



Challenges and Opportunities in Fostering Political Participation and Representation in Regional Organisations: A Case Study of ParlAmericas and the Organization of American States (OAS)

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The Partnership for Research in International Affairs and Development (PRIAD)



International IDEA

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Abstract

The Organization of American States (OAS) is a regional organisation supporting democracy, peace and security in the American continent. From the late 1990s, it backed the creation of a regional parliamentary association, the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA), to help strengthen dialogue between national parliaments and foster the integration process. In 2011, the 10th anniversary of FIPA coincided with a name change to ParlAmericas, together with a new communication campaign and strategic plan. Whilst the organisation has been proactive in fostering interest in subjects of hemispheric concern (e.g. gender, conflict, migration etc.), it also faces important challenges. Besides expanding its membership base, ParlAmericas also needs to diversify its sources of funding.

This paper analyses the mandates and functions, as well as the strengths of and challenges faced by ParlAmericas, both from an institutional point of view, as well as from the perspective of fostering political participation and representation. Whilst it is clear that ParlAmericas can be considered representative and inclusive (it targets parliamentarians of different stripes and has an active Group of Women Parliamentarians), the paper argues that more should be done to evaluate the real impact of this forum, particularly to understand how debates, activities and recommendations issued by ParlAmericas take shape in national parliaments. The paper also highlights key characteristics of other regional associations and forums, such as COPA, and concludes with a series of policy-relevant recommendations.



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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AEC	African Economic Community
ALCA	Area de Libre Comercio de las Américas (Free Trade Area of the Americas)
AU	African Union
CAN	Comunidad Andina de Naciones (Andean Community of Nations)
CELAC	Community of Caribbean and Latin American States
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
COPA	Confederación Parlamentaria de las Américas (Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas)
CSO	civil society organization
EP	European Parliament
EOM	electoral observation mission
FIPA	Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas
FOPREL	Foro de Presidentes y Presidentas de Poderes Legislativos de CentroAmerica y la Cuenca del Caribe (Forum of Presidents of Legislative Branches in Central America and the Caribbean)
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
MEP	member of the European Parliament
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market)
MoU	memorandum of understanding
OAS	Organization of American States
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PAP	Pan-African Parliament
PARLACEN	Central American Parliament
PARLANDINO	Andean Parliament
PARLASUR	MERCOSUR Parliament
PARLATINO	Latin American Parliament
SAI	Sistema Andino de Integración (Andean Integration System)
SICA	Central American Integration System (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana).



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Introduction


El gran día de América Latina no ha llegado. Hemos expulsado a nuestros opresores, roto las tablas de sus leyes tiránicas y fundado instituciones legítimas; más todavía nos falta poner el fundamento del pacto social que debe formar, de este mundo, una nación de repúblicas. Simón Bolívar, 1822

As early as 1815 in his famous *Carta de Jamaica*, Simon Bolivar spoke of the need to establish a formal union between all the countries in America. His ideal was closest to a 'nation of republics'. Soon after gaining their independence from Spain (Brazil was a late exception), Latin American countries, based on their common history, language, culture and traditions, started to work on achieving full political integration.

Latin America today is the largest and most homogeneous cultural space on the planet (Luiselli and Rodríguez, 2006: 247). In fact, if a nation is to be defined in terms of language (Spanish and Portuguese), religion (Catholicism), culture (*mestizo*), and a shared history (pre-Columbian and colonial legacies), then Latin America could be a nation. Throughout the continent, people listen to the same music and read the same authors, and Latin American culture is perceived around the world as a single entity (Luiselli and Rodríguez, 2006: 253).

From 1945 to 1980, 'democracy' remained a distant concept in most of Latin America. However, the end of the Cold War in 1989 shifted international priorities to democracy, peace and security. This change was also accompanied by the growing acceptance that countries faced issues of a supra-national nature that required cooperative and consensual solutions. Regionalism, and particularly the creation of relevant regional organisations, provided an opportunity for the world to jointly tackle these challenges. These regional organisations, including the Organization of American States, led to the regularisation, normalisation and institutionalisation of exchanges between member states, and emphasised the domestic and international dimensions of democracy as a factor in stability (Mace and Bélanger, 1999: 7; Ramis, 2010: 9-11).

Latin America's transition to democracy and the onset of neo-liberalism also rested on trade agreements. Yet the 'democratic deficit' or lack of public involvement that characterised such projects (e.g. in the case of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, ALCA) quickly reinforced the need to instigate checks and balances as well as to foster accountability and transparency, particularly through parliaments. Thus regional parliaments such as PARLANDINO,



PARLACEN and PARLASUR were created, as well as parliamentary forums such as the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA) and ParlAmericas. Such organisations proved the right environment to discuss legislative and political developments, particularly where these involved changes at the national level, e.g. the harmonisation of domestic legislation (Quispe, 2012: 67-68). Involving parliaments and parliamentary organisations in this way thus infused the integration process with a sense of democracy and representation (Quispe, 2012: interview with authors).

