignments in a Nascent Party System: The Case of the Turkish Grand National Assembly

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Abstract. In the USA, scholars have developed theories to explain the role of legislative committees, but these theories have not been widely tested outside the USA. This ambivalence results from the perception that the strength of political parties in parliamentary systems undermines the importance of other legislative institutions, including the committees. We surveyed members of the Turkish parliament during a period of considerable party-system turmoil to test the applicability of the prominent theories of committee organization (the distributive, informational, and partisan theories) to a parliamentary system. We found strong support for the distributive and partial support for the informational specialization and partisan theories. We consider the implications of these results for our understanding of the role of committees in parliamentary democracies and the study of parliamentary politics.

Keywords: • Legislative committees • Party system • Turkish parliament • Conditional logit

The study of legislative institutions has relied on stereotypical characterizations of parliamentary and presidential systems. According to this scheme, presidential systems are exemplified by limited party loyalty, executive and legislative balance, and political stalemate (Mezey, 1991; Sundquist, 1981). In contrast, parliamentary systems are portrayed as having cohesive political parties, strong executives, and compliant legislatures (Mezey, 1994). Partly, this stylistic distinction has helped separate the comparative study of parliaments from legislative research into the most scrutinized presidential system – that of the USA. Students of legislative politics in the USA have focused considerable attention on the committee system in the belief that "Congress in its committee-rooms is Congress at work" (Wilson, 1885: 69).

Our knowledge of legislative committees in parliamentary systems lags behind – especially about the extent to which the three theories of committee organization (distributional, informational specialization, and partisan) apply to legislatures outside the USA. Nonetheless, there is a growing interest among the students of legislative politics regarding the role of committees in parliamentary systems. In a number of countries, committee systems have assumed new roles in the legislative process (Cairney, 2006; Hallerberg, 2004; Mattson and Strøm, 1996, 2004; Olson and Crowther, 2003; Strøm, 1990, 1998) that have enabled members to establish sway over the executive (Leston-Bandeira, 2001).

If committees play an important role in parliamentary systems, the study of committee organization clearly warrants further scholarly attention. Given the abundant theoretical and empirical literature on committee organization in the USA, a useful starting point is "to ask to what extent these perspectives are applicable to other parliaments" (Strøm, 1998: 28). The purpose of this article is to help answer this question by evaluating the three theories of committee organization as they relate to the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM). Turkey offers a good opportunity to test these theories in the context of a nascent party system in which the usual assumptions about party cohesion and legislative compliance seem especially unjustified. Volatility and fragmentation are recurrent themes in Turkish politics, as several observers have noted (for example, Heper, 2002; Kalaycioglu, 2006; Ozbudun, 2000), and this has been the case especially since the 2002 elections which saw Turkey shift from a multiparty to a two-party system with a new majority party.

To test these theories, we conducted a survey of members of the Turkish parliament less than a year after the watershed 2002 general elections. Results indicate that committees help members serve the interests of their supporters and as such lend strong support to distributive theories of committee organization. Specifically, we find that members are more likely to be assigned to committees that match the policy interests of their main supporters. The analyses provide only partial support for informational specialization and partisan theories. We interpret these results as evidence of the importance of committees in parliamentary systems and the potential effects of party-system change on legislative organization.

Theories of Committee Organization

"If one were to ask a member of Congress why committees exist," note Groseclose and King (2001: 191), "a dozen different reasons" might be given. By contrast, among political scientists, only three explanations are consistently offered for the existence of the committee system: distributive theory, informational specialization theory, and partisan theory.[1]

Distributive Theory

The distributive theory of committee organization builds on the assumption that legislators are motivated, primarily, by the desire to secure their own re-election (Groseclose and King, 2001). To that end, individual legislators strive to advance the interests of their supporters by securing policy concessions that favor their constituents or by delivering pork-barrel projects to their home districts.

Since no member is able to form a majority absent the support of other members of the chamber, each needs to join or form a coalition that can ensure

the implementation of his or her policy and distributive preferences. This is not an easy undertaking and requires that each legislator trades favors. Each member must support the interests of the other members in return for their endorsements of his or her own preferences. The aggregated effect of such horse-trading is that members logroll their demands into large, omnibus bills.[2] Logrolling is not a complete solution, however, since it creates a number of additional problems. Most notably, there is always the possibility that some members of the coalition may renege on their commitment to a bill or to specific parts of the bill that are unimportant to them. The threat of defection is exacerbated by the cyclical majority problem (McKelvey, 1976) as any coalition formed in support of a bill can be defeated by an alternative coalition in the absence of alternative institutional arrangements.

The solution to these problems consists of a "host of institutions underpinning a set of property rights loosely referred to as the committee system" (Weingast and Marshall, 1988: 157). Instead of exchanging votes in support of a bill, legislators exchange special parliamentary rights that afford the holders of those rights additional influence over each policy area. Insofar as the legislators are primarily motivated by the goal of re-election, each committee will consist of legislators with a greater than average interest in the policy jurisdiction of that committee. Thus committees will be "highly unrepresentative of their parent body, or outlying, since they are composed disproportionately of high demand members" (Prince and Overby, 2005: 69).

Informational Specialization Theory

Since it is costly to obtain information about the bills, the chamber will form legislative committees to obtain information for assessing the representativeness of policy in relation to its own preferences. In addition, the parent body will take advantage of the policy specializations of members to improve the efficiency of the chamber as a whole (Gilligan and Krehbiel, 1989; Krehbiel, 1991). The committee system affords committee members the chance to gain policy skills and acquire the resources necessary to explore the consequences of each bill more fully than can members of the floor. In turn, the committees provide members of the chamber with sufficient information about each bill so that each legislator can ascertain the extent to which it corresponds to his or her policy preferences. Thus, proponents of this theory contend that the main purposes of the committee system are to improve the efficiency and to allow the monitoring of the agent (that is, committees) by the principal (that is, the chamber).

