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**Ambition and Opportunity in Federal Systems:
The Political Sociology of Political Career Patterns
in Brazil, Germany, and the United States**

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1. Ambition – Institutional Opportunity – Career Pattern: On Some Central Categories of Analysis

„Ambition lies at the heart of politics.“ Joseph Schlesinger’s opener of his 1966 classic on political careers still sounds provocative after all those years. What may seem a plea for a radical methodological individualism in fact was a much-needed reminder of the fact that a) representative democracy is based on competition for public office and b) we only in the rarest of cases find offices filled with people who attempted to avoid the office they are holding. Public offices and mandates are still a *sough-after*, a scarce good people strive and fight for.

While the competition for public office every time anew is a fascinating spectacle whose attractiveness is based precisely on the room for surprises much like sports games, the career paths of politicians within any given polity typically follow rather fixed rules and observable patterns. The rules mostly are institutionally given and hence also the patterns are related to the institutional order. Yet they tend to develop a logic of their own and to reproduce themselves over time. The goal of this paper is, first, to develop some conceptual and typological thoughts on career patterns in federal or highly regionalized political systems. Secondly, I want to compare the prevailing career patterns in three old federal systems (Brazil, Germany, and the U.S.) with each other and with the ideal types developed in the second part of the paper.

The issue of political careers is closely linked to that of political professionalism or, historically speaking, the professionalization of politics. As Max Weber first recognized in „Politik als Beruf“ („The Profession and Vocation of Politics“, Weber 1994), the professionalization of politics¹ is a necessary, an inevitable implication of the advent of modern democracy. On the other hand, once politics becomes a profession, that also profoundly changes the strategic thinking of politicians. With entering into the realm of professional politics, the stakes and the potential costs resulting from electoral defeat are raised dramatically. Politics no longer is simply about success or defeat or about the status attached to an office. It then is about one’s livelihood thrown under the imponderabilities of politics in general and the democratic election in particular.

Schlesinger turned our attention to the fact that it is precisely the uncertainty of political careers that leads politicians to rather carefully plan their careers (Schlesinger 1966, 6). Plans change, especially in the political field they rather often fail. But even a failed plan is much different from pure coincidence. The precarious character of the political profession (cf. Borchert 2003, 167) then reinforces patterned careers as it creates the necessity to look for reliable fall-back positions and reasonable alternatives. In these strategic calculations professional and non-professional offices have to be clearly distinguished as they serve different purposes.

Schlesinger proposes three ways in which careers are patterned (and these patterns also are reproduced):

¹ Professionalization here is understood in terms of becoming an occupation. For a discussion of to what extent the sociological concept of the „professions“ may be fruitfully applied to politics cf. Borchert 2003, 133-201. On the conceptual distinction between a professionalization of an individual, an office, an institution, and a political system, cf. Borchert 2003: 25-29.

- first by way of the *institutional „structures of opportunity“*: Certain institutional traits systematically favor or hinder certain career moves and thus produce career patterns that are in line with the institutional order in which they exist,
- second by way of an *anticipation of the possible further career trajectory* which shapes behavior throughout the career, and
- third the *expectations of other actors about possible career steps derived from past experiences*.

(1) The existence of a territorial multi-level system, as in federal states, is an important feature of the state structure. If there is not only a national and a local, but also a regional level with competencies of its own and a fully developed polity with a legislative and an executive branch, the number of available political positions is raised considerably. You would not find those political hopefuls as in unitary countries with single chamber legislatures who Heath and Taylor-Robinson (2003) have described as „all dressed up with no place to go“. Multi-level systems also offer the possibility of separate career arenas on the different levels of government with distinct logics of competition. If this possibility becomes real depends largely on the other elements of the opportunity structure (cf. conceptually Borchert 2003, 46-49): the institutional order (particularly the relationship between the executive and the legislature), the organizational structure of politics (especially party system, party structure, and campaign finance) and the structure of representation (electoral system, candidate selection mechanisms). Building on Schlesinger we can understand these characteristics of a case as institutional incentives and restrictions that render specific career patterns more or less probable.

From the perspective of potential candidates these elements form a configuration in which offices differ in terms of their availability, accessibility, and their attractiveness. An office is *available* if it not only exists, but also a certain individual could in principle attain it. Criteria like a minimum age for certain offices, residency requirements, or legal – or even partisan – gender quota may considerably reduce the number of offices available for any given person. Availability is an absolute criterion: An office is either available for someone or not.

Accessibility by contrast denotes the relative chance to reach a certain office or mandate. This chance typically varies for different offices in a given polity based on their specific structure of competition (this was the point of Schlesinger’s comparative analysis of the situation in the American states). It may also vary for the same office based on the person of the prospective candidate. The *attractiveness* of a position is defined by its benefits – however defined – for a certain person. Based on individual preferences we would expect therefore the same office to hold different value for different candidates. Typically, however, we do find office hierarchies based on collectively shared assessments of the power, the status, and the material benefits of certain positions. This entails a clear dividing line between professionalized and non-professionalized offices.

(2) Schlesinger (1966) emphasized the impact of future office aspirations on the behavior of career politicians. A city councilor harboring national ambitions will focus not only on local issues, and the House member vying for a seat in the Senate will adapt his appearances, his media presence, and his voting behavior to the state as a whole. Strong ambitions thus can

contribute to establishing linkages between institutions that are otherwise strictly separate. Progressive ambition therefore favors the strategic broadening of competences and resources. The anticipation of further career moves becomes an important factor in guiding political behavior.

