Senates: A Comparative Perspective

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One of the more momentous and sweeping political developments of modern times has been the tide of democratization that has engulfed the formerly authoritarian regimes of Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and Latin America over the last two decades or so. Among the welcome consequences of this quest for democracy has been a resurgence of interest among political scientists and policy makers alike in constitutions, constitutional engineering, and institution building. Specifically, the question now widely asked is: What are the institutional arrangements making for lasting, stable, and effective democratic government?

The plethora of efforts to answer this question has produced a large
literature on the relative advantages and shortcomings of parliamentary as opposed to quasi-presidential and presidential forms of government (e.g., Lijphart 1992; Linz and Valenzuela 1994; Sartori 1997; von Mettenheim 1997; and Weaver and Rockman 1993). Likewise, the merits and demerits of various types and mixes of electoral systems have been subjected to extensive analysis with a view to determining, among other things, their origins and their effects on the structure of party systems, patterns of representation, and the making and unmaking of governments (e.g., Cox 1997; Farrell 1997; Lijphart 1994). But perhaps the sharpest break with the past has come with the restoration, after decades of close to total neglect, of bicameralism to the status of an institutional arrangement worthy of investigation and discussion outside the narrow confines of the United States, with its clearly powerful and influential upper house (e.g., Levmore 1992; Mastias and Grangé 1987; Riker 1992a, 1992b; Trivelli 1975; and Tsebelis and Money 1997).

Political science interest in such topics as presidentialism vs. parliamentarism and majoritarian vs. proportional electoral systems was kept alive during the cold war era by concern about the policy immobilism and democratic instability that was, or had at some point been, characteristic of political life in a number of Western European countries. Was French democracy better served by the abandonment in the Fifth Republic of the traditional republican ethos of parliamentary supremacy and its replacement by a presidentialist regime? What has been the role of electoral systems in explaining the rapid governmental turnover and policy deadlock characteristic of Weimar Germany, postwar Italy, and the Third and Fourth French Republics? Conversely, what has been the contribution of Germany's mixed proportional, first-past-the-post electoral system to the stable and effective democratic government that has been that country's post–World War II political hallmark?

Invisible Upper Houses

Studies addressing these and similar questions inevitably and unquestioningly focused on the directly elected lower house of national parliaments. With the glaring exception of the United States where the Senate was universally accepted as being central to the policy-making process, the role of upper houses in shaping how governments perform and what they do
was largely ignored. The de facto working model for the world's parliamentary democracies seems to have been a British House of Lords that the 1911 and 1949 Acts of Parliament had stripped of all its powers except the ability to delay nonfinancial legislation for up to one year. As Tsebelis and Money (1997, i) point out, one measure of the common and long-standing disregard for upper houses is not only that Norton's (1990) "collection of the most influential articles written about legislatures fails to include a single article on bicameralism, but also . . . the articles themselves do not address the distinction between unicameral and bicameral legislatures."

This neglect of the political role and performance of upper houses in parliamentary democracies is to be regretted for at least two reasons. In the first place, it discouraged recognition of the basic fact that their relationship to lower houses is variable; not all senates are, or were in the past, as constitutionally helpless vis-à-vis the lower house as the British House of Lords. Constitutionally speaking, for example, the Italian and Romanian senates enjoy the same legislative powers as their lower houses.

In the second place, and in direct consequence, neglecting a significant actor in the legislative process encouraged a no more than partial understanding of the actions and inactions of democratic governments. A case in point is the democratic stability literature in which the party system was usually the keystone of explanations of the rapid turnover of coalition governments. Especially notable is Sartori's (1966) seminal argument that this turnover was a function not of multiple parties and coalition government per se but of "polarized pluralism." In other words, the essence of the instability problem in France, Italy, and the like was the existence of popular antisystem parties at the left and right poles of the party system that forced relatively centrist, pro-system parties into uneasy and fragile coalitions that often split apart when difficult decisions had to be made. Ignored in such party system-based explanations of patterns of governmental instability, however, were differences in constitutional and institutional structure. What, for example, was the impact on their longevity of Italian governments being, unlike their French or Weimar German counterparts, answerable to both houses and having to secure majority support for their policy initiatives in both houses and not just effectively in the lower one?