For committees to serve this purpose, however, members need an incentive to join them and invest their efforts in acquiring policy expertise. The allocation of a gatekeeping authority to committees is critical for motivating members of the floor to join them in the first place, given that in the absence of such influence, the committee may have no more control over its preferred policy area than the floor. At the same time, members of the floor need to restrict the rights of committees to ensure that committee members do not abuse their influence. As Krehbiel (1991: 80) notes, "the subservient nature of committees in informational theories cannot be overemphasized." If committee members differ at all in their preferences from members of the floor, they may manipulate the flow of information so as to improve the chances of the passage of preferred legislation, while harming the passage of unwanted bills. Perhaps the only way effectively

to minimize the risks that committee members will abuse their influence is to ensure that the preferences of committee members correspond as closely as possible to those of the chamber as a whole. In other words, the chamber will be tempted to form committees with a distribution of preferences that resembles the preferences of the floor. Hence, the chamber will try to limit the number of outlying committees "so that they are directed toward collective, rather than, individual ends" (Prince and Overby, 2005: 70).

Partisan Theory

The proponents of the partisan theory of committee organization contend that the parliamentary party must be able to coordinate action within the chamber in two ways. First, it must be capable of achieving its own policy objectives, at the expense of rival parties, and, second, it must also be able to prevent its own members from pursuing their own interests should those interests conflict with those of the party. Each party seeks to behave as a kind of "legislative cartel" that governs the chamber, regulating its own members at the same time as minimizing the influence of its political opponents (Cox and McCubbins, 1993). To that end, members appoint party leaders to monitor cooperation and compliance among their colleagues.

The committee system provides the party leadership with the means to achieve its policy objectives while concurrently providing party members with an incentive to defer to the leaders of the party. Those who have demonstrated their loyalty to act in accordance with party objectives are most likely to be assigned to committees. At the same time, committee membership should guarantee some influence over policy areas or offer members other benefits such as prestige or additional resources. The party leadership must maintain a delicate balance. They have to allow committee members to shape policy without losing overall control of the committee system or permitting the emergence of alternative sources of power within the chamber. To that end, parties may endow senior members or committees with negative or positive agenda power to control the legislative process. A committee chair, for instance, is assumed "to act with an eye on the interests" (Cox and McCubbins, 2005: 38) of his or her party and therefore may be given the power to delay or veto a bill (negative agenda power) or to ensure the placement of a bill on the floor (positive agenda power). The appointment of loyal party members to legislative committees is also fundamental to maintaining partisan control of these institutions. And even though committee assignments are intended to ensure, in part, that members will follow party orders even when they conflict with their own preferences, control over the committee system can be assured most effectively if members share the preferences of their party colleagues in the first place (Cox and McCubbins, 1993).

The Turkish Grand National Assembly and Committees

As the sole legislative body of the Turkish Republic, the Turkish Grand National Assembly constitutes an important part of the parliamentary system.[3] The TBMM consists of 550 members elected from party lists in 81 multi-member districts. Elections are held every five years under a closed-list proportional representation system with a 10 percent national threshold. The electoral process is dominated by political parties such that campaigns are generally organized around nationally

salient issues and candidates run under the party label. The party leadership has a greater say in candidate selection. However, local party politics and individual campaigns are also important, as party leaders will consider the resources and constituency strength of each candidate in forming the candidate lists.

Any party that has at least 20 members in the parliament can form an official party group according to rules specified in the constitution and the Rules of Procedure (ROP). Party groups provide opportunities for members to voice their concerns and to contribute to important decisions in an officially sanctioned caucus. More importantly, since the 1982 Constitution of the Republic of Turkey (III-C-95) requires "the participation of each political party group in all the activities of the Assembly in proportion to its number of members," in most cases membership in an official party group is a prerequisite for assignment to any function in the TBMM. In fact, according to the ROP (Article 22), any committee member who resigns from his or her party automatically loses her committee membership.

At the time of the data collection, in late 2003, there were 17 standing committees in the TBMM. Table 1 lists the 17 standing committees and the number of members assigned to each. In most cases, committees shadow ministries and maintain close associations with the government departments responsible for their policy area. In addition, these committees perform a number of legislative and supervisory duties on behalf of the assembly.

Committee posts are assigned to parties in proportion to the number of seats in the assembly each party holds. The process of committee appointment takes place in three stages. First, the chamber presidency determines the number of committee members for each party group. Second, groups send a list of candidates

TABLE 1. *The Committees of the TBMM*

Committee	Members*
Constitutional Committee	24
Justice Committee	24
National Defense Committee	24
Internal Affairs Committee	24
Foreign Affairs Committee	24
National Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Committee	24
Public Works, Reconstruction, Transportation and Tourism Committee	24
Environment Committee	24
Health, Family, Labor and Social Affairs Committee	24
Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Affairs Committee	24
Industry, Trade, Energy, Natural Resources, Knowledge and Technology Committee	24
TBMM Examination of Accounts Committee	15
Petition Committee	15
Planning and Budget Committee	40
State Economic Enterprises Committee	35
Examination of Human Rights Committee	24
European Union Integration Committee	18

Note: *Members as of fall 2003.

for each committee to the presidency. At this stage, members are requested to submit their rank-ordered preferences for more than one committee membership along with their curriculum vitae. The main decision and negotiations are made at this stage between the individual members and the group leadership. In the third stage, after the lists are submitted to the presidency, the president of the assembly puts these lists to the floor for a vote.[4] Committee assignments are made twice in each term. Assignments made in the first round last for two years, while assignments made in the second round last for three years. As laid down in the ROP (Article 21), multiple assignments are possible except for the Planning and Budget Committee and the Petition Committee.