(3) Once a career pattern is established it tends to reproduce itself. This tendency is due to a simple mechanism: The likely candidates for a vacant office usually are derived from past patterns (Schlesinger 1966, 8-9; 100-101; 193). If the last federal deputy came from a state legislature both the media and the party selectorate will look for a successor precisely there. If she was a successful mayor, the chances for ambitious local politicians are strengthened considerably. Career patterns reproduce by shaping the expectations of potential candidates, inner-party selectorates, partisan opponents, the media, and the public alike. This explains why individual preferences and institutional context produce relatively stable positional sequences (Herzog 1975, 44) that are not simply institutionally determined.

Career patterns thus are always social constructions as well. Potentially successful career pathways are the product of shared opinions about the structure of competition and the hierarchy of political offices. The relative attractiveness of the individually available offices combined with calculations about their relative accessibility causes individual career decisions that typically are part of a collective pattern. These patterns may be distinguished according to speed of movement (how frequent are changes of position?), direction of movement (which offices are regarded as more prestigious), and their scope or inclusiveness (how many relevant patterns may be found in any one polity?).

2. The Three Worlds of Political Career Patterns in Multi-Level Systems: A Typology

Based on the prevailing direction of career moves within a political system, the frequency of moves, and the number of career patterns in a polity, we can distinguish three ideal-typical worlds of political career patterns in territorial multi-level systems (cf. Borchert 2001; in ideal-type the classical source still is Weber 1991 [1904], 72-89). Logically there is one world in which all inhabitants share the same goal, one in which different groups develop different preferences, and one in which there is no pronounced hierarchy of offices at all.

The first world is where we primarily find the classical pattern of political careers: (Most) Everybody wants to rise, all actors have a shared conception of what constitutes a higher office, and how to get there. This notion informed Schlesinger's work, but it still is at the base of many recent studies of political careers particularly in the U.S. (cf. Francis and Kenny 2000, among others). In this first world of political careers we find a pattern that most fittingly can be labeled '*unilinear*'.

The general assumption is that ambitious politicians in general strive to represent or govern as many citizens as possible (Francis and Kenny 2000, 3). This implies a territorially defined positional sequence that starts on the local level and then proceeds via the regional or state level to the national capital. This is closely linked to the implicit assumption that the level of competition for political office is rising from the local to the regional to the federal

level. Hence in a normative perspective political careers are seen as a progressive selection process which allows the best candidates to succeed (this is implicit in James Madison's argument, cf. Hamilton et al. 1982, 290).

Theoretically, it would also be compatible with this type of career pattern that the office at the top of the hierarchy be at the local or state level. While this would lead to entirely different careers, the type of career *pattern* would be the same: characterized by a pyramidal structure with a clearly defined top. Hence the hegemony of any one career pattern is the defining feature of this first type.

The frequency of career moves by contrast is not clearly defined. As the career goal and the career path are mostly given, the structure of political competition determining the accessibility of offices becomes paramount (how often and in what order are elections held? how big is the incumbency advantage? are there term limits? etc.). Another important factor is political professionalization: The more professionalized positions a polity has to offer, the lower the speed of changes should be. A greater number of professionalized political offices will reduce the intensity of competition. If there is a larger number of offices that do not differ that much in terms of their material attractiveness, there will be less competition.

The second world of political career patterns is characterized by its physical appearance as a chain of mountains rather than as a single peak. There is no one prevailing pattern but rather there are several ones with each having a clearly defined hierarchy of offices. From the perspective of aspiring young politicians one can speak of *alternative* career paths that constitute this pattern. There are several routes into and within professional politics. The decision between different paths usually is made rather early in a career, as permeability tends to fall. This lack of permeability may be caused by an institutionally or territorially given separation of several political arenas limiting access or by a progressively reduced attractiveness of other options as the costs of changes are rising steeply. Anyway, it is this separation of career arenas with limited permeability that best characterizes the second type of career patterns.

Alternative career patterns are usually associated with a high level of political professionalization. In a highly professionalized polity alternative career patterns are much more likely since this way more offices may be considered roughly of equal value. Once alternative career paths are established, they can be expected to be progressively shielded off against each other. On the one hand this is due to the expectations cited above that tend to reproduce existing patterns. On the other hand it also is the result of conscious efforts of politicians who have no interest in the possibility of heightened competition caused by people crossing over from the other path. If changes from one path to the other become increasingly difficult, that also dampens the frequency of positional changes in a system. As a trade-off, positions become safer. Hence we would expect a significantly lower rate of involuntary turnovers and a longer average tenure than under other prevailing career patterns.

The third world of political career patterns is characterized primarily by what it is lacking: There are neither clear boundaries between different levels of government or types of institutions nor is there a general hierarchy of offices. Many different offices are rated similarly in terms of their importance and attractiveness, and most positions are accessible for most career politicians. The result should be notable acceleration of positional changes. On the one hand one can move to another office any time (provided there is an election or an opening).

Conversely, there are new challengers all the time. The high speed of positional changes therefore is the defining element of what I call the *integrated* type of career pattern.

In this type all professionalized political offices belong to one big playing-field on which all actors are moving freely. The willingness to move on is produced by the individual order of preferences, but also by institutional features. Term limits or norms of office rotation, for example, characteristically are a most favorable factor for the development of this type. If every career politician has either to look for another office after a short period of time or quit his profession altogether, the shielding of one's office against competition becomes meaningless and even counter-productive. By contrast, a high level of permeability raises everybody's chances to remain in the game. The direction of moves appears arbitrary from outside. That does not preclude that some positions are deemed particularly attractive. If these positions for some reason cannot be held for a long time, the overall picture becomes one of continuous rotation throughout the system. Similarly to the classical unilinear type the integrated one also tends to be hegemonic: All actors share a collective interest that there are no pockets of offices that are removed from the pattern and hence inaccessible to office-seekers moving within the pattern.

