

**Informal Legislative Membership Groups in Cross-National Perspective:
Congressional Membership Organizations and
European Parliament Intergroups Compared**

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Abstract

This paper compares congressional membership groups in the United States Congress with Intergroups in the European Parliament. This research seeks to better understand why members of legislative bodies choose to create regularized informal groups to consider policy options that cannot or will not be considered by formal party groups. In the United States Congress, representatives and senators create membership organizations (CMOs), usually referred to as “caucuses” around issues like race and ethnicity (the Congressional Black Caucus) or industry (the Congressional Steel Caucus) or issue area (the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus). Members of the European Parliament organize Intergroups to consider similar issues. These groups include the European Parliament Intergroup on LGBT Rights, the Health Intergroup, and the Youth Intergroup. CMOs are well-studied by academics and journalists. The methods used to study CMOs may be applied to European Parliament Intergroups to determine if there are common explanations for the creation of these informal groups in two different legislative bodies.

Informal Legislative Membership Groups in Cross-National Perspective: Congressional Membership Organizations and European Parliament Intergroups Compared

A few days after the November 2010 general elections, Texas state Senator Dan Patrick (Republican, Houston) promised to start a Tea Party Caucus in the Texas Legislature. By December 16, he was ready to announce the official launch of the caucus. He enlisted the support of 48 state legislators to create the organization within the Legislature. Senator Patrick's announcement was significant for several reasons. He identified that caucus as a "grassroots-up, not a Legislature-down" caucus. The caucus would receive input from outside of the Capitol through the work of the state Tea Party Advisory Board. He also specified that the mission of the caucus was to pass conservative legislation.¹ The legislation that flowed out of the Texas Legislature during the 2011 session indicated that the Tea Party Caucus was successful. Most of the Tea Party movement's agenda was enacted.²

The Tea Party Caucus in the Texas Legislature was created a few months after a similar group was organized in the United States House of Representatives. The Tea Party Caucus, created by Representative Michelle Bachmann (Republican, Minnesota), represents an effort to bring the ideals of the national Tea Party movement into congressional policymaking (Jones 2011, 9).

These two examples of informal legislative groups, one at the national-level and one at the state-level, provide a glimpse into the work of such informal groups. This paper examines the informal groups that are organized by legislators in an attempt to outline what political science

¹Brandi Grissom, "Sen. Dan Patrick Announces Tea Party Caucus," *Texas Tribune*, 16 December 2010 <<http://www.texastribune.org/texas-politics/tea-party/sen-dan-patrick-announces-tea-party-caucus/>> Accessed July 1, 2011.

²Brandi Grissom, "For Tea Party, a Successful Legislative Session," *Texas Tribune*, 23 May 2011 <<http://www.texastribune.org/texas-politics/tea-party/for-tea-party-a-successful-legislative-session/>> Accessed July 1, 2011.

understands about these informal groups. While the examples presented above illustrate informal groups in the American context, it is important to recognize that similar organizations exist in legislatures in other countries (see European Parliament, Directorate-General for Research 1998) and other states in the United States (see, for example, California State Legislature n.d.; Legislative Women’s Caucus of New York State n.d.). We examine the informal groups present in the United States Congress and those at work in the European Parliament. In the United States Congress, representatives and senators create Congressional Membership Organizations (CMOs), usually referred to as “caucuses,” based on issues like race and ethnicity (the Congressional Black Caucus) or industry (the Congressional Steel Caucus) or issue area (the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus). Members of the European Parliament organize Intergroups to consider similar issues. These groups include the European Parliament Intergroup on LGBT Rights, the Health Intergroup, and the Youth Intergroup. CMOs are well-studied by scholars (Ainsworth and Akins 1997; Burgin 2003; Fiellin 1962; Hammond 1991, 1998; Hammond, Mulhollan, and Stevens 1983, 1985; Kastner and Grob 2009; Loomis 1981; McCormick and Mitchell 2007; Miller 1990; Pinney and Serra 1999; Rausch 1991; Singh 1996; Stevens, et al 1974; Stevens, Mulhollan, and Rundquist 1981; Vega 1993; Victor and Ringe 2009).³

The Intergroups in the European Parliament have not been studied as much, at least in a format accessible to American researchers (for an exception, see Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton 2007, Chapter 10). In fact, the first author learned during an informal discussion with a group of German political observers including several professional staffers with the European Parliament that “no one really looks at the Intergroups.”