Both cabinet members and the members of parliament are authorized to introduce bills to the parliament, known as either *teklif* (cabinet bills) or *tasarı* (private members' bills). Once introduced to the parliament, the TBMM president sends *teklif* and *tasarı* bills directly to the committees. In most cases, the president sends the bills to primary and secondary committees. The former prepares the main report and the latter submit informative views on related articles.

Theoretical Implications

Given the features of the Turkish political system and the TBMM, it might seem that parties dominate the committee system and that, consequently, the distributive and informational specialization theories will be less applicable to the TBMM. First, party-centered politics appears to be the norm in Turkey, where MPs are elected from closed party lists compiled by the national party leadership. As a result, it may be more important for members of parliament to satisfy the demands of their party leaders than those of their voters. Second, only members of official party groups can be appointed to positions in the assembly and committee members who resign from their party automatically lose their committee membership. Third, the process of selecting members to serve on the committees is managed within the party caucus.

All this implies that, even if members of parliament were to try to use the committee system to advance their chances of re-election, parties are the gatekeepers to the election and committee system and, therefore, the committee system will work for the parties. Since loyalty to the party and support for its policy objectives are the most important influences on the process of committee appointment, especially when it comes to the most important committees, we anticipate the following:

Hypothesis 1.1:   *The greater the ideological distance between a member of parliament and her party median, the less likely it is that she will serve on any committee.*

Hypothesis 1.2:   *The more salient a committee, the less likely it is that extremist members (relative to their own party median) will serve on that committee.*

Hypothesis 1.3:   *The more salient a committee, the more likely it is that members who are committed to the goals of their party will serve on that committee.*

Since each party is intent on achieving its own objectives, often at the expense of the other parties in the chamber, the party that controls the legislature will most likely circumscribe the ability of other groups to accomplish their goals through the committee system. In effect, this implies that even if a minor party or parties nominate committee members who represent their policy interests, their

proximity to the median legislator of the majority party may have some degree of influence on their selection. Therefore:

Hypothesis 1.4: *The greater the ideological distance between a member of parliament and the majority party median, the less likely it is that she will serve on any committee.*

Hypothesis 1.5: *The more salient a committee, the less likely it is that extremist members (relative to the majority party median) will serve on that committee.*

Hypothesis 1.6: *The more salient a committee, the more likely it is that members who are committed to the goals of the majority party will serve on that committee.*

The influence of political parties within the parliament, although often considerable, can change over time, especially in response to changes in the party system. From time to time, spectacular changes in the electoral landscape can lead to the disappearance of old parties and the emergence of new ones (Gallagher et al., 2001). In these situations, inchoate parties may be less able to coordinate parliamentary outcomes, thereby increasing the role of committees. More importantly, if emergent parties cannot command the support of loyal party voters to the same level as the established parties they replaced, individual legislators may be more inclined to pursue their electoral and policy interests through legislative institutions.

Despite the institutional assistance afforded to political parties in the TBMM, there are several reasons why the majority party in Turkey may not have established sufficient control over the parliament to maintain a committee system that serves its interests. In recent years, the Turkish party system has been beleaguered by a high degree of instability and partisan fragmentation. Only two parties that had been represented in the previous parliament managed to win seats in the 2002 elections.[5] One of these parties, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), was formed roughly one year prior to the elections from dissident members of the Islamic Virtue Party. The other, the Republican People Party (CHP), failed to win any seats in 1999 and won 190 seats in 2002. The most recent general elections fundamentally transformed the party system (Kalaycioglu, 2006) and left it in a state of considerable disarray. Indeed, since 2002, a number of other parties have managed to secure parliamentary representation through defections from the AKP and the CHP – an indication of the inability of the major parties to coordinate legislative action and exert their influence over the chamber. The parliamentary rejection of a bill to deploy troops in Iraq in 2002 provides an insightful example of the potential limits to party power in a nascent party system. Members of the AKP were sharply divided over the bill and a majority of party members openly declared that they would not cast a vote in its favor. In response, the party leadership sent various signals to members in an effort to force them to vote in support of the bill, but the parliament eventually rejected it.

The partisan landscape following the 2002 election is somewhat analogous to that which followed the 1983 election. In that earlier election, three new parties were elected to the TBMM. Two of the three parties were reformulated versions of older parties, while the third, the Motherland Party (ANAP), was founded just prior to the elections. In the years after the election, these new parties lacked cohesion and exhibited low levels of party coordination (Kalaycioglu, 1990). These problems continued into the 1990s as large numbers of members defected from their parties and the inability of the major parties to command the support

of loyal voters led many members to try to advance their careers through means other than service to their respective parties (Turan et al., 2005). The post-2002 situation left Turkey with an immature party system in which the largest party is still in its infancy. It is possible, therefore, that TBMM members found more opportunities to advance their own interests, as well as those of their supporters, even at the expense of the parties to which they belonged. As the large number of party defections shows, the electoral benefits of party membership do not necessarily outweigh other considerations in the minds of many Turkish parliamentarians. In Turkey, this motive is accompanied by the increasing professionalism of legislators and the importance of constituency service (Dorronsoro and Massicard, 2005; Hazama, 2005).

Therefore, as predicted by the distributive theory, there is good reason to suspect that the committee system would be used by members of parliament to deliver benefits to their supporters in order to establish a loyal constituency and thereby enhance their own electoral fortunes. One can expect that the MPs, as rational politicians, will choose committees in which they will find greater opportunities to serve their constituency and increase their chances of re-election:

Hypothesis 2: The greater the importance of a policy area to the supporters of a member of parliament, the more likely it is that she will serve on a committee that has responsibility for that policy area.