Overall the three ideal-typical worlds of political career patterns may schematically be displayed as in Table 1:

Table 1: Three Ideal-types of Career Patterns

Type of Career Pattern	Direction of Positional Moves	Speed of Office Moves	Inclusiveness of Pattern	Degree of Professionalization
unilinear	clearly defined	depends on structure of competition	universal	variable
alternative	different, but clearly defined	rather low	several patterns	high
integrated	no direction discernible	high	universal	high

Note: The most defining characteristic of each type is displayed in a shaded box..

Case Selection and Data

The relevance of this typology can only be tested when it is confronted with political reality in real-existing polities. While the typology should hold for all territorial multi-level systems, it makes sense to start with established federal systems where the distribution of competences, the status of different offices, and career patterns have had time to develop and stabilize. In this paper I am looking at three cases that at first look have a certain affinity to one of the ideal-types: the U.S., Germany, and Brazil. In analyzing some very basic career data for these countries, I will use the ideal-types developed above as a foil. Where political praxis deviates from the theory, either the typology has to be amended or we have to look more closely at the institutional and cultural peculiarities of the cases.

I have analyzed the members of a recent federal legislature for each of these three countries. For the bicameral legislatures of the U.S. and Brazil I have limited the analysis to the larger chamber. First, I analyzed the career background of members, understood as office experience. This, however, gives only a partial idea of career trajectories as we do not know what deputies do after their mandate, if they pursue another political office. Therefore in a second step I moved back ten years in time and analyzed what political positions the members at that point are holding after ten years². While this is only a rough indicator, it should give us at least an idea of what place a seat in the federal legislature occupies in the different countries. In the two countries with four-year terms (Brazil, Germany) the period of time covered encompasses three federal elections, in the United States five.

3. U.S. Political Careers: The Road to Washington

Political careers in the United States are in fact so clearly structured as may be expected from the unilinear type of career patterns³. As a long stint in executive offices is rendered close to impossible by legal (for example, term-limits for governors) and conventional restrictions (for example, short terms for federal secretaries), American political careers mostly are legislative careers. Contrary what we would expect under a purely unilinear type, the local level is not the usual point of access for a political career. Only 25 percent of members of the U.S. House start their career with mandate on the city council or the local school board. Ten percent have prior experiences as mayor or county executive. All in all 29 percent start their career on the local level.

By far the most common office experience of American federal legislators is that of state legislator (54 percent). Hence this is the typical "base office" (Schlesinger) in the American political system, where professional political careers usually start. Yet a state mandate in most cases is not a professionalized position itself. It only provides a springboard into a professional political career. According to Peverill Squire's analyses only eight to eleven states might be considered as having a professionalized state legislature based on members' salaries, staff, and time demands⁴. Interestingly enough the level of professionalization itself does not make much of a difference for the springboard of a state legislature. In the eleven states with at least partial professionalization 50 percent of federal legislators have state legislative experience, in the other 39 states the number is 57 percent. The reason why professionalization on the state level does not preclude a move to the federal level most probably is the steep dif-

² The days for which members were analyzed are different, too (U.S. 03/19/1995, Germany: 05/02/1995, Brazil: 02/04/1998). However this should not distort results in any major way. The data is taken for the U.S. from the Almanac of American Politics and Politics in America, for Germany from Kürschners Volkshandbuch des Deutschen Bundestages und for Brazil for 2008 from the homepage of the Chamber of Deputies (<http://www2.camara.gov.br>). For 1998 it kindly was provided by my colleague Fabiano Santos.

³ On political careers in the U.S. cf. among others Francis and Kenny 2000; Moncrief 1999; Prinz 2003; Squire 1993, 2007.

⁴ Peverill Squire has developed an index named after him that measures the level of professionalization in state legislatures in relation to the U.S. Congress. Currently, one can speak of fully professionalized legislatures only in California, New York, Wisconsin, and Massachusetts. A partial professionalization is diagnosed in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois. Some other states might be included depending on the definition. Cf. Squire 1993, 148; 2007, 223-24.

ference in levels of professionalization between all state legislatures and Congress. Hence the state legislature has become a springboard to Washington almost everywhere⁵.

A small percentage of members of the House have had experiences as judge, district attorney or sheriff (6.2 percent) or in the state executive (3.4 percent). The route via law enforcement is heavily concentrated in the South (two thirds) and in Texas in particular (30 percent). 27 percent do not have any prior office experience. This group mostly consists of lawyers and businesspeople with some former sports stars thrown in. Eight percent have some political experience as staffers for legislators or in the executive branch – the vast majority in D.C. Staffers not only gain access to the political process and to important networks. They also are among the first to know once their boss decides to retire or run for another office. This knowledge may be turned into an important resource in the struggle for a vacant seat. Given the enormously high election rate in the House, vacant seats clearly provide the most promising point of access.

From the state legislature – as from the other starting offices – the next step up is a seat in the House of Representatives. Running for another office first does not provide any advantage and thus is rarely pursued. And there is not much in terms of political office after House either. Therefore successful political careers in the United States are characterized primarily by a very short career *path* – measured by the number of positions held – and a long tenure in Congress. On average a representative stays in the House for almost 14 years and hence is elected seven times. This remarkable persistence against the odds – short terms of only two years, a two-step electoral systems with potential challengers on both levels and no place to hide on a party list, weak parties, and extremely costly campaigns – points to very successful attempts by incumbents to immunize themselves against challengers.