Nor is the neglect of senates restricted to this particular body of literature. Rather, it has been, and continues to be, pervasive. Take, for
example, a 1997 textbook on European politics that came across our desks by chance. After distinguishing between unicameralism and bicameralism and providing information on the names of the two chambers in individual national parliaments, the number of seats in them, and the term lengths of members, it then goes on to ignore the upper houses. Discussing the “work of parliaments,” it quickly narrows its focus to encompass lower houses only. “In general terms, parliaments act as a means of communication between the people and the government. They (or at least their lower chambers) are composed of elected representatives of the people. Together, these elected representatives have the authority to hold the government accountable to the people” (Roberts and Hogwood 1997, 196–97). Skirted is the question of whether senates play a significant role in making governments accountable. If they do, or indeed if they do not, what work do they do? How do they organize themselves to go about doing it? With what consequences? As in the textbooks generally, these and similar questions are assumed to be irrelevant to the study of parliamentary government and democracy.

Senates: A Reappraisal

This book essentially puts this assumption to the empirical test in a number of countries deliberately chosen for their variation in characteristics, like state structure, constitutional status of the upper house, and the method of recruitment of its members, which can be expected to influence the political role that upper houses play in democratic political systems. This test has necessarily involved two objectives. The first of them is descriptive. For want especially of relevant English-language literature, it has been incumbent on the individual chapters of this book to provide details about how upper houses in a range of countries actually work. At the moment, basic descriptive information of the kind that is plentiful about lower houses, political executives, and other institutions of government is simply lacking when it comes to second chambers. With the exception of the U.S. Senate, little is known about upper houses individually, and even less is known about them in comparison with each other. How were they formed, and with what purposes? Where do their members come from, and how did they get there? What is their constitutional role in the legislative process, and how reflective is it of the role they actually play?
Our second objective has been to highlight what should have long been obvious from even the most cursory glance at the constitutions of many new and established democracies: upper houses exist for a reason, and bicameralism is important for the theory and practice of democratic government. The importance of these parliamentary institutions is manifold, potentially encompassing instrumental considerations like influence on legislation, and symbolic ones like enhancing democratic legitimacy by checking the majoritarian impulses of single-party governments. In this volume, issues of space and complexity have meant that importance has been defined narrowly to encompass senates' performance of the two functions most commonly attributed to them: representation and redundancy.

The immediate impression to emerge from these studies of upper houses in many of the more important new and established democracies today is one of a variety and complexity that might seem at first glance to stand in the way of progress toward a systematic understanding of the factors conditioning their political performance. All are unique in a number of important respects, some because, as with the House of Lords, their evolution is deeply rooted in an atypical pattern of national historical and political development, and others because, as with the Polish Senate, they represent the result of a negotiated settlement between conservatives and reformers, the product of a constellation of political forces and circumstances at a particular juncture in the nation's political development. Some have large memberships, and some have small ones. Some are elected bodies, some appointed, and still others employ mixed recruitment criteria. Some exist in federal systems of government, and some exist in unitary ones. Some have a territorial representational base, whereas others do not. Some enjoy coequal powers with the lower house, while the majority are constitutionally and self-consciously subordinated to it because they do not enjoy the same democratic legitimacy that comes with direct, popular election.