The committees of the TBMM may also be used to advance the interests of the entire chamber. Informational specialization theory implies that the policy preferences of committee members should be representative of the preferences of the parent body. Insofar as the principal role of committees is to take advantage of the policy specializations of members to increase legislative efficiency, members who have already developed considerable policy expertise in an area should be appointed to serve on the appropriate committee. Of course, members of the floor are not likely to trade policy experience or information for control over the legislative process and, as such, even if a prospective committee member has considerable skills and experience in a given policy area, the floor may not support his or her appointment if the preferences of that member are far removed from those of the other members of parliament. Thus, we might also expect the following:

Hypothesis 3.1: The greater the ideological distance between a member and the chamber median, the less likely it is that she will serve on any committee.

Hypothesis 3.2: The more salient a committee, the less likely it is that extremist members (relative to the chamber median) will serve on that committee.

Hypothesis 3.3: The greater the expertise of a member of parliament in a policy area, the more likely it is that she will serve on a committee that has responsibility for that policy area.

Theoretically, there are at least two potential exceptions to this rule. First, members of the floor might be prepared to appoint extremist legislators to a committee if they can counteract their influence by appointing other extremist legislators to oppose them and hence prevent the formation of outlying committees. Second, if the chamber considers that a policy area does not require policy expertise, it may allow the appointment of extremist legislators to the committee.

Given the likely effects of extremism on policy stability (Tsebelis, 2002) inside the committee, we suspect that the floor would only stack a committee in such a way if it were intent on incapacitating it. Even if the informational advantages of a committee consisting of preference outliers were greater than those of a committee of like-minded members, such deliberate sabotage seems so inconsistent with the theory of informational specialization that it is hardly necessary to evaluate this exception. Moreover, in the TBMM, a small quorum (one-third) is required to hold meetings and take votes and with such a small quorum, the impact that any individual committee member will have on committee decisions is considerable. We think it is not very likely, therefore, that the chamber would allow any extremist legislators to be appointed to any committee. Furthermore, past research has concluded that outlying committees are exceptions rather than the norm, lending further support to the implications of this theory.

Data and Method

We surveyed members of the TBMM in late 2003 – roughly one year after the landmark 2002 general elections. The Turkish Parliamentarians Survey was intended to measure the attitudes of members toward a number of social and political issues in addition to key organizational aspects of the TBMM. Questionnaires were sent to all 550 members with a letter from the TBMM administration encouraging all members to participate. In early 2004, members of parliament who had not yet responded to the survey were contacted in person in order to encourage them to take part. In total, 204 completed responses were received (that is, a response rate of 37 percent).[6] The survey produced a highly representative sample with respect to party affiliation, gender, age, and regional representation. For example, as of fall 2003, 65 percent of the MPs were from the AKP and 35 percent from the CHP, corresponding to a distribution of 66 percent and 34 percent in the sample. The response rate among committee members is 42 percent (172 out of 411 members) and of these 158 (36 percent) were members of the standing committees.

Given that each respondent was faced with 18 possible alternatives (that is, one of 17 committees or non-assignment), we first used logit to model the likelihood of assignment to any committee. Thus, in the logit analysis, the dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator of committee membership (coded 1 if assigned to one of the 17 committees and 0 otherwise). Then, we modeled the likelihood of being assigned to one of the 17 committees using conditional logit. Conditional logit is an appropriate technique when the dependent variable relates to unordered choices. Use of this method enabled us to model how the characteristics of each respondent interacted with the attributes of each committee to influence the probability that she would be assigned to it.[7] In the conditional logit analyses, each respondent is assigned 17 hypothetical choices corresponding to assignment to each committee and the dependent variable indicates to which of the 17 committees the respondent was assigned (coded 1 if assigned to that particular committee and 0 otherwise).[8]

One drawback of conditional logit is that any terms that do not vary across alternatives are excluded from the analysis. Since the characteristics of legislators do not vary within groups, testing the hypotheses requires the interaction of all individual characteristics with one or more variables that vary within

groups (Greene, 1997). The importance of this problem, however, should not be overstated. It makes little theoretical sense to model assignment solely as a function of individual-level attributes since these factors alone are not likely to influence the committee choice. For example, if extremism from the chamber median influences committee assignment, the only way that it can influence to which committee a member is assigned is if it is considered more important for the membership of some committees than for others. In addition to the methodological requirement, therefore, there is a theoretical imperative to consider committee characteristics.

The most important attribute of a committee is its salience. We measured salience by considering a committee's coverage in the media, its workload, its legislative relevance, and its ability to scrutinize legislation. To measure media coverage, we counted the number of articles that mentioned each committee by name in the online editions of two major dailies. The two newspapers, *Sabah* and *Milliyet*, are ranked among the five top-selling Turkish newspapers (BYAUM, 2000) and counts were obtained for the years preceding the 2002 elections, that is, for 1999–2002 and 2001–02, respectively (since online searches were available for these years only). Media-exposure scores were calculated as proportions of the maximum level of coverage obtained by a single committee in each paper. Thus, scores provide an indication of the levels of public exposure enjoyed by each committee relative to the most publicized committee – an important concern for individual members and their party leaders. The more widely publicized the activities of a committee, the more an individual member has to gain from serving on that committee. At the same time, media exposure raises the importance among party leaders of ensuring that only members who represent the interests of the party serve on the relevant committee.

To measure workload, we collected information on the numbers of primary and secondary bills referred to each committee. These statistics were collected from the TBMM official website and were based on more than 2000 bills considered by the parliament during its 21st term. The numbers of primary and secondary bills were recorded separately because being assigned primary responsibility for a bill signifies that a committee has greater policy relevance in an area. Moreover, since primary committees have more opportunities to scrutinize legislation and are commissioned to provide the parliament with a report on each piece of legislation they are asked to peruse, the primary committee should be able to exercise greater influence over the outcome of a bill than the secondary committee. For each committee, the numbers of primary and secondary referrals were then divided by the maximum numbers obtained by any single committee. Thus, workload scores reflect the degree to which a committee is assigned primary and secondary status relative to the most salient committees.