This paper is concerned with ParlAmericas, originally the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA), founded by Resolution 1673 of the OAS' Plenary Assembly gathered in Guatemala in 1999. This resolution recognised the importance of fostering the participation of parliaments in the inter-American process, and acknowledged that 'the establishment of a parliamentary network among member states at the hemispheric level would complement initiatives undertaken by international, regional, and sub-regional parliamentary forums in the America'.

ParlAmericas is a political forum fostering inter-parliamentary dialogue between the national legislatures of the 35 member states of the OAS. It seeks to strengthen national and hemispheric processes by a) fostering inter-parliamentary dialogue on issues of joint concern (e.g. citizen security, crime, democracy, the economy, gender and poverty), b) facilitating sharing of best practice and experience, and c) encouraging legal harmonisation (ParlAmericas).

The paper begins by tracing the work of the OAS in support of democracy and provides background information about ParlAmericas. Next, the paper analyses ParlAmericas' mandates and functions, as well as its achievements and challenges. It considers the democratic character of the organisation (i.e. the decision-making process, as well as the level of representation and participation), and the institutional challenges it faces. These relate not only to the necessity of fostering 'relevance' or 'uniqueness', particularly with relations to other parliamentary organisations (e.g. COPA), but also organisational issues such as the need to grow its membership base so as to maximise outreach, or the issue of financial viability. As ParlAmericas is a new organisation and is currently undergoing important restructuring through a new strategic and communication plan, the paper's analysis comes at the right time and seeks to improve the effectiveness of the organisation. Key recommendations are drafted to that intent.




Background

The OAS

The OAS, which brings together 35 member states of the Americas, is the world's oldest regional organisation and the main political, juridical and social governmental forum in the continent. Whilst the OAS' work and values were undermined by the presence of many military dictatorships for the most part of the second half of the 20th century, the progressive demise of dictatorships in the 1980s, and later the break-up of the polarised world of the Cold War, instilled a new spirit of cooperation and a renewed emphasis on democracy, peace, development and security. Epitomising this spirit, the OAS adopted Resolution 1080 of 1991 on representative democracy, which outlines mechanisms for an automatic response to any illegal interruption of the democratic process in any member state. It also created the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy as a means to consolidate democracy. Later, it inaugurated the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001. Other achievements include the creation of the autonomous Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, an important platform for human rights litigation, the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001, stating that countries have a right to democracy just as they are bound to defend it, and the deployment of electoral observation missions (EOMs), which come into action when invited to do so by member states. In the area of anti-corruption, the OAS's leadership behind the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption was an inspiration for future action by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations, and paved the way for the establishment of a peer review on compliance with international agreements. Moreover, the OAS has been proactive in the area of counter-narcotics, anti-terrorism and resettlement of combatants (Babbitt et al., 2011; Lee, 2012).

In his opening speech to the OAS' General Assembly gathered in Cochabamba (Bolivia) for the organisation's 42nd regular session, José Miguel Insulza summarised what he, and some analysts (e.g. Lee, 2012), perceive to be the organisation's greatest strength:

[The] very holding of this General Assembly session, the distinguished presence of so many foreign ministers, and even presidents, of member states, shows, better than words could, that this is a valid and effective forum where everyone is heard, where all can bring their problems and seek solutions. In that tolerance, in that ever-present wish and purpose of maintaining unity in diversity, of placing dialogue before confrontation, is where the strength of this Organization lies. (Organization of American States, 2012a)



Against this backdrop, the development of ParlAmericas as a political forum of national parliaments working to foster parliamentary involvement in democratic governance could significantly contribute to the work and image of the OAS. If participation and representation are strengthened in ParlAmericas, and if it becomes an effective forum to increase inter-parliamentary dialogue, share experience and promote the harmonisation of legislation, it will likely help the OAS to gain credibility whilst also reinforcing its ideal of ‘unity in diversity’ (Organization of American States, 2010).


ParlAmericas

After rebranding itself from FIPA to ParlAmericas in September 2011, the organisation adopted a new strategic plan. ParlAmericas is an independent network comprising the national legislatures of the 35 member states of the OAS with a permanent Secretariat in Ottawa, Canada. All OAS member states are de facto members of the organisation, though this does not mean that they all actively participate. Countries nominate delegates or participants who take part in the activities organised by ParlAmericas and report back to their home legislature. Participation is open to all parliamentarians, not only members of select committees.

ParlAmericas is not a legislative body or regional parliament, and is not tasked with providing oversight of the OAS. Rather, it is a political forum or parliamentary association. Unlike many regional parliaments, it does not have decision-making power, but issues non-binding recommendations for implementation by national parliaments (see Annexe).

ParlAmericas is not an issue-based organisation. Its purpose is to promote parliamentary participation in the inter-American system and to promote the role of parliaments in the democratic process. Moreover, ParlAmericas plays an important role in the exercise of parliamentary diplomacy by providing a regular institutionalised venue for legislators from all countries of the Americas to meet and exchange experiences, best practices and solutions, particularly regarding shared concerns such as gender equality in politics, security, migration, violence and economic development. It also seeks to promote the harmonisation and development of legislation among member states and to enhance national and hemispheric democratic processes. The objective is for these exchanges to influence legislators in their approach to domestic legislation and international relations.