Lessons from Nine Senates

The list could go on, but no amount of detail on differences should be allowed to shortchange what senates have in common. Variety and complexity notwithstanding, a number of general conclusions emerge clearly from the case studies in this volume.
Camera/Inequality

The first, and most general, of these conclusions relates to the position of upper houses in the larger political system. The United States Senate has come to enjoy remarkable prestige and power. But senates in parliamentary systems of government generally enjoy less prestige and power than lower houses. Most often, as in the case of the House of Lords and the Canadian, French, and Spanish senates, this is the result of constitutional dictate. But even when constitutions mandate formal equality between the houses, this does not always translate into actual equality. Italy is a good example. Its two houses are directly elected and coequal in power, yet dissatisfaction with bicameralism has translated into proposals to abolish the Senate and not the Chamber of Deputies. Lodici explains lower house primacy in a formally equal bicameral system in terms of "the major influences on Italian public opinion" coming from the Chamber of Deputies, "which prefers a senate whose role is one of mediation, wisdom, and moderation, and not a senate with coequal legislative or government-making power."

Essentially Contested Institutions

This argument leads directly to the second general conclusion to emerge from the chapters in this volume, and it is that, be they fixtures of unitary or federal states and regardless of their power relative to the lower house, parliamentary upper houses are "essentially contested" institutions in the sense that their very existence is inherently a matter of dispute (Gallie 1955–56). Many countries choose not to have one, others have them but then do away with them, and still others keep them but are engaged in an apparently incessant dialogue about how they should be reformed. None of this is true, of course, of the United States where a governing philosophy of minoritarian democracy and a constitutional separation of powers legitimize opposition to the House of Representatives, even if it comes from political actors who, unlike members of the lower house, are not themselves directly elected, e.g., the president, justices of the Supreme Court, or senators before 1913. The overriding goal of democratic government is to protect the interests of minorities against the potential tyranny of the majority. By contrast, parliamentary systems of government are
based on a majoritarian philosophy of democracy and a fusion of governmental powers. Their overriding goal is to allow the popular will, as expressed in periodic elections, to be put into practice for as long as the government legally holds office and can retain the support of a majority of elected representatives.

The problem with upper houses is their very existence places parliamentary democracies on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, senates can be politically useful in practice. They can, for example, provide representation to self-consciously distinctive territorial or functional groups, thereby assuring them that their rights are protected in national government. Examples are the states in federal systems like Australia, the localities and autonomous communities in unitary states like France and Spain, respectively, or the hereditary aristocracy in Britain. Equally, upper houses can do much useful work reviewing lower house legislative proposals, offering more or less friendly amendments and tidying up their language—busy work that overcommitted lower houses generally do not have the time or the inclination to do for themselves. But performance of these representational and redundancy functions is bought at a price, which is that upper house influence runs counter to the basic principle of majoritarian democracy that political authority derives only from election by the people. The quandary, therefore, is how to reconcile the usefulness of institutions that are not always directly elected with an influence on policy that is not their democratic right.

The simple answer might seem to be to have them directly elected, just like lower houses, but there are good theoretical and practical reasons why this recourse is not a solution to the problem. The theoretical impediment is that, in dispersing democratic authority, the principle of the fusion of powers, with its concentration of decision-making power in the lower house, is breached and the direct and focused governmental accountability that is the hallmark of parliamentary democracy is diluted. The practical disincentives are two. First, for parliamentary governments to create directly elected upper houses would be potentially to create a whip for their own backs. Direct election would endow senates with the same democratic legitimacy as lower houses and, especially when controlled by a different partisan majority, would turn them into a competitor for the political authority and decision-making power that lower houses now generally monopolize. Second, a potential casualty of coequal powers,
apparent to would-be reformers of Italy’s coequal senate, is legislative efficiency; it simply takes longer to pass legislation if the reconciliation of differences has to be pursued within and between lower and upper houses coequal in power and status.

The upshot of this situation is that senates in parliamentary democracies are forever under the microscope of parliamentary reform. Rarely are all significant political actors satisfied with the balance that is achieved between the criteria according to which senators are recruited and the powers of influence and veto that they enjoy. Governments in lower houses want senates that are useful to them in largely administrative and apolitical ways and that do not compete with them for influence, sometimes final decision, in the legislative process. This ideal may come close to realization when partisan majorities in the two houses coincide, but a foul is called when the senate majority is different and demands concessions in return for its legislative cooperation and agreement.