For the third set of salience measures, we obtained the total number of bills reviewed by each committee that were eventually enacted as laws. Separate counts were obtained for member and cabinet bills. Although these statistics do not measure the legislative influence of each committee, they provide some insight into a key facet of committee salience: the degree to which a committee deals with significant legislation. Irrespective of what factors influence the ultimate passage of legislation, we suspect that committees which spend their time reviewing legislation that never becomes law are hardly likely to be viewed by individual members, party leaders, or the chamber as a whole as salient committees. Both

scores, then, are divided by the maximum number of enacted member and cabinet bills reviewed by any committee.

The fourth set of salience measures describe the extent to which each committee scrutinizes the legislation referred to it and are intended to gauge the potential influence that each committee has on legislative outcomes. Some factors that have little to do with the importance of a committee may affect the amount of time a bill spends in a committee. For example, committees composed of ideologically polarized members may struggle to reach consensus and, therefore, may fail to deliver their reports within the allotted time frame (for example, Tsebelis, 2002). However, we also believe that the degree of legislative scrutiny within each committee is an important indicator of its significance. Committees that are intent on establishing their influence within the chamber have an incentive to maximize their scrutiny of legislation. Article 37 of the ROP states that once a bill has spent 45 days in committee, its initiators may ask the TBMM president to return the bill to the floor. Thus, committees that take more than 45 days to review legislation do so with the implicit approval of the chamber. We calculated two measures of legislative scrutiny (that is, the average number of days a bill has spent in committee) by taking the difference between the exit and entry dates for each bill. We then calculated the average length of time that bills spent in each committee, with separate means calculated for member and cabinet bills. These statistics were then divided by the highest score obtained by any of the 17 committees so as to reflect the relative level of scrutiny within each committee.

Together, these eight variables provide a comprehensive measure of committee salience within the TBMM. We conducted a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to explore the underlying dimensions of these measures and to obtain a composite measure of salience using the factor scores.[9]

Table 2 shows the confirmatory factor loadings for the eight variables described above, two for each of the four measures of salience (media coverage, workload, legislative relevance, and the ability to scrutinize legislation). With the exception of news coverage in *Milliyet* and the length of time spent scrutinizing member bills these items loaded strongly on a common factor. We then ran confirmatory factor analysis using only a single item from each of the four measures of salience. Included items were news coverage in *Sabah*, the number of primary bills referred to each committee as a proportion of the maximum number of primary bills referred to any single committee, the number of enacted member bills as a proportion of the maximum number of enacted member bills reviewed by any single committee, and the average number of days bills had spent in committee as a proportion of the maximum scrutiny score of any committee. As shown in Table 2, all four items loaded highly on a common factor. Factor scores obtained from the above analyses were used to create composite salience scales and these variables were used to create interactions between the individual characteristics of members and committee salience. Reliability scores for the four-item and eight-item scales were reasonably high (0.79 and 0.77, respectively).

In order to determine whether members are more likely to be assigned to committees responsible for policy areas of interest to their supporters, we created an indicator of policy demand. Respondents to the survey were asked to select from a generic list of interest groups which they considered to be among their strongest supporters. Dichotomous indicators for each group were included in the logit analyses of non-assignment as control variables. We classified these

TABLE 2. *Factor Analysis of Committee Salience*

	Factor loadings*	Factor loadings*
News exposure (*Sabah*)	0.6762	0.6196
News exposure (*Milliyet*)	0.2301	
Primary assignment	0.8553	0.8747
Secondary assignment	0.4995	
Cabinet bills enacted	0.8442	
Member bills enacted	0.9176	0.9565
Average time spent (member bills)	0.2776	
Average time spent (cabinet bills)	0.5700	0.692
Eigenvalue	3.45	2.54
Variance explained	43%	63%
Cronbach's alpha	.77	.79

Note: *Principal component analysis (one factor).

groups according to which committees dealt with policy areas that, in our opinion, were considered most relevant to each group. We then coded each observation depending on whether there was a match between the corresponding assignment option and the policy interests of the group. For example, if a respondent named farmers among his or her most important supporters, that respondent received a score of 1 for the Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Affairs Committee option and 0 for all other committee options.[10] Further details regarding the coding of this indicator are contained in Appendix A.

To measure extremism from the chamber median and distance from the majority and minority party median, we created two separate indicators based on the self-placement of respondents on a 10-point ideological scale ranging from left to right.[11] To calculate extremism from the chamber median, we first obtained the absolute distance between the ideological position of the respondent and the chamber median. Then, we rescaled this measure to create a scale ranging between 1 and 6, where higher values represent closeness to the chamber median. Similarly, distance from the party median was calculated as the absolute distance between the ideological position of the respondent and the median member of the party. We then rescaled these scores such that higher scores reflect ideological proximity between members and the majority party median.

Since partisan theory implies that party members who are loyal to the party organization are more likely to be assigned to salient committees, we created a measure of party loyalty to be included in the model. Respondents were asked to indicate, using a 10-point scale ranging from a commitment to constituency interests (a value of 1) to those of their party (a value of 10), whether they would support the interests of the party or the constituency if there were a conflict between the two. Finally, to capture the effects of policy specialization on committee assignments, we also included a measure of prior committee service. This variable labeled "seniority" was coded as 1 if the respondent had served on that committee option in any previous parliamentary term, and as 0 otherwise. To control for the effects of years of service, the number of years served in the TBMM was included in the analysis. The descriptive statistics and the survey questions are reported in Appendices B1 and B2, respectively.