³Informal groups in the United States Congress also are the subjects of doctoral dissertations. A search of “congressional caucuses” on the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses database found eight dissertations published from 1992 through 2010.

Despite an apparent lack of interest in Intergroups in the European Parliament, informal groups potentially play a significant role in the functioning of legislatures. Several national parliaments ban the establishment of informal groups. For example, in France, the rules of the National Assembly forbid the establishment of groups “whose aim is to defend private, local or professional interests and which require their members to accept mandatory instructions.” There are study groups, however; these study groups may be approved by the National Assembly Bureau and have access to a staff member and meeting facilities (European Parliament, Directorate-General for Research 1998).

The present research is concerned with understanding informal groups in legislatures by comparing the caucuses that form in the United States Congress and the Intergroups organized by members of the European Parliament. In the process of comparing the two types of informal groups, we will identify potential obstacles to fully understanding the functions of the organizations. We consider the history of caucuses and Intergroups to find if the organizations have similar life stories. We then turn to a review of research on congressional caucuses to determine if any of the methodologies will assist in better understanding Intergroups. The ultimate goal of the present research is to determine if caucuses and Intergroups are comparable and then to suggest effective research methodologies to understand how informal groups of legislators affect the structures and functions of legislative bodies.

The Formalities of Informal Groups

One of the challenges researchers face in studying informal groups in legislatures is the multiplicity of labels applied to such groups. The labels often identify how official the groups are and help determine if there are adequate records of membership and activities needed to study the groups. Though traditionally called caucuses, informal groups in the United States House of

Representatives have variously been labeled “legislative service organizations” (Singh 1996) and “congressional member organizations,” based on stipulations presented in House rules.

Informal groups receive a degree of formality in the rules of the U.S. House of Representatives. The Committee on House Administration presents the rules governing the informal groups and provides an avenue to oversee the work of the informal groups. According to information presented on the committee’s website, “Members of Congress may form a Congressional Member Organization (CMO) in order to pursue common legislative objectives.” CMOs must register with the Committee on House Administration during each Congress. In their registration, the CMO must provide the following information:

- Name
- Statement of Purpose
- Officers of the CMO
- Employee designated to work on issues related to the CMO

Members of the House and Senate may join a CMO, but at least one of the officers of the CMO must be a Member of the House.

The rules place significant limits on CMOs. They may not have a separate corporate or legal identity. A CMO may not employ anyone. A CMO may not be assigned separate office space. CMOs or individual Members may not accept goods, funds, or services from private organizations to support the CMO. Members may use personal funds to support the CMO. A Member of the CMO may utilize employees and official resources under the control of the Member of the House to assist the CMO in carrying out its legislative objectives, but employees may not be appointed solely to work for the CMO.

CMOs may not use the free mailing privileges extended to Members of the House. Members of the House may not lend their free mailing privileges to CMOs. Members may devote a section a section of their official website to present CMO issues, but CMOs may not

have independent web pages. A Member may send information related to a CMO through the inside mail in the House of Representatives. Members also may prepare materials related to CMO issues for dissemination. While official funds may not be used to print or pay for the CMO's stationary, Members of the House may refer to their membership in a CMO on their official stationary (United States House of Representatives, Committee on House Administration n.d.).