While the career path is brief, political careers themselves are rather long in the U.S. Deputies who held a mandate in the state legislature before coming to Washington did so for 8.9 years on average. This adds up to a remarkable overall career length – especially if we take into consideration unsuccessful candidatures before obtaining the first public office and the possibility of holding other office after the House.

The circumstances of leaving office and the further career of former representatives offer further hints at the structure of political careers in the United States. Of the representatives of 1995 209 (48 percent) were still (or in some cases: again) a member of the House ten years later – a remarkably high percentage. Most of the 226 who left did so voluntarily. Almost half of them (46 percent) at some point decided not to run again and withdrew – at least temporarily – from professional politics. Median tenure in this group is 18 years but 30 and more years are no exception. By and large these are voluntary retirements after a long and successful career as a professional politician which mostly take place after age 65.

A little more than a quarter (27 percent) of deputies left in order to run for or to be appointed to another office. Combined with the long tenure this shows that the U.S. House holds a high place in the hierarchy of political offices but that there are some offices that are ranked even higher. This is particularly true for two offices. The most popular option is U.S. Senator:

⁵ Some significant differences probably are due to peculiar state traditions. Otherwise differences like that between Wisconsin (75 percent with state legislative experience) and Michigan (67 percent) on the one hand and Illinois (37 percent) on the other cannot really be explained.

57 percent of the 61 members leaving to run for another office strived for a seat in the Senate. The result was open: 16 of 35 were successful, the rest failed. The second popular option was the governorship (for 25 percent of those leaving the House for another office). Here however the success rate was much lower with only three out of 15 being really elected.

Overall only 44 percent of those running for another office right after leaving the House were successful – which may explain why not more tried. But even those who lost very rarely quit politics altogether. A quarter of those who failed tried again while others turned to lobbying. The same persistence may be found among those who were defeated in the primary or the general election. Even some of those who voluntarily retired returned to electoral politics later on.

Looking at the whereabouts of members after ten years, we thus find a lot of persistence and a clear structure of opportunity: 45 percent of those no longer in the House but still in politics are now in the Senate. There might be more than the 11 percent holding a governorship who would actually like to be governor of their home state. But House members running for governor have to compete not only with other members or even senators, but also with the strongest candidates from state-level politics and local politics. By contrast, House members have a natural advantage when it comes to Senate elections.

If we try to sum up the three elements named above – frequency of career moves, their direction, and the inclusiveness of any one career pattern – the result for the U.S. is pretty clear:

(1) Career moves occur rather seldom, offices once won are held for long periods of time. This finding can be attributed to the precarious conditions of political competition in the U.S. It is always more difficult to win another office that is at least of equal status than to defend the one you have. The personal campaign apparatus and the clientele of any candidate typically is drawn from and geared towards his or her present constituency and territorial arena. Parties are too weak to guarantee safe transitions to other office. Each move is connected with high costs and enormous risk. Not only is there the danger of losing the election. Even winning jeopardizes the cultural capital accumulated in the old institution as it cannot be simply transferred to the new one. Seniority rules are but the most visible part of this. Hence any move should be well considered. Very often the most rational strategy would seem to stay where you are. This also renders political careers in the United States mostly legislative careers (producing subsequently the misunderstanding in American political science that political careers in general are legislative careers). The numbers of our little follow-up analysis are quite impressive here: 93 percent of those still working in the political profession after ten years do so as legislators!

(2) The direction of moves is clear. Local office is of lesser importance, the state legislatures provide the access point and springboard, and the peak of the office hierarchy clearly is situated in Washington. The ‘gubernatorial temptation’ is just about the only deviation from this pattern. Roughly ten percent of House members at some point run for Governor – with limited success. The office of governor seems particularly attractive as the most realistic chance to once be the responsible executor of politics. Yet limited accessibility holds the attractiveness in check and prevents more members from running.

94 percent of the still active members of 1995 are on the federal level. Even among those who left the House 61 percent stay in D.C. while only 19 percent return to the state level and eight percent to the local level. These numbers are a good indicator of the status differences between levels of government in the unilinear model of the U.S. State and local office beyond the governorship are mere fall-back positions for those who fail on the federal level.

(3) The prevailing career pattern is highly inclusive. It merely excludes the realm of amateur politics and that of executive politics for the reasons named above. But recently a certain loosening of career patterns has occurred in those states that have adopted term limits for state legislators but at the same time have highly professionalized politicians on the state level. Particularly in California we find a new pattern that combines several territorial levels in novel ways and is a move towards an integrated type of career pattern⁶.

4. Germany: Parallel Paths to Federal and State Politics

The point of entry for political careers in Germany is the local level. 49 percent of German federal deputies had local council experience before their election to the Bundestag. Another four percent had a local office – usually mayor or county executive – while eleven percent had both local office and mandate experience. Thus, the „base office“ in Germany clearly is city (or county) councilor.

By contrast, only 18 percent of federal deputies entered the Bundestag by way of the state legislatures. For the majority of those who did (10 percent) the state legislature was only the second step after a local council. The European Parliament plays a negligible role as a career springboard in Germany: Only five of 613 members were MEPs before coming to Berlin.

For most members (42 percent) the seat in the Bundestag is their second public office or mandate, for 39 percent it even is the first. This number heavily underestimates the level of political experience, however, as it does not include party office nor does it include experience as a staff member which has come to be a common route into German professional politics. On average, German deputies are first elected at age 42. By comparison to the U.S. and Brazil the most characteristic feature of German political careers in office accumulation. German politicians are typically holding several offices at a time – legislative, executive, party, interest group; at the local, state, and federal levels. The parties are the gatekeepers for public office as they have successfully monopolized personnel selection. Therefore party office is an important prerequisite for acquiring public office and keep a check on intra-party competitors. Typically therefore, public office is combined with party office on various levels of government⁷.