Results

Our sample includes 158 members of 17 standing committees. The median legislator had only one year of experience, as two-thirds of the parliament was formed of newcomers following the 2002 elections. Some 14 members reported previous parliamentary service and 11 of these were committee members. An examination of bivariate correlations demonstrates that only demand for specific committees has a statistically significant and positive (0.29) relationship to the committee assignment.

Given that three of the above hypotheses concern the likelihood of assignment to any committee, we conducted a series of logit estimations with the full sample and split samples (majority and minority party). Table 3 shows the results of the logit analyses.[12]

TABLE 3. *Logit Coefficient Estimates*

	Model 1	Model 2 (majority party)	Model 3 (minority party)	Model 4 (minority party –alternative)
Seniority	0.21	−1.12	*a*	*a*
	(1.14)	(1.59)		
Length of service	−0.12	0.11	*a*	*a*
	(0.18)	(0.25)		
Majority party member	−0.01	NA	NA	NA
	(1.09)			
Party loyalty	0.04	0.00	−0.03	−0.74
	(0.09)	(0.16)	(0.26)	(0.60)
Closeness to chamber median	−0.22	−0.22	4.82**	1.90
	(0.18)	(0.22)	(0.39)	(1.22)
Closeness to major party median	0.13	1.16**	NA	NA
	(0.21)	(0.43)		
Closeness to minor party median	NA	NA	NA	7.75*
				(4.60)
Unions	0.50	−0.26	0.07	−2.25
	(0.59)	(1.07)	(0.92)	(2.44)
Civil organizations	−0.47	−1.59	−0.84	0.35
	(0.62)	(1.02)	(1.23)	(1.61)
Farmers	0.18	0.82	0.26	0.85
	(0.50)	(0.78)	(1.11)	(1.64)
Unemployed	−0.84*	−2.97**	0.15	−1.46
	(0.48)	(0.95)	(1.08)	(2.13)
Students	−0.41	−0.15	0.20	−3.45
	(0.51)	(0.82)	(1.01)	(2.42)
Ethnic groups	1.33	−0.12	0.00	a
	(1.18)	(1.50)	(0.00)	
Environmentalists	0.69	1.34	−0.25	−1.04
	(0.71)	(1.63)	(1.04)	(2.77)
Constant	1.93*	−2.90	2.26	−34.75
	(1.08)	(2.86)	(2.21)	(2.61)
N	136	83	47	47

Notes: *$p < .1$, **$p < .05$, ***$p < .01$, standard errors are in parentheses.
[a] dropped.

The first model provides little support for any of the three committee theories and only "unemployed" had a discernible effect on the probability of being assigned to a committee (see Table 3). Neither seniority nor ideological proximity to the majority party and chamber medians was significantly associated with the chances of committee assignment. However, a very different picture emerged when we examined possible interactions between these variables and party membership. Model 2, including majority party members, lends support to the partisan theory. AKP members who were ideologically closer to their party median were more likely to receive committee assignments. In contrast, MPs from the minority party (CHP) were more likely to be assigned to committees if their ideology was closer to the chamber median. However, once we controlled for proximity to the minority party median, this relationship disappeared. In Model 4, ideological proximity to the party median increases the likelihood of assignment to a committee. At the same time, the third model offers some tentative support for the informational specialization theory. These results imply that ideological proximity to either party median is sufficient to determine committee assignment, lending support to the partisan theory. However, since a large proportion of MPs receive committee assignments in the TBMM, examining the assignment to specific committees constitutes a more interesting question. To tackle this issue, we ran a series of conditional logit models.

Table 4 shows the results of the conditional logit analysis with interactions between the individual characteristics of members and the eight-item composite salience scale. Model 4 is the base model; Model 5 and Model 6 are run with split samples; and Model 7 and Model 8 include three-way interactions between individual characteristics, party membership, and the measure of salience. The results provide strong support for the distributive and partial support for the informational specialization theories of committee organization. Only policy demand was a statistically significant ($p < .05$) predictor of which committees respondents were assigned to across all models. Seniority reaches statistical significance in three of the five models presented in Table 4. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, in both models members were roughly two-thirds more likely (the logit coefficient is greater than .51) to be assigned to a committee that matched the policy interests of their supporters compared to assignment to any other committee. This finding is consistent with the results of other research documenting the importance of constituency service to Turkish members of parliament (Hazama, 2005). Table 4 also shows that members who had served on a committee in a previous term were more likely to be reassigned to that committee than any of the other 16 committees. Consistent with Hypothesis 3.2, respondents were roughly five times more likely in Model 4 and six times more likely in Models 7 and 8 to be assigned to the committee in which they had previously served. This result provides partial support for informational specialization theory, as members who are assigned to a committee over and over again are likely to have or to gain expertise in the policy jurisdiction of that committee. At the same time, however, closeness to the chamber median had no discernible impact on the likelihood that a member would be assigned to a given committee. Contrary to Hypothesis 3.3, ideological outliers were not significantly less likely to be assigned to committees of high importance. Irrespective of how we measured it, ideological proximity to the chamber median failed to predict the committee assignments of TBMM members. Thus, even though there is some evidence that committees enable members to

specialize in policy areas, we found no further evidence to support informational specialization theory.

We found no support for the partisan theory in conditional logit analyses. Neither party loyalty nor ideological proximity to party or majority party median were statistically significant predictors of committee assignment. In other words, the likelihood of being assigned to the more salient committees is not significantly less for those members whose ideological preferences were far removed from their party or the majority party. This result may be due to the low levels of institutionalization in the Turkish party system, a finding that is perhaps not surprising given the recent turmoil experienced within that system. Our results are consistent with other studies that have observed limited partisan influence on legislative outcomes in Turkey following significant partisan upheavals (Kalaycioglu, 1990). Nonetheless, these results hardly indicate that parties have no influence or stake whatsoever on which committee a member is assigned to. Party leaders may prefer to assign party members to the committees in which they can serve their constituency better. This may help increase the aggregate votes of the party.