The Committee on House Administration provides a list of the 256 registered Congressional Member Organizations on its website (<http://cha.house.gov/images/stories/links/cmocso/112cmo.pdf>). There are 645 informal Member organizations, including the CMOs (Dilger 2009, 1).⁴

While members of the United States Senate may join Congressional Member Organizations, informal groups of Senators organize without official recognition by the chamber. These groups are not funded through the Senate's appropriation process. The Senate officially recognizes only one caucus, the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control established by law in 1985 (United States Senate n.d.).

Intergroups in the European Parliament are governed by rules. These rules help differentiate officially-recognized informal groups from more unofficial groups. Intergroups are not "organs of Parliament" and may not express an opinion as coming from the Parliament. Intergroups may not use the name or logo of the European Parliament and they may not use any name that may lead to confusion with official structures of the European Parliament. Intergroups

⁴Estimating a number of informal legislative groups in the United States Congress is fraught with difficulty. Victor and Ringe (2009, 750) construct a "complete population of the caucuses and caucus membership for the 110th Congress." They report that the Committee on House Administration lists 276 "official" caucuses on its website. The Congressional Research Service produced a list of caucuses in the 110th Congress in the spring of 2008 and identified 394 House or joint caucuses. The researchers' search of the 2008 Winter edition of the *Congressional Yellow Book* identified 559 distinct caucuses.

also many not engage in any activity that may lead to confusion with official activities of the Parliament. They also may not take actions that may have “an adverse effect on relations with the other Institutions of the Union or relations with non-member countries.”

When an Intergroup applies for official recognition, it must file an application signed by Members of Parliament from at least three of the political party groups in the Parliament. The number of signatures required from each party group is identified at the beginning of each new parliamentary term. The application must be accompanied by a declaration of financial interests and a list of the members of the Intergroup. The chair of each Intergroup must make a declaration of financial interests annually. All members of the Intergroup must abide by the Parliament’s financial accountability rules. The financial information is made available for public inspection.

Intergroups are allowed access to technical facilities, conference rooms, and translation facilities under limited conditions. Intergroups are allowed to meet only during part-sessions in Strasbourg. They also may not meet at voting times during meetings of the European Parliament (European Parliament 2009).

Table 1 lists the official Intergroups in the 2009-2014. There are other more unofficial gatherings of Members of the European Parliament. Data on these unofficial gatherings are more difficult to identify and collect.

[Table 1 about here]

The formal aspect of these informal groups provides the researcher with data for analysis. Congressional Member Organizations and European Parliament Intergroups are required to file lists of members as well as financial contributions. These data are important in any research on the social networking ability of informal groups as well as revealing insights on the voting

behavior of group members. One of the challenges researchers may face in analyzing the voting behavior of Intergroup members is the requirement that every official Intergroup have members from at least three party groups. Are there policy issues that would allow Intergroup members to vote the interest of the Intergroup over the program of the political party group?

Histories of Congressional Caucuses and Intergroups

Examining the histories of caucuses in the United States Congress and Intergroups in the European Parliament provides clues to a more complete understanding of the formation and functions of these informal groups. How have informal groups developed through the history of the two legislatures and how have the informal groups' relationship to the official policy process changed over time?

The United States Congress

Informal associations of Members of Congress have existed since the early days of the institution. In the early 1800s, congressmen from specific regions, states, or cities organized in informal groups to press for passage of pieces of legislation favorable to their constituencies. Young (1966) identifies these informal associations as “boardinghouse groups” because members from the same area of the country lived in the same Washington boardinghouse. These groups developed characteristics and policy agendas reflecting the interests of their members. The members worked together to navigate favored legislation through the complex process leading to a bill's passage. These groups were cohesive voting blocs (Young 1966, 102).

As the 19th Century progressed, the boardinghouse groups lost the effectiveness as the membership of the House grew. The functions previously served by the groups were appropriated by political parties. As the parties became more institutionalized in the House, they developed their own organizations, called *caucuses*, to inform and unite their members. These

caucuses soon became accepted, almost official, structures in the House selecting the leadership of the body. The influence of informal groups waned until the middle of the 20th Century.