But accumulation goes even further than that: The goal of German political careers is to combine legislative office – which forms the backbone of political careers in Germany as well – with executive positions. The basic idea of parliamentary democracy that government is to

⁶ On the effect of term limits to lead to a change of career patterns rather than to deprofessionalization cf. Moncrief et al. 2007, 32-35.

⁷ On political careers in Germany cf., among others, Best and Jahr 2006; Borchert and Stolz 2003; Jahr 2009; Schüttemeyer and Sturm 2005. On Europe more generally cf. Patzelt 1999.

be formed within Parliament has led to a convention in Germany (as in other countries with this governmental system) that the members of the cabinet should be recruited mostly from the legislature. They then keep their legislative seat when entering the executive. In German federal politics this phenomenon is reinforced by an even larger number of Parliamentary secretaries of state who by definition *have* to be members both of the Bundestag and of the executive.

Another chance of accumulation is given by the compatibility of federal and local mandates. The reason federal deputies are putting extra hours to serve on their local council is similar to the motivation for party office: They don't want to lose touch with their local constituency and at the same time wish to check their party ranks for potential challengers. Another historically common pattern of accumulation combining a legislative seat with an interest group position – which was constitutive for political professionalization in Germany during the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic – has receded in importance and today is an exception to the rule.

Average tenure in the Bundestag is not very different from the U.S. House. The members of 1995 who have left in the meantime (n=482) served a mean of 13.6 years (median: 12 years). Thirty deputies left with 28 years of tenure or more. While there are no such extreme long-termers as in the House, there is a significant number of members who stay on fairly long and spend much of their professional career in the Bundestag. While there is no reliable data on voluntary and involuntary retirement, about one third of members leave over age 65 and hence in their vast majority probably retire voluntarily. Others take up other political offices or leave politics altogether.

Yet there is also a considerable risk to be defeated at election time (or not to be renominated). The risk of defeat is highest for deputies from smaller parties hovering around the 5 percent threshold the electoral system requires. In my sample 23 members from the left-wing PDS lost their seats when their party did not make it back into the Bundestag in 2002 – twelve of them coming back in 2005. But even in the larger parties candidates on the lower places on the party list or in marginal constituencies can be sent home involuntarily should their party get less votes than the last time around. This is reflected in the fact that 58 deputies (9 percent) have an interruption in their legislative careers, most of them resulting from electoral defeat. Many come back even during the same term succeeding fellow partisans who retired or died. A partial exception is provided by some Green MPs who had to leave because of their party's former rotation rules.

A most remarkable finding in a comparative perspective is how few former federal deputies took up other political office. Only 64 former representatives (13 percent of those who left the Bundestag) had found a new political office or mandate until 2005. Even if we acknowledge that many of those who were forced out in the 2005 election might come back this year or will eventually turn up in some other political office, the finding clearly is that the Bundestag in most cases is the final destination of German political careers.

Among those who do take (or keep) another office, the largest share (39 percent) moves to the local level. This includes those who do not want to give up politics altogether and therefore maintain or seek a seat on the local council, but also those who are looking for an executive challenge on the local level and for this reason are voluntarily giving up their federal seat.

Local government reform which strengthened the mayor and the county executive in many states has resulted in quite a few long-term federal deputies particularly in Northrhine-Westphalia, the largest state, to go back to their home towns and counties. A second group (33 percent) moves to the state level, most of them into state executive positions. Two Christian-Democratic state prime ministers in particular, who themselves were recruited from the Bundestag, drew much of their cabinet from the federal legislature. Only six federal deputies became 'simple' state legislators.

We have to look back to the institutional structure of opportunity in Germany to grasp the curiosity of these results. Germany provides excellent conditions for career moves between levels of governments and between different types of institutions. We have virtually identical party selectorates for federal and state legislatures). Yet there are very few people moving from the federal to the state level and not that many people moving the other way (cf. Borchert and Stolz 2003, Jahr 2009). While the first finding could be attributed to the lesser attractiveness of the state legislatures, the fact is that, contrary to the situation in the United States, German state legislatures⁸ have fully professionalized state legislatures paying salaries not much below the Bundestag. In fact, this contributes to the relatively little interest state deputies show of going to Berlin. If the bulk of the roughly 2,000 German state legislators were trying to move to the federal level, we should find many more than the 18 percent of federal deputies with state legislative experience.

Thus, we have fairly distinct career paths for federal and state politicians that cannot easily be explained with the institutional conditions that in fact would seem very favorable for cross-level movement. The relatively little gap in terms of professionalization and the high cost coming with a move (loss of informal seniority) obviously more than offset a structure of opportunity ready-made for an integrated career pattern. Hence we have the paradoxical situation that levels of government are inextricably interwoven in party boards and in public policy-making but separate and quite impermeable in political careers, the exception being the local level which serves as point of entry for both federal and state-level careers.

Looking at the three central criteria named above – frequency and direction of career moves plus the inclusiveness of a pattern – for Germany the findings may be summed up as follows:

(1) The frequency of career moves is rather low in the German system. As in the United States, but different from Brazil, German politicians relatively seldom change positions. The way into the federal or the state legislature is sought rather fast. Those who make it there try to stay on and rise within the internal hierarchy or make it into executive positions. Even those who are defeated often try to come back. For a typical federal deputy and even for many state deputies there is little incentive to move on. An exception to the rule is provided by cabinet positions on the state level and by positions as mayor or county executive on the local level. German politicians thus have a certain preference for executive positions. Luckily they most often can just stay where they are and wait for an executive opening they can then hold along their legislative seat.