TABLE 4. *Conditional Logit Coefficient Estimates*

	Model 4	Model 5 (AKP)	Model 6 (CHP)	Model 7 (AKP)	Model 8 (CHP)
Policy demand	0.51***	0.52*	0.57*	0.51***	0.51**
	(0.18)	(0.23)	(0.31)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Proximity to chamber median*salience	0.01	0.03	–0.03	–0.14	0.12
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.15)	(0.28)	(0.15)
Seniority	1.69*	1.02	154.50	1.85**	1.84**
	(0.87)	(1.10)	(3849.74)	(0.86)	(0.85)
Length of service*salience	0.02	0.09	–15.12	–0.15	0.06
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(25.13)	(0.17)	(0.07)
Proximity to party median*salience	0.01§	0.02	–0.08	0.09	–0.15
	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.23)	(0.14)
Party loyalty*salience	–0.04	–0.05	0.01	0.02	–0.05
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.04)
Salience	–0.1	–0.23	15.39	0.01	0.42
	(0.26)	(0.71)	(25.14)	(0.37)	(0.62)
Party membership*proximity to chamber median*salience				0.15	–0.1
				(0.28)	(0.16)
Party membership*length of service*salience				0.24	0.19
				(0.18)	(0.23)
Party membership*proximity to party median*salience				–0.1	0.08
				(0.23)	(0.08)
Party membership*party loyalty*salience				–0.07	–0.42
				(0.08)	(0.62)
N	2618	1700	918	1700	918

Notes: *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$. Standard errors are in parentheses.
§ Majority party median.

To ensure the robustness of these results, we conducted additional conditional logit analyses using the four-item composite salience scale as well as its individual components (the ratios for news coverage in *Sabah*, primary bills referred, enacted member bills, and average cabinet bill scrutiny) to calculate the interaction terms included in Table 4. We also replicated these models by running further analyses in which committees were ranked and numbered, from 1 through 17, based on their salience scores on the eight-item and four-item salience scales. Furthermore, we ran various specifications with the whole and split samples. In all of these estimations, the results are consistent with those presented in Table 4. Demand and seniority are statistically significant in almost all models while neither party variables nor extremism from the chamber median reach statistical significance.[13]

Conclusion

Overall, these results imply that committees are seen by members as a means to serve the interests of their supporters and as such this lends credence to the distributive theory of committee organization. Members are more likely to be assigned to committees that match the policy interests of their main supporters. There is also some evidence that committees enable the TBMM to take advantage of specialization, as members who have previous experience on a particular committee are more likely to be reassigned to it. While this is consistent with the theory of informational specialization, it is worth noting that the importance of seniority may also be consistent with the distributive theory. Even though committee service is likely to enable a member to increase her expertise in a policy area, seniority may also give a member de facto property rights over a committee seat that can be used to obtain further gains for her supporters (Groseclose and King, 2001; Mattson and Strøm, 1996; Strøm, 1990, 1998). The analyses also provide partial support for partisan theory as closeness to the party median is found to be a significant predictor of receiving a committee assignment. However, ideological proximity to the party median and commitment to the objectives of the party did not affect to which committee a member is assigned.

   We believe that there are at least two plausible explanations for these results. First, we challenge the conventional view that committees are ineffective players in parliamentary systems. Our results imply that legislative scholars should be cautious about making assumptions regarding the importance of committees in parliamentary democracies. Legislative scholars need to investigate the comparative organization of legislative committees and unfold the relation between the types of committee organization and the functioning of the larger political system. So far, students of parliamentary systems have argued that legislators strategically use legislative institutions, including committees, to influence policy outcomes (Mattson and Strøm, 2004; Strøm, 1998) and improve their own hopes of being returned to the chamber. In a parliament, such as the TBMM, committees can influence the passage of a bill. Thus, MPs may find ample opportunities to use their membership of a committee instrumentally, to provide gains for their supporters. In light of the growing evidence of legislative professionalism among Turkish MPs, with its attendant emphasis on constituency service (Dorronsoro and Massicard, 2005; Hazama, 2005), it seems especially likely that the members of the TBMM may have turned toward its committee system to advance their career objectives.

Second, we believe that the role of the committees may change over time as a result of changes in the party system, especially if these changes are related to internal party politics. Studies assuming that parliamentary political parties are always the principal agents in legislative activities are likely to oversimplify the reality of politics in those systems (Mezey, 1994). The Turkish political system, characterized as it is by a volatile party system (Heper, 2002; Ozbudun, 2000), provides a striking counterpoint to some of the conventional axioms about parties in parliamentary arenas. The 2002 elections helped engineer a significant shift in the party system in which all but two of the parties that had been represented in the previous parliament disappeared from the legislature. Those that remained were still relatively new, having been formed in the lead-up to those elections. In situations such as these, parties are likely to lack the means to coordinate members and achieve their objectives within the chamber. Since internal party politics and external environmental factors may undermine the ability of the party to organize the parliament, members may find greater incentives and opportunities to use the institutions of the legislature strategically to maximize their goals. This result has important implications for the comparative study of legislative politics. In less institutionalized party systems, the MPs may use legislative committees to engage in clientelist relations with their supporters in order to improve their re-election chances. This, in turn, may increase the weight of personal voting and undermine the formation of institutionalized party systems. Future studies should examine the relationship between legislative organization and larger political system components such as electoral processes, clientelism, and party systems.