The democratic reality of alternating governments thus dooms senates to a life of uncertainty, and their general lack of democratic legitimacy leaves them in a weak position to defend themselves against political opponents demanding their reform. It is not important that demands for reform may arise less out of consideration for representative democracy and more out of the frustration of governments constituted from lower houses whose legislative proposals have met with repeated upper house resistance. The reality is that, whatever the reason, senate reform is a perennial item on the political agenda of parliamentary democracies, perhaps because the threat of reform provides valuable leverage for governments wanting to influence senate behavior. Again, the U.S. Senate stands as unusually immune from most such demands because of its exalted constitutional status in a system of separated powers.

Senates Matter: Representation

The pervasive and apparently endless debate about senate reform leads inexorably to our next conclusion: senates are influential and important parliamentary bodies. If they were not, why would lower houses strive so hard to strike a more appropriate balance—from their perspective—between themselves and upper house usefulness and influence? However, it is manifest that the extent to which senates are consequential varies
according to the function performed; generally speaking, their behavior is structured less by performance of the representation function than by the redundancy one. Accordingly, we consider senate functions separately, taking representation first.

There are a number of reasons why the notion of representing a constituency, be it territorially or functionally defined, is less relevant to understanding the work and achievements of senates than is the notion of overseeing and influencing the actions of government. One is that members of upper houses do not always have clear constituencies that they represent and to which they are accountable. This is especially obvious in cases where members acquire their position through right of birth or governmental appointment and retain it for life, as, for example, in the British House of Lords and the Canadian Senate. The most that can be said in such instances is that members' responsibility is to the constitution, good government, improving the quality of legislation, or the like. This is not representation in the usual sense in which that concept is used (Pitkin 1967).

A second reason is that even where there is a clear territorial base to senate representation, the behavior of the upper house can be more sensitive to the dictates of partisan competition with a lower house controlled by a different political party or combinations of parties. In some cases, interhouse conflict may signal representative democracy at work in the sense that the elected partisan majorities in the two houses represent different constituencies, and their disagreements properly reflect the contrasting interests of these constituencies. A particularly clear example of this situation occurs when the U.S. Senate is controlled by one party and the House of Representatives by the other. In parliamentary Germany, the federal government frequently has been dominated by one major party, currently the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), and state governments have been controlled by its rival, the Socialists (SPD).

However, the upper house's performance of a legitimate representative function becomes far more questionable when its entrenched and unelected partisan majority is able to hinder, and even thwart, the will of the popular majority in the lower house. This situation was evident in the obstructionism of the appointed Liberal majority in the Canadian Senate during the time that Prime Minister Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government was in office. Even direct election does not always guarantee
the primacy of representative over partisan motivations in upper house behavior. In Australia's version of "divided government," for example, determined Senate minorities have thwarted a succession of majority governments in pursuit of their own partisan agenda.

In sum, then, it is clear that senates do not always represent a constituency, territorial or otherwise, to which they are democratically accountable. They do sometimes, and their actions reflect it. But it is also the case that their actions are sometimes explicable only in terms of their "knee jerk" desire to influence, perhaps even foil, the ambitions of a partisan majority in the lower house with which they instinctively disagree.

Senates Matter: Redundancy

Whether senates pursue partisan goals, representative ones, or a mixture of the two, they do have in common their performance of the redundancy function; they serve to bring a "bicameral perspective" and influence to bear on the legislative process. Our fourth conclusion follows directly from this observation: senates tend to have an important impact on the shaping of legislative policy outputs. Of course, constitutional provision and political circumstance mean that senates are at different points in time influential to different degrees in their performance of the redundancy function. At the same time, the essays in this volume give no indication that any of the nine upper houses investigated can be dismissed as being unworthy of detailed study for want, to use Bagehot's apt phrase, of playing no more than a "dignified" role in government. This conclusion is hardly novel and is perhaps best taken as simply emphasizing a point too infrequently appreciated and made by scholars of national legislatures other than the U.S. Congress. After all, if upper houses are widely perceived to play no useful role in their country's legislative process, then their elimination, seen in post-World War II Denmark, New Zealand, and Sweden, would be a more common phenomenon.