⁸ The three city states (Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg) are a partial exception in this regard.

Parties play a pivotal role as selectors of the political personnel, but are marginal as political employer. Similarly, interest groups have lost their once central role. Jobs in lobbying and political consulting have clearly gained in importance for former deputies. This however was not part of the analysis here. For political recruitment, on the other hand, staff positions for deputies and legislative parties in particular have come to be a real alternative to local politics. But these are only the first steps or the fall-back positions for those on the political career ladder in Germany.

The ladder itself is surprisingly short – given the institutional structure of opportunity – and climbers are moving upwards only slowly. Yet in fact there are two ladders (three, if the European Parliament is included) which reduces inner-party competition for nominations both on the district and the state level. State and federal politics form largely distinct career arenas with only a small overlap after a common trainee phase in local and party politics. This is true in spite of the well-known interlocking quality of Germany's brand of federalism in terms of policy substance, constitutional order, and party organization. Why this is the case would have to be the matter of a historical analysis taking a closer look at the trajectory of career patterns in Germany which greatly changed from the Kaiserreich to the present. My hypotheses would be that the professionalization of state legislatures during the 1970s played an important role in this process. In any case, the finding that the institutional order could well support very different career patterns points to the volatility of the prevailing alternative pattern.

(2) The direction of career moves is not as clear-cut in Germany as it is in the United States. There are two paths that lead from local politics either to state politics or to federal politics. The high level of professionalization renders state politics an attractive option in its own right. Yet it hardly explains why so few state legislators are running for a seat in the Bundestag. Even though the same party organizations and the same local offices are the recruitment base for both state and federal deputies and even though selectorates are overlapping, moves between levels are the exception rather than the rule. Thus, an *alternative* type of career pattern has been established characterized by two alternative paths. We can assume that while the attractiveness of a federal office is higher, the cost of change outweighs the advantage. The prospect of starting over as a backbencher in Berlin just is not a strong pull factor for established state politicians.

(3) In Germany hence we find several co-existing career patterns simultaneously. An analysis of local politics could well find another pattern distinct from the state and federal ones. The move from federal and state politics back to the local level is a relatively recent and still exceptional phenomenon. Overall, then, German cooperative federalism paradoxically has produced territorially separate career arenas.

5. Brazil: One Huge Playing Field

Brazilian deputies are late starters. The average deputy enters the Câmara dos Deputados at age 46. Yet by then Brazilian politicians are very experienced by all means. 156 of 513 deputies (30 percent) in the current legislature (2007–11; 03/31/2008) – have experiences as local councilors. 20 percent were mayor or vice-mayor before. Subtracting those who have held

both offices/mandates, we find 45 percent with local office experience. This is a rather high number quite close to the 53 percent in Germany.

36 percent of Brazilian deputies were representatives in one the twenty-six state legislatures. This puts Brazil right between Germany (18 percent) and the U.S. (54 percent). Overall, 63 percent of federal deputies in Brazil have public office experience before coming to Brasília. It is quite difficult, however, to name any one „base office“ that provides the best point of access to a political career: city councilor, mayor, and state legislators all rank about equal in that regard⁹.

Legislative tenure differs greatly. There are some long-termers who leave after more than 40 years of service (including time during the military dictatorship), while others leave for some other office during their first term. Above all, it is hard to tell who is a member of the Chamber of Deputies at a certain point in time and who is not. This is due to the Brazilian legislative institutions of „*licença*“ and „*suplente*“. Deputies may ask for a leave of absence (*licença*) at any time. While they are excused from legislative service they may accept all kinds of executive offices on all levels of government and are replaced by a substitute deputy (*suplente*) from the party list. They can, however, take up their seat again at any time sending the substitute back home.

This peculiar institutional arrangement allows Brazilian deputies to strive for executive office without running any risk as they always have their legislative seat as a fall-back position. Local office is quite attractive since local elections are held midway between the federal and state elections held concurrently every four years. But with the leave of absence the office of state minister also enjoys special appeal. 25 percent of current deputies have interrupted their service – either voluntarily to take up another office or because they served as substitute and the regular deputy wanted his seat back. Some political scientists (for example, Samuels 2003) have interpreted this discontinuous service as an indicator for the disdain Brazilian politicians hold towards their national legislature because it is only weakly institutionalized and not very powerful.

This interpretation, however, fails to acknowledge that 75 percent of federal deputies are running again with about two thirds being actually reelected¹⁰ (Botero and Renno 2007, 114; Costa and Costa 2006). The high share of those running again as well as the high number of those returning to the *Câmara* after a break prove that the federal legislature is considered an attractive place and plays an important role in Brazilian political careers. The fact that slightly more than a third of those incumbents running for reelection lose their bid, points to the high level of electoral insecurity in the system. This is the second important element of Brazilian electoral politics: It not only provides an unusual number of opportunities, it also is unusually competitive and risky. The latter fact is due to the interaction of the electoral system with the multi-party system.

⁹ On political careers in Brazil cf., among others, Botero and Renno 2007; Marengo dos Santos 2005, 2006; Power and Mochel 2008; Samuels 2003, 2008; Santos and Pegurier 2009.