More broadly, we believe that the stylistic distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems devalues the power of legislatures and their members. Our analysis implies that students of legislative politics should challenge conventional wisdom regarding the dominance of majority parties in parliamentary systems and accept that legislative politics in those polities may be less predictable than commonly thought. We hope that by abandoning some of the rigid assumptions about parliamentary politics, scholars may also be able to integrate further the study of parliamentary and presidential systems, either by applying theories developed for the US Congress to other parliaments, as we have done, or by applying some of the theoretical insights developed from parliamentary systems to the American Congress and the state legislatures. In our opinion, abandoning the stylistic distinction between these two systems would be an important step in establishing a truly comparative approach to legislative politics.

Appendix A

TABLE A1. *Coding Scheme for Policy Demand*

Main support groups	Relevant committee
Labor groups	Health, Family, Labor and Social Affairs Committee
Civil servants	Planning and Budget Committee, State Economic Enterprises Committee
Business groups	Industry, Trade, Energy, Natural Resources, Knowledge and Technology Committee
Farmers	Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Affairs Committee
The unemployed	Health, Family, Labor and Social Affairs Committee
Students	National Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Committee
Ethnic groups	Examination of Human Rights Committee, Justice Committee
Environmental groups	Environment Committee

Appendix B1

TABLE B1. *Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Service	204	1.38	1.53	1	13
Ideology	200	5.83	3.05	1	10
Closeness to chamber median	200	3.44	1.66	1	6
Distance from the majority party	200	3.16	2.43	−1	6
Distance from the minority party	200	1.89	2.66	−2	6
Party loyalty	202	4.04	2.59	1	10
Demand	204	0.24	0.43	0	1
Seniority	139	0.11	0.31	0	1

Appendix B2

Survey Questions

Service

Including the current term, how many *years* have you served in the parliament?

Support Groups

What groups do you regard as among your strongest supporters?

Labor/Union	Civil Servants	Business
Farmers	Unemployed	Students
Religious Groups	Ethnic Groups	Environmental Groups

Ideology

In politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10?

LEFT									**RIGHT**
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Party Loyalty

If there is a conflict between what you think is best for your party and what you think the people of your district want, do you think you should follow what is best for your party or follow what the people in your district want?

PARTY									DISTRICT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Seniority

If you were a member of the parliament in previous terms, did you serve as a member of a committee or committees?

　No

　Yes　*please specify which committee or committees.*

Notes

1. Committee organization has provoked major interest among the legislative scholars interested in the "committee outliers" debate (Groseclose, 1994). Scholars (Adler and Lapinski, 1997; Groseclose, 1994) have concluded that outlier committees are rare. It should also be noted that we provide a *stylistic* explanation of committee theories below for presentation purposes and that these theories are mostly complementary.
2. Sometimes omnibus bills are packed by party leaders to form coalitions.
3. The first Turkish parliament was founded in 1877, but was soon abolished. It was reinstated in 1908, but disbanded and re-established again in 1920. Since then, there have been two further interruptions as a result of military interventions in 1960 and 1982.
4. To our best knowledge, there were no examples whereby the floor rejected the lists sent by party groups within the past decade. An informal agreement among parties to accept each other's list has been the norm in the TBMM.
5. On July 22, 2007, the governing Justice and Development Party won a sweeping majority, obtaining 47 percent of the vote and retaining its majority status.
6. Although the response rate may seem low in comparison to mass surveys, relative to other elite surveys this is an acceptable level (for example, Carey et al., 1995). Since no cabinet minister responded, the survey is not representative of the entire parliament. See Tekin and Ciftci (2007) for representativeness of the survey and details.
7. We use McFadden's (1973) choice model and follow Greene's (1997) notation:

$$P(Y_i = j) = \frac{e^{\beta' z_{ij}}}{\sum_{j=1}^{j} e^{\beta' z_{ij}}}$$

   Since Z includes the attributes of choices (w_i) and individual characteristics (x_i), the equation can be rewritten as follows:

$$P(Y_i = j) = \frac{e^{\beta' x_{ij} + \alpha' w_i}}{\sum_{j=1}^{j} e^{\beta' x_{ij} + \alpha' w_i}} = \frac{e^{\beta' x_{ij}} e^{\alpha_i' w_i}}{\sum_{j=1}^{j} e^{\beta' x_{ij}} e^{\alpha_i' w_i}}$$

8. Respondents not assigned to any committee were excluded from the conditional logit analysis, as were those who indicated more than one committee (two members), leaving a total of 158 respondents and 2686 hypothetical assignment options.
9. Three factors were extracted by principal components analysis and more than 40 percent of the variation was accounted for by a single factor.

10. Lacking a better and more direct measure, we had to use this item. The measure is not free of limitations, as we were unable to assign a support group to each committee when a strong link between a support group and a committee could not be justified. However, we used composite measures of support groups in some models and the results did not vary significantly.
11. Some scholars have questioned the utility of a one-dimensional, left–right continuum in Turkish politics (Carkoglu and Hinich, 2005). Benoit and Laver (2006) argue that the concepts of left and right provide a useful basis by which people may describe and distinguish themselves. We compared ideological median scores from our sample to Benoit and Laver's (2006) measure and the median scores were not significantly different.
12. In split samples, due to the small number of observations, success or failure was completely determined for certain variables such as seniority, demand, and service. These variables were dropped. We were able to model policy demand by including different support groups, yet no proxy was available for seniority and service. Despite these limitations, the results were robust as the signs of the coefficients and the significance levels did not change across different models.
13. In some of these analyses, the interaction between party loyalty and one of the two ranked salience scores reached statistical significance, but not in the expected direction. We also ran the analysis excluding the Planning and Budget Committee due to its special nature, and again the results did not change in these models.

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