Still, it remains the case that the role of upper houses in the legislative process has long been ignored. At least part of the reason seems to be conflicting perceptions of what "mattering" means in this context. The maximalist position is that it entails some kind of power equality with the lower house. In Spain, for example, some proponents of senate reform argue that if the Senate has no role in appointing or dismissing governments, then its "influence in other respects will be close to zero," as Flores...
points out. By this measure, of upper houses studied in this book located in parliamentary systems, only Italy can be said to have a senate that matters. To make this claim, though, is clearly untenable given, for example, that slightly more than half the bills passed in Germany require the Bundesrat's consent.

The more moderate and realistic position would seem that senate influence does not manifest itself only through victory in open clashes of will with the lower house and its governing majority. Upper houses also have real influence when their anticipated reaction is taken into account in the writing of a bill, when they amend or improve the text of government proposals, or when they oblige the government or lower house to make concessions in, for example, conference committee to prevent recourse to the suspensory veto at one extreme or, where it is constitutionally possible, outright rejection at the other. Examples of this more subtle kind of influence in its various manifestations are legion in political systems like Britain, Canada, France, Poland, and Spain, where the upper house boasts no more than the most modest constitutional powers vis-à-vis the lower house.

The Growing Importance of Senates

The fifth conclusion to be suggested by these chapters is the most interesting and exciting of all: senates take on greater institutional importance today in the shaping of legislative policy outputs than they did in the not-so-distant past. That is, they have become more legislatively assertive in relation to the lower houses despite the constitutional rules governing their interaction not having changed. In the Canadian case, Franks traces this change to the elevation to office in 1984 of a Progressive Conservative majority government after a protracted period of Liberal hegemony and the Liberal Party's continuing domination of the senate. A little less precisely, Uhr attributes the rejuvenation of the Australian Senate to "the arrival (in the late 1960s) of the second wave of minor parties which were less committed to shoring up the major parties in government." Shell, in contrast, writes in relatively unspecific terms of the House of Lords having "in the past few decades actually become of greater significance." Similar disjunctures, or cycles of assertiveness, can be identified in France, the United States, and other countries.

Whatever its timing in individual cases, this development underscores
the need for students of comparative democratic politics to take senates more seriously than they have done in the past, not least because the reasons for it make it most unlikely that it is a development that will be reversed. These reasons are interactive and can be placed in three categories: (1) partisan competition, (2) respect, and (3) the crystallization of competing philosophies of government in lower and upper houses.

The most obvious reason for the increased competition for legislative influence between lower and upper houses is the more frequent incidence of ideological differences between the political parties in control of the two chambers. This is starkly obvious in the case of Canada where, after a long period of Liberal government and a long train of Liberal appointees to the Senate, a Progressive Conservative government came to power in the 1980s. The Liberal-dominated Senate decided to break with tradition and use the constitutional and political resources at its disposal systemically to frustrate the will of the popularly elected Conservative government in the House of Commons. Similar tensions have been periodically evident in France, whose centrist senate has often found itself strongly opposed to policies favored by left- and right-wing presidents with their often compliant governing majorities in the Chamber of Deputies. Patzelt notes as well that "a great deal of criticism has been leveled at the Bundesrat for functioning as a partisan 'second opposition' to the federal government. Most of it has been motivated by considerations of political expediency as partisan groups seek to discredit competitors in the public eye."