In 1949, 15 Republican members of the House of Representatives, including Rep. Richard Nixon of California and Rep. Gerald Ford of Michigan, founded the Chowder and Marching Society. The group's original purpose was to oppose legislation providing monthly bonuses to war veterans. The group's membership increased to about 40 Republicans. It was an exclusive forum that discussed pending legislation and legislative strategy as well as providing a social outlet for the Society's members (Gertzog 1995, 92-95).

The Democratic Study Group (DSG), the first modern informal organization in the House, was established in 1959. It was formed by moderate and liberal House Democrats as a counterweight to the influence of southern conservative Democrats who chaired many House committees. The moderate and liberal Democrats believed that by organizing into an informal group, they could gain leverage to influence the policy process. The DSG had forty charter members. Over time, the group's membership grew reaching 115 to 170 dues-paying members in the early 1970s, about 225 dues-paying members in the mid-1970s, and 250 dues-paying Members in 1980. During the 1980s, membership dropped to about 200 dues-paying members (Stevens, Miller, and Mann 1974, 669-671; Ripley 1983, 256-257). The DSG provided legislative policy briefings, but its influence soon grew as it was able to hire its own staff. The staff researched policy options and helped write legislation (Farnham 2003).

In the 1960s, two informal members groups were organized. Fourteen moderate and liberal first-term Republican members of the U.S. House created the Wednesday Group to help with the exchange of information on pending legislation. The group grew to about 30 members. In 1966, several Democratic and Republican Senators and House members organized the non-

partisan Members of Congress for Peace Through Law to voice their concerns about U.S. foreign policy and the escalating war in Vietnam. The members of the informal group saw it as a “rebel organization. We’re rebelling against the close ties between the Administration and committee chairmen who have a monopoly on information” (Caldwell 1989, 631; Dilger 2009, 12). Until the 1970s, the Democratic Study Group, the Wednesday Group, and the Members of Congress for Peace Through Law were the only visible informal groups operating in Congress.

During the 1970s, the number of congressional caucuses grew rapidly. In 1970, one group, the Conference of Great Lakes Congressmen, was organized. The Congressional Black Caucus reorganized from a select committee in 1971, bringing the total number of informal groups to five. By the end of the 1970s, there were 59 congressional caucuses in operation. The growth in the number of informal groups led to calls for a review of their operations and the establishment of regulations to ensure that the groups were not spending congressional funding improperly. The groups did not have any direct congressional oversight. In September 1977, the Commission on Administrative Review of the U.S. House of Representatives recommended that informal groups “should be held accountable for the spending of public monies” (U.S. Congress, House Commission on Administrative Review of the U.S. House of Representatives 1977, 40).

The implementation of the Commission’s recommendations led to regulations on informal groups including the creation of an *ad hoc* sub-committee on Legislative Service Organizations in the Committee on House Administration. Starting in 1981, caucuses either had to register as a Legislative Service Organization (LSO) or remain an unregistered Congressional Member Organization. LSOs were entitled to office space in House office buildings, the ability to send mail free of charge, and telephone, mail, and stationary services. LSOs were prohibited from receiving outside funds and the LSOs had to disclose their receipts and expenditures. The

groups also had to reorganize their research arms, or to establish research arms, as non-profit institute or foundations, legally independent of LSO (Singh 1996, 84-85).

Legislative Service Organizations were subjected to increased regulations in the 1980s. In 1981, the House passed rules that restricted the sources of funding that LSOs could accept. Any group receiving outside funds could not locate its office in House office buildings or receive any other support from the House or from Members of the House using their office allowances. LSOs were subject to quarterly reports, made available to the public, that specified receipts and disbursements, payroll, and sponsors of educational interns, fellows, or volunteers working for the LSO. The number of informal Member groups continued to increase during the 1980s, but the number of LSOs remained fairly stable. One obstacle to the growth in the number of LSOs was a lack of office space in the House Office buildings (Dilger 2009, 16-17).