¹⁰ Marengo dos Santos (2006) emphasizes that this a result of democratic consolidation. Historically, turnover was much higher until the third elections after redemocratization. Then it decreased significantly. The 2006 elections might be an exception, since many deputies were involved in several large corruption scandals which might have led to a higher turnover than would otherwise have been the case (cf. Costa/Costa 2006).

The open-list electoral system with preferential voting and an electoral formula (d'Hondt) that favors bigger parties leads to a strong personalization of politics: Every candidate runs on his or her own. At the same time, however, the other candidates of the own party and the own list are extremely important. If they draw a lot of votes this may be beneficial for other candidates on the list – provided there are not too many others drawing more votes than oneself. Candidates' strategic considerations are rendered even more complicated by the parties' practice to link their lists with other parties in order to maximize seats. While parties may decide on their candidates¹¹, but success is mostly based on individual name recognition and popularity. The periodic electoral season that takes place every four years thus sees every Brazilian politician busily calculating his or her chances for different offices and finally making a decision that is still a leap in the dark.

Another part of the calculations is the opportunity not only to run for another office but also to change your party. Deputies who have been members of only one party throughout their career are the great exception. Only within the Workers' Party (PT) is party fidelity fairly common. Three to six changes of party during a career are considered normal, even though they are increasingly condemned as a source of political instability. The Supreme Electoral Court (*Tribunal Superior Eleitoral*) therefore in 2007 declared party-switching outside certain 'transfer periods' and without good reason for illegal and in December 2008 unseated the first deputy – Walter Brito Neto from Paraíba – for „party infidelity“ („*infidelidade partidária*“) even though the party change had been his first. The strategic reason behind party changes almost always is the attempt to improve one's electoral position.

Looking at the whereabouts of the deputies of 1998 is testimony to the diversity of Brazilian political careers. Of the 513 deputies, 124 (24 percent) still (or again) were members of the Chamber of Deputies. 89 (17 percent) were holding different offices. Offices held vary greatly: 44 percent had moved to local politics, 30 percent to state politics, while 26 percent had remained on the federal level. The most common single office is that of mayor with 31 percent, followed by Senator (13 percent) and state legislator (11 percent). Five (6 percent) of the 1998 deputies were governor or vice-governor ten years after.

Hence there is movement towards all territorial levels without a prevailing path. The office of mayor, for example is both a common point of access for political careers and a goal of many careers. This confirms the impression that all political offices in Brazil are part of one single arena. There are individual preferences, but these are not as clear-cut and universally shared as in the other two countries. What is observable is a clear emphasis on executive office (also cf. Power and Mochel 2008). 62 percent of all former deputies who are still holding office do have an executive office. Brazilian politicians strive for executive office but they regard the federal parliament as both an ideal springboard into the local and state executive and as a weatherproof fall-back position after stints in the executive that tend to be short.

What about the frequency of career moves, their direction, and the inclusiveness of the pattern?

(1) The frequency of career moves is extremely high in Brazil. The combination of electoral insecurity, multitude of attractive and professionalized offices, and the chance to tempo-

¹¹ Until 2002 incumbents had the right to run even against the will of their party.

rarily leave Parliament without losing one's seat makes for a constant shopping for better opportunities. The risk to lose one's office in the upcoming election is almost as high as the chance to win another one. The overall goal of the political game is to remain a player, to open up new opportunities and to make use of them. Similarly to the U.S., the typical politician electorally is a political entrepreneur and not a party regular. Nevertheless party discipline within the legislatures is quite high in Brazil. By contrast to the United States and to Germany politicians stand to lose very little by running for another office, as legislatures are not very powerful and their internal hierarchy is weakly developed. This leads to a wholly different logic of political careers and dramatically accelerates career movements.

(2) The Brazilian polity as such works as one integrated playing field for political careers. On this field it is quite hard to get a sense of direction. Executive office, however, is usually preferred to legislative seats. The executive dominates policy-making in the presidential system of Brazil and it also controls patronage and the distribution of particularized benefits. This enables Brazilian politicians to build and strengthen clientelistic ties which is of central importance for their personal vote for all kinds of offices. While politicians freely move between local, state, and federal office, their political base is extremely localized. Once established these ties may be transferred to candidacies for different offices. They remain linked to a particular place, though. Hence a change of state (or even city) which occasionally happens in both the U.S. and Germany is practically impossible for Brazilian politicians¹². Overall, Brazil is a clear case of an integrated career pattern.

(3) The integrated career pattern not least is based on the many opportunities it offers. The great number of opportunities in turn is based on the universal validity of the pattern. There are no political offices in Brazil that are exempt. In every town, in every state there is a pool of political candidates and a pool of political offices. In a process characterized by highly complex strategic calculations on behalf of the would-be candidates and by fluctuating political coalitions, the latter (the offices) are distributed among the former (the candidates). The major exchange for the distribution of offices is provided by the periodical federal and state elections. Local elections and executive appointments offer extra chances in between.

6. Three Worlds of Political Career Patterns: A (Tentative) Comparative Balance

The assumption that the three countries I looked at exhibit different patterns of political careers and that these patterns to a large extent approximate the ideal types developed above was largely confirmed (cf. Table 2). The motivation that leads to opposite behavior in the U.S. and Brazil is the same: uncertainty and insecurity in the electoral arena (cf. King 1997; Borchert and Stolz 2003). In the U.S. the uncertainty that accompanies every career move nurtures the disposition to stay in the House, whereas in Brazil every reelection campaign is so insecure that one might just as well opt for something else. In Germany, by contrast, one does not have to give up a legislative seat for an executive office, but rather can combine the two.

¹² The only exception may be Protestant ministers with a TV following.