However, partisan competition alone does not explain increased upper house assertiveness. The House of Lords, for example, retained its built-in Conservative majority throughout the eighteen years of Conservative government from 1979 to 1997, but it still functioned during this period as what Shell terms "the other Opposition." Equally, Mastias shows the French Senate to have had better relations with some Socialist governments than others during the Mitterand presidencies. This is because a second factor affecting interhouse relations independently of partisan competition has been the respect shown to upper houses by their lower house counterparts. At the extreme, such respect has been notable for its total absence—witness General de Gaulle's attempt to deprive the French Senate of all political power in the 1969 referendum.

More commonly, senates have shown resentment of, and resistance to, lower houses' efforts to bypass their scrutiny by ignoring or overriding
their recommendations for change to legislative proposals, setting their agendas, and overburdening them with work, especially at critical points in the legislative calendar. Among the reactions of angry governments has been public denigration. Thus, Canadian Prime Minister Mulroney described his country's senators as "has-beens and never-weres," while Paul Keating, the Australian prime minister, depicted their antipodean counterparts as the "unrepresentative swill" of Australian politics. In a similarly derogatory vein, a senior Labour politician in Britain recently justified government plans to restrict the powers of hereditary peers by dismissing them as "that cast of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera in the House of Lords" (Guardian, September 11, 1997).

Both the cause and consequence of such tensions is perhaps the most durable source of increased senate assertiveness, and it is the crystallization of divergent views of the nature of democracy itself in lower and upper houses. The lower house view is the conventional majoritarian one that legitimate political power and its exercise emanates, and should emanate, from the mandate conferred by direct, popular election and the maintenance of majority support in the lower house. Under these circumstances, senates with no popular mandate do not have the democratic right to question and frustrate the wishes of the lower house. Franks summarizes this conception of democracy nicely for Canada: "Effective parliamentary democracy demands both an opposition which can present itself as a credible alternative to the government, and parliamentary processes which enable the opposition to criticize government policies effectively, and hold the government accountable for its stewardship. These core activities are highly partisan in nature, and their legitimacy derives from their support through the democratic election of members to the House of Commons. The Senate is appointed, not elected." Upper house members themselves have shown that they do not always have to this view. One counter argument they have made is that, even if not elected, upper houses still have a constitutional duty to perform and cannot stand by passively when they see governments with a safe, disciplined majority in the lower house overstep their powers, especially when, as in Britain, they are not accountable for their actions to a higher constitutional authority. In the words of one Conservative peer in the House of Lords justifying resistance in the 1970s to highly contentious Labour government legislation proposing to hedge freedom of the press: "We have no personal interest to defend in this matter: we have a constitutional duty to perform,
and a constitutional responsibility to carry out. We have sought to discharge that duty and responsibility" (quoted in Baldwin 1995, 226).

Less spectacular than constitutional confrontation is the risk that majoritarianism degenerates into tyranny and disregard for the rights of minorities. For instance, echoing America's Founders, Riker (1992a) holds that a powerful upper house is to be welcomed for the role it plays in preventing majority tyranny and protecting minority interests. For this minoritarian conception of democracy, what is important is to have effective devices, like independent upper houses, that help to prevent majoritarian government, protect minorities, and thereby discourage the passage of legislation for which there may be an inevitably transient parliamentary majority, but for which there is no underlying consensus in the society as a whole. Thus, Australian and Canadian senators have justified their obstructionism by arguing that their actions better allow for the representation and protection of minorities in the general context of disciplined, majoritarian decision taking in the lower house. French senators, for their part, have sought to achieve this same goal by another route, namely, by resorting to the Constitutional Council to protect individual rights and freedoms in particular.