Legislative Service Organizations attracted significant scrutiny in the early 1990s. Many observers criticized the groups for misspending federal tax dollars. Representative Pat Roberts, a Republican from Kansas and a member of the Committee on House Administration, avowed:

The big picture is the House LSOs with millions of dollars in Federal tax dollars missing and unaccounted for. These are an embarrassment to the Congress. I think it could be a national disgrace. It could rival last year's bank, restaurant, and post office scandals. My independent 10 year review involves surprising and alarming figures. It shows that Members of Congress have funneled more than \$34 million in tax funds on LSO operations. Those LSOs in turn report spending of \$26.8 million . . . \$7.7 million are absent. They have simply disappeared. One out of every \$5 is missing, unreported, and unaccounted for. . . . At the very least we should have an outside audit, an accounting of what has happened to these funds, then we need to consider what steps can be taken to respond to this problem (U.S. Congress. Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress 1993, 317-318; Dilger 2009, 18).

The criticism led to additional regulations on LSOs. Most of these regulations were weakened by the Democratic House leadership.

In the 1994 mid-term election, the Republican Party gained the majority of seats in the United States House of Representatives. The new Republican leadership moved to abolish LSOs. Cutting LSOs meant a reduction in congressional spending and the ending of influence on “parochial special interests.” Most LSOs were dominated by Democrats and represented interests that were not part of the Republican Party base so it would be easy to abolish the groups. Abolishing the LSOs also would serve to centralize House operations and procedures on the new Republican leadership (Singh 1996, 95). Legislative Service Organizations were officially abolished on January 31, 1995.

Informal Member groups were now called Congressional Member Organizations:

A CMO is an informal organization of Members who share official resources to jointly carry out activities. . . . [It has] no separate corporate or legal identity apart from the Members who comprise. . . . [It] is not an employing authority, and no staff may be appointed by, or in the name of the CMO. A CMO may not be assigned separate office space (Dilger 2009, 20-21).

Most of the LSOs continued operating as informal Member groups or as a CMO. Despite the Republican leadership’s attempt to end the influence of informal groups, the number of CMOs and informal Member groups continued to increase. In 1999, there were 185 such groups (Dilger 2009, 21). This growth continued through the first decade of the 21st Century. Rather than disappear, informal Member groups continue to provide significant input into the congressional policymaking process. Dilger (2009, 22) notes that many Members of the House of Representatives consider their participation in informal Member groups and CMOs as “advantageous in achieving their primary goals of policy advocacy, reelection, and power within the institution.”

The European Parliament

The history of Intergroups in the European Parliament begins with the first direct elections to the Parliament in 1979. A number of Intergroups requested official recognition, but the leadership in the Parliament realized that it would be difficult to provide resources to all the Intergroups seeking recognition. The only group formally recognized was the Intergroup of Elected Local and Regional Representatives. Other Intergroups had to meet with restrictions on facilities or had to share space with Political Groups. By the end of 1994-99 Parliament, 58 Intergroups were officially recognized. At the beginning of the 1999-2004 Parliament, the number was at 80 (Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton 2007, 185). The current rules governing Intergroups were adopted in December 1999 and amended in February 2008. Again, there are some informal groups operating in the European Parliament that are not officially recognized by the Parliament. Can the work of informal groups in the European Parliament be completely understood by studying only the officially-recognized Intergroups?

Understanding the Processes and Functions of Informal Groups⁵

Most of the research on informal legislative groups has focused on the structures and functions of such groups. Political science has worked to find out why members of legislatures seek to create and join informal groups. In this section of the present research, we review the literature on informal legislative groups. We also consider the different methodologies used to study informal legislative groups, primarily in the United States. In reviewing the research on informal legislative groups in the American case, we will justify the ability to apply this research to better understanding the informal legislative groups that form in the European Parliament.