Table 2: Comparing Careers in the U.S., Germany, and Brazil

	United States	Germany	Brazil
<i>prior political experience</i>			
age at election (median)	45	42	46
local mandate before election (%)	21 (25 incl. school boards)	49	30
local office before election (%)	10	15	20
total with local experience (%)	29	53	45
state legislative experience (%)	54	18	36
total prior office experience (%)	73	61	63
Turnover/share of new deputies (%)	22	23	47
<i>base office</i>	<i>state legislature (54%)</i>	<i>city council/county council (49%)</i>	<i>state legislature (36%) city council (30%) mayor (20%)*</i>
<i>Deputies after 10 Years</i>			
legislative survival rate (%)	48	28**	24
political survival rate (%)	57	38	42
Tenure when leaving (average years)	13,9	13,6	***
state office after leaving (% of those who left)	5	4	7
local office after leaving (% of those who left)	1	5	10
ratio of executive to legislative office (%)	6 : 9	6 : 6*	14 : 7
<i>most common offices (% of those who left and are still active)</i>	<i>Senator (45%) Gouverneur (11%)</i>	<i>State Minister/ Prime Minister (22%) Mayor/ County Executive (19%)</i>	<i>Mayor (31%) Senator (13%) State Legislator (11%)</i>

Note: Own calculations.

* Legislative and executive office may be held concurrently.

** During the ten years considered here the Bundestag was reduced in size from 656 to 598 seats from 2002 on. This reform, of course, promoted higher turnover in the 2002 elections.

*** Because of the many interruptions during legislative mandates there is no reliable number. Samuels (2008, 86) mentions an average tenure of seven years. Yet this does not include interrupted service in all cases.

Each type of career pattern indeed seems to develop its own logic. As suspected, the attractiveness and accessibility of offices shape the behavior of career politicians. What has to be added, however, is the time horizon: There are offices which are highly attractive, but cannot be held for a long time. On the other hand offices with a potentially long time horizon get much more attractive by virtue of this simple fact.

Differences between the three countries may be found along two axes: the territorial and the institutional (cf. Table 2). Territorially the major difference is in the place of the local level within career pathways. In Brazil the local level serves both as entry point and as a permanent option. In Germany it is even more important as a springboard. Recent career moves to local politics open the prospect that Germany might be moving more towards the integrated type. The same could be said for some developments in the United States, particularly in California. Yet for the time being local politics is least important for political careers in the United States.

Institutionally cases differ in terms of the relative attractiveness of executive office. Again, this attractiveness is lowest in the U.S.: Professional politicians here are largely professional legislators. Germany provides the attractive opportunity to combine legislative and executive office with the legislative seat as a very comfortable fall-back position. Executive positions are sought-after options to rise (cf. Jahr 2009) – a function that in the U.S. is provided by positions in the legislative committee system and the party leadership. In the Brazilian system of „*presidencialismo de coalizão*“ (Abranches 1988; Santos 2003) on all three levels the primacy of the executive also makes it the most attractive place to be. Yet the short tenure of executive office makes legislative office a not to be undervalued option to fill the long periods between the short stints on the levers of executive power.

Institutional structures shape career patterns. This is hardly surprising. The United States' unilinear career pattern is to be expected if highly professionalized office is largely limited to the federal level and the parties are too weak to serve as a gatekeeper for cross-level political careers. American career politicians have to rely on their own support networks. This leads to a pattern in which amateur or semi-professional positions are considered springboards to professional office. The decision to run is made only if there is a fair chance of winning – which is usually the case only in open seats. Once an elective office is achieved, reelection becomes the top priority as the risk of moving is overwhelming.

Brazilian politics is characterized by an extremely tough competition in a multi-party system multiplied by its intra-party competitive aspects. An emphasis on reelection cannot possibly be the only strategy here. Rather the own options with regard to office and party have to be constantly reviewed. Samuels (2001, 100) aptly speaks about extreme „informational problems“ in a „candidate-centric multi-member district system“. Under these conditions, positional changes often are a perfectly rational strategy. Hence the integrated type of career pattern is reflected in a corresponding interest of politicians moving within that pattern. If uncer-

tainty cannot be reduced (only by an electoral reform that is much discussed in Brazil, but most probably more unintended than intended effects), at least the menu to choose from is maximized. A certain asymmetry within the pattern is provided by the emphasis on executive positions.

Whereas career patterns in the United States and Brazil may rather well be explained within a structures of opportunity argument based on Schlesinger, Germany presents a certain puzzle: Based on the structure of opportunity we would expect much more cross-level movement. The strong role of regional and local party organizations in the nomination process notably increases the career security of incumbents (cf. Schüttemeyer and Sturm 2005, 545-553). Still one would not expect the federal and state career arenas to be sealed off against each other to the extent they are. While the „increasing returns“ argument based on the rising cost of moving is a plausible one, it cannot fully explain the reluctance of state legislators to run federally, especially since the state legislatures in Germany are considered rather powerless and having a limited policy portfolio.

To better understand why an institutionally rather unlikely pattern prevails in Germany we would on the one hand need more information on the motivation and self-interpretation of career politicians (cf. Best and Jahr 2006). On the other hand a research strategy understanding career patterns as historically constructed and alterable could be helpful. Changes in prevailing career patterns, critical junctures if you want, would then be the focus of research focusing on the mechanisms of change. All of these should be embedded in an internationally comparative perspective as has been attempted here. Surprisingly, comparative studies of career patterns are still the exception (but cf. Norris 1997; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). This paper has attempted to provide a categorical frame for comparative research on political career patterns and to illustrate the empirical usefulness of such an approach. This, however, can only be a starting-point.

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