Partisan competition, private and public respect, and divergent conceptions of democracy all conspire to ensure an ongoing tension and conflict of interests between lower and upper houses in bicameral systems of government. Short of sweeping reform, there is little likelihood that the resultant competition between them will disappear. It may well ebb and flow as, for example, majorities in the two houses become more or less alike, but the reality, and likely persistence in lower houses, of executive dominance, disciplined voting, and disregard for opposing viewpoints means that intercameral tension and disagreement will remain part of the grist of "normal" democratic politics and, as such, will need to figure as a matter of course in accounts of the legislative process and governmental policy outputs.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, upper houses are important for legislative politics and outcomes, even in parliamentary democracies where they are endowed with few constitutional powers. In member states of the European Union, at least, their
role in the legislative process is even likely to grow as domestic parliaments have to deal with more and more legislative initiatives emanating from Brussels and Strasbourg. The German Bundesrat is a good example of an institution that has already turned the flow of European legislation to its political advantage. As Patzelt notes, “There have been few serious discussions of reform of the Bundesrat.” It has “adapted to new situations by taking preemptive measures when the clear need for reform has arisen. The best example has been the creation of its EU-Chamber in response to the growing volume and importance of European legislation.”

The future points to upper houses having an evident, perhaps growing, and minimally cyclical importance in the democratic legislative process. Their political role therefore needs to be better understood in at least two respects. First, the internal decision-making dynamics of senates need to be better understood. Until now, upper houses have tended to be seen from a bicameral perspective, and their interactions with lower houses and the government of the day have been the central analytical focus. Questions concerning the outcome of conference committees or the results derived from shuttling legislative proposals between legislative houses, the number of upper house amendments accepted or overturned in the lower house, and government strategies for building and maintaining support in the upper house have dominated the scholarship on senates. Relatively little research has been conducted on the dynamics by which senates arrive at the positions they take to the conference committee table or by which they choose to veto legislative proposals rather than amend them. In short, little is known about the inner workings of upper houses, about what goes on within them, before they interact with the lower house.

This point is nicely illustrated by Sinclair’s analysis of the U.S. Senate. The other country chapters have a distinctly bicameral perspective, focusing mainly on the various interactions between governments and upper houses. Relatively little is said about the internal organizational characteristics and political dynamics of the upper houses themselves. By contrast, the analysis of the U.S. Senate mainly concerns the institution in its own right, with only secondary consideration given to the Senate’s relations with the House of Representatives, and tertiary attention to the interactions of the Senate with the president.

The same kind of approach, yielding the same kind of information, needs to be adopted in the study of other upper houses. Do senatorial parties organize themselves in the same disciplined way they do in lower
houses? How do standing committee systems operate? Are upper house members subjected to systematic and sustained lobbying by interest groups? Where appropriate, how are senatorial election campaigns funded and with what implications for their parliamentary behavior? These questions are but a small sampling of the matters that need to be investigated and clarified before we can gain comparative insights into how senates organize themselves, and why they behave as they do in their own right as well as in their interactions with their respective lower houses.

The second aspect of senates that needs inquiry is their relationship to public opinion and the implications of this relationship for the legitimacy of the larger political system. Is the territorial representation provided by senates instrumental in holding diverse regions in multiethnic states together, or does it simply exacerbate sentiments of exclusivity and heighten tensions? In his analysis of the Italian Senate, Lodici notes that national public opinion evidences a strong antiparliamentary prejudice. But just how deep is the knowledge of the senate's contribution to the country's protracted instability, and does it get the same blame for it as does the lower house? What value, if any, does the mass public see in upper houses? Is public opinion a resource for them in their disagreements with their more democratic lower house counterparts? Again, the list of specific questions, many of them already asked and answered about lower houses, could go on and on. The important point is that in the nine parliamentary settings we have examined, senates enjoy some importance and influence in the relatively narrow confines of the legislative environment, but an intriguing question is whether they have a role and an influence in the larger national political systems of which they are a part.

Note

1. This observation is especially true of the English-language political science literature, but see Tsebelis and Money (1997). Exceptions in French are Mastias and Grangé (1987) and Trivelli (1975). Even in English, there are good studies of single upper chambers, including Shell (1992) and Sinclair (1989).

References