⁵The literature on congressional caucuses or informal legislative groups is quite voluminous as documented in the References Cited. The review of literature presented in this section will only consider the research that might best be used to understand Intergroups in the European Parliament.

The existing research literature on informal legislative groups tends to focus on the role that such groups play in helping junior members of legislatures find a place in the legislative process. Until the 1970s, junior Members of the United States Congress were expected to follow certain norms such as seniority and apprenticeship. The junior Members were not expected to play a significant role in the development of legislation and policy. In prior research, caucuses serve as institutions that help legislators at a structural disadvantage, such as junior Members (Ainsworth and Akins 1997; Hammond 1998). Caucuses allow marginal members to build their reputations in the legislature and gain influence in the policymaking process.

A review of the literature finds that research has identified three purposes of caucuses. Caucuses allow legislators to demonstrate their policy preferences and priorities to their constituents. Second, caucuses serve as forums for the exchange of information within the legislature (Ainsworth & Akins 1997; Fiellin 1962; Stevens, Miller, and Mann 1974; Stevens, Mulhollan, and Rundquist 1981). Finally, caucuses allow for the coordination of legislative action outside the formal party and committee structure (Fiellin 1962; Hammond 1991, 1998; Hamond, Mulhollan, and Stevens 1983, 1985; Loomis 1981; Miller 1990; Vega 1993). Ainsworth and Akins (1997, 408) find that much of the existing work on caucuses “has argued that caucuses augment the formal institutional structure of Congress by offering members a means to gain information and affect policy across conventional institutional boundaries, including those dividing committees, parties, and constituencies.”

Research has identified a connection between the growth of congressional caucuses and the decline of party voting by the American electorate. Instead of relying on party organizations for electoral support, congressmen increasingly formed “a more individualistic and candidate-centered process in which constituency service and attentiveness to district interests represented

a sine qua non of successful electioneering” (Singh 1996, 81). In the 1970s, Congress had a decentralized institutional structure, party leaders were considered to be too conservative, and important issues went unaddressed by the institutional standing and select committees. The formation of informal Member organizations was seen as a way to realize electoral and policy objectives (Dilger 2009, 4). Members of informal groups could use that membership to inform constituents about their support of a policy issue or direction. Junior Members of Congress also could use informal groups as a way to connect with like-minded Members of the House in a way that the stringent standing committee structure did not allow.

Thinking back to the Tea Party Caucus examples that introduced this research topic, we see that the members of the Tea Party Caucus at both the congressional and state legislative-levels desire to show their constituents that the legislators are connected to their constituents and share their constituents’ concerns. The Members of the Tea Party Caucuses also hope to build a base of knowledge that they could tap as they move into legislative leadership positions.

Member of the European Parliament Jaroslaw Walesa (Poland) describes his membership in a number of Intergroups on his webpage. The first Intergroup he lists is the Baltic Europe Intergroup, very important since he is from a Baltic country. He also is a member of the Intergroup on Seas and Coastal Affairs, the Tibet Intergroup, the Intergroup on Youth, and the Union of European Federalists (Walesa 2009). In each brief narrative, MEP Walesa identifies the purpose of each Intergroup of which he is a member. He also reviews the Intergroups’ accomplishments and goals for the current Parliament.

The most effective and useful research on informal legislative groups in the United States has resulted from a mix of research methodologies, primarily qualitative in approach. In her

detailed analysis of the formation and operation of congressional caucuses, Hammond (1998, 31-35) classified six caucus types based on caucus purpose and shared member characteristics:

1. Intraparty Caucuses are formed by like-minded Members of the House within a political party. They organize because they share policy objectives. Examples include the Republican Study Committee, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and the Blue Dog Coalition.⁶
2. Personal Interest Caucuses focus on a specific issue like the arts, families with children, or some foreign policy issue. Members of Personal Interest Caucuses usually do not reflect the concerns of their electoral constituents. Examples include the Congressional Allergy and Asthma Caucus and the Congressional Brain Injury Task Force.
3. National Constituency Caucuses advocate the interests of particular constituencies, such as women, members of minority groups, and veterans. The Congressional Black Caucus is a famous example of a National Constituency Caucus.
4. Regional Caucuses work on issues of concern to a particular geographic region. This type of caucus includes the Congressional Western Caucus, and the Northeast Midwest Congressional Coalition.
5. State/District Caucuses organize to advocate for policies favorable to a particular state or district. The California Democratic Congressional Delegation is one example of a State/District Caucus.
6. Industry Caucuses work on the problems of a specific industry or business within a state or district. These caucuses have received the greatest critical attention because they are seen as a way for special interest groups to apply additional pressure on Members of

⁶The Blue Dog Coalition is a group of fiscally conservative Democrats in the House of Representatives. They work to bring a moderate voice to policy debates (see Ross 2011).

Congress. This type of caucus includes the Congressional Automotive Caucus, the Congressional Steel Caucus, and the Congressional Caucus on Beef.

Dilger (2009, 5) identifies a growing number of informal legislative groups that he terms “Diplomacy Caucuses.” Hammond classified these caucuses as a subset of the Personal Interest Caucuses. Diplomacy Caucuses “concern themselves with improving foreign relations with another country or region of the world.”

Using Hammond’s schema for classifying informal groups could ease the work of comparing congressional caucuses and Intergroups. There are likely few intraparty Intergroups since European Parliament rules require a cross-party composition in Intergroup membership. State/District Intergroups also seem to be absent from the ranks of European Parliament Intergroups. A first attempt to classify some of the Intergroups is presented in presented in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

Informal legislative groups have been subject to quantitative analyses (see McCormick and Mitchell 2007). Victor and Ringe (2009) examine the congressional caucus system as a social network. The bulk of the literature on caucuses relies on individualistic explanations. Social network analysis considers the role of social relations in creating political behavior. Victor and Ringe (2009, 762) that “participation in caucuses is about maximizing the social utility of one’s relationships within the institution, which implies that legislators seek to associate themselves with colleagues in positions of formal power.” Instead of challenging the formal distribution of power in the legislature, caucuses actually reinforcing the distribution of power. The authors “demonstrate that caucuses are not organizations used by junior representatives, rank-and-file legislators, electorally marginal members, or women and minority legislators to

increase their legislative influence.” Party and committee leaders are central to the caucus network, effectively serving as “magnets” for those who join caucuses to maximize the utility of their social contacts within the legislature (Victor and Ringe 2009, 762). Could the Victor and Ringe research be replicated using data collected from the European Parliament?

The mixed-method case study appears to be the most effective research methodology for studying informal legislative groups. These case studies are rich investigations of the workings of the groups. Using interviews, surveys, newspaper analyses, and sometimes just plain “soaking and poking”⁷ Some of these case studies seek to demonstrate the importance of informal groups in the policy process. Burgin (2003) examines the role of the Congressional Diabetes Caucus in health policy making in Congress. Through extensive interviews with caucus members, Burgin (2003, 816) “highlights the potential of member groups in health-policy making.” Kastner and Grob (2009) use a case study to illuminate the role of the Congressional Taiwan Caucus in the development of foreign policy with Taiwan.

Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton (2007, 188-190) utilize brief case studies to illustrate their discussion of the operations of Intergroups. The authors describe the European Constitution Intergroup and the Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals.⁸ The European Constitution is comprised of Members of the European Parliament who seek to “constitutionalize” the various treaties that established the European Union. The Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals is self-explanatory. It is important to note that there are several formal committees in the European Parliament that also consider issues relating to the welfare and conservation of animals (Corbett, Jacobs, and Shackleton 2007, 189).

⁷A research method that relies on in-person empirical observation of political actors (Fenno 1978, 1986).

⁸There is a correlate to the Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals in the United States House of Representatives. The Congressional Animal Protection Caucus is chaired by Representatives Jim Moran (Democrat of Virginia) and Elton Gallegly (Republican of California).

The authors document the histories of the two Intergroups and describe the activity of each group. While brief, the case studies demonstrate the potential of case studies in providing details to be used in building theories on the creation and operation of informal legislative groups.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?

A careful review of the research literature demonstrates that political science knows a lot about congressional caucuses. We know that many congressional caucuses were created by junior Members of Congress as a way to achieve their electoral and policy objectives. We know less about the Intergroups in the European Parliament. What type of Members organizes Intergroups in the European Parliament? What are the motivations for the Members of the European Parliament to create Intergroups? To join Intergroups? Do the voting patterns of the political groups in the European Parliament affect the voting patterns of members of Intergroups? What is the role of Intergroups in the work of the Parliament? We have noticed that some of the Intergroups receive significant media attention while others do not. Are some Intergroups better positioned for media attention? Are some Intergroups organized specifically for relations with constituencies outside Parliament instead of working to influence parliamentary output, legislation?

The Intergroups in the European Parliament are comparable to congressional caucuses even if there are fewer Intergroups and they are more rigorously regulated by chamber rules. While the present research did not conduct significant quantitative research on Intergroups, a quantitative research methodology utilizing social network analysis likely would reveal interesting findings about membership in Intergroups. Case

studies of particular Intergroups, especially studies comparing a specific Intergroup with a similar congressional caucus, would provide fruitful insights. For example, comparing the work of the LGBT Equality Caucus and the work of the Intergroup on LGBT Rights could be enlightening. There are a number of congressional caucuses that have counterparts in the European Parliament. Including the informal legislative groups of another legislative body also would help round out the theories political science has developed about informal legislative groups.

Informal groups are important actors in legislatures. They can hinder legislative work or supplement the activity of parties and leaders. Informal groups may serve as useful connections between the legislature and constituents. Comparative political science has much to offer in our effort to develop theories about these groups.

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Table 1. List of Official Intergroups in the European Parliament.

Ageing and intergenerational solidarity
Anti-racisme & Diversity
Baltic-Europe
Climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development / Changement climatique, biodiversité
et développement durable
Disability
Extreme poverty and human rights
Family and the Right of the Child & Bioethics
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Rights – LGBT
Media
Mers et Zones Côtières / Seas and Coastal Areas
Mountains, Islands and Sparsely-Populated Regions
New Media
Public Services (SGI – SSGI)
Sky and Space/ Ciel et Espace
SME "small and medium-sized enterprise"
Social Economy/Economie Sociale
Sustainable Hunting, Biodiversity, Countryside Activities and Forests
TIBET
Trade Union
Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages
Urban
Viticulture, Fruits et Legumes, Tradition et Alimentation de qualite
Water/Wasser
Ways of Saint James / Caminos de Santiago
Welfare & conservation of animals
Western Sahara
Youth Issues / Jeunesse

Source: European Parliament, "List of Intergroups"

<<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/expert/staticDisplay.do?language=EN&id=98>>

Table 2. Examples of Hammond’s Classification Using Official Intergroups in the European Parliament.

Personal Interest Intergroups

Ageing and intergenerational solidarity
Anti-racisme & Diversity
Climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development / Changement climatique, biodiversité et développement durable
Family and the Right of the Child & Bioethics
Water/Wasser
Ways of Saint James / Caminos de Santiago

National (European) Constituency Intergroups

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Rights – LGBT
Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages

Regional Intergroups

Baltic-Europe
Mers et Zones Côtières / Seas and Coastal Areas
Mountains, Islands and Sparsely-Populated Regions

Industry Intergroups

Media
New Media
Public Services (SGI – SSGI)
Sky and Space/ Ciel et Espace
SME "small and medium-sized enterprise"
Viticulture, Fruits et Legumes, Tradition et Alimentation de qualite

Diplomacy Intergroups

TIBET
Western Sahara