As a political forum, the organisation was built on the belief that parliamentarians can no longer focus only on domestic issues. Because the impact



of regional and hemispheric issues is felt at the local level, parliamentarians benefit from being directly exposed to their peers from other countries of the region. One-on-one and group interaction (e.g. ParlAmericas' Plenary Assemblies) allows parliamentarians to gain a better understanding of issues and to discuss jointly how to tackle them. Importantly, parliamentary diplomacy can also be an effective option when formal government discussions may have stalled.

ParlAmericas is a recent organisation and was never formally granted defined status within the OAS framework. In order to further institutionalise the relationship between both organisations, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in February 2012. The MoU defines the independence of ParlAmericas relative to the OAS, while also recognising the importance of keeping a good working relationship. Moreover, it stipulates key areas of joint interest where the two organisations can work together in order to improve the participation of parliamentarians in hemispheric dialogue. These include sharing parliamentary databases; facilitating parliamentary exchanges in the context of the OAS General Assembly and the Summit of the Americas; exploring areas of joint interest with regard to women's rights and gender issues; and developing sub-regional communications hubs for parliamentarians (ParlAmericas, 2012; Organization of American States, 2012b; Hill, 2012, interviews with authors).

With regard to its founding organisation, the OAS, ParlAmericas constitutes an important tool to help it achieve its objectives of fostering peace, democracy and dialogue. By encompassing all three Americas and the Caribbean, it has in principle a broader reach to foster representative democracy, peace and security. Moreover, ParlAmericas is intrinsically non-partisan, and all OAS member states are de facto members. They are invited to the table not to confront each other's views, but to focus instead on topics of hemispheric concern. In this way, ParlAmericas can fill an important role as a political forum offering a space for dialogue, visioning and solutions. In the future, it is the intent of both organisations to discuss how the framework of ParlAmericas could be used to create a more formal legislative forum within the OAS that will allow the legislative and executive branches to be brought together (Hill and Machuca, 2012: interview with authors).




Democratic Credentials of ParlAmericas

The purpose of this section is to describe key elements that make parlAmericas democratic and able to foster participation and representation.

Inclusivity The inclusion of gender and other minority groups in parliaments is essential to guarantee their democratic nature. While women's participation in Latin American and Caribbean politics, measured by their share of parliamentary seats, rose from an average of 13 per cent in 2000 to 21 per cent in 2010, this has more to do with gender quotas than with the betterment of socio-economic conditions (Htun and Piscopo, 2010: 2-5). As a result, although women have a voice in parliament, this does not mean it is an effective one. Women's increased presence has to be accompanied by empowerment, and significant efforts still need to be achieved to mainstream gender in politics.

Within ParlAmericas, the Group of Women Parliamentarians aims to address this issue head on. The Group seeks to strengthen the leadership of female politicians and to increase participation of women in politics; to promote the creation of equal opportunities (e.g. by eradicating employment discrimination); and ensure that ParlAmericas adopts and maintains a gender-sensitive agenda (ParlAmericas, 2011b, and see, for example, recommendations issued by the Group regarding citizen security, *Seguridad Ciudadana*). Thanks to the Group, there has been a noted increase in the share of women parliamentarians within countries' delegations (ParlAmericas, 2012a).

The Group has succeeded in appealing not only to women, but also to male parliamentarians. This has allowed identifying a number of 'change agents' among male parliamentarians who are willing to take up this issue in national parliaments, thus making the parliaments more representative and democratic. The work and nature of activities of the Group have widely benefited from the inputs of parliamentarians who are part of other committees or working groups (e.g. on economics, justice, territory, security), either at home or in other forums (Machuca, 2012, interview with authors). ParlAmericas plans to establish other permanent committees in the future, for example on Young Parliamentarians. This would emulate the work and structure already adopted by the Group of Women Parliamentarians, though it should be noted that creating additional permanent working groups or Committees would affect ParlAmericas' finance and involve additional administrative and logistical challenges. For that reason, this may be a piecemeal process (Hill, interview with authors, 2012).




Representation and participation Delegations aim to include members of different political parties, representative of both chambers (where relevant), as well as male and female delegates. Unlike other regional legislatures such as PARLASUR, parliamentarians are not directly elected to the organisation (see the Annexe). Rather, they are nominated by their national assemblies to represent them in the forum (ParlAmericas, 2012b). The lack of direct election, however, is not necessarily a negative. Having a foothold both in ParlAmericas and in their national legislature provides the guarantee that participants share a responsibility towards both, and are concerned about how debates at the continental level can be integrated at the national level. There is a risk that parliamentarians who are directly elected to sit in a regional body lose touch and fail to coordinate with their national parliaments. Moreover, regional parliaments in Latin America are relatively unpopular. By virtue of granting seats to former heads of states, PARLACEN has earned a reputation for being a safe haven for corrupt politicians (Mendez, 2010).

There is no scope for direct citizen participation in ParlAmericas, though this is in line with its mandate as a political forum. Still, being a gathering of elected representatives ensures its democratic character. Civil society organisations (CSOs) also have limited input, unlike in the OAS which has a number of procedures to channel their participation; but ParlAmericas draws on academic, civil society, and other expertise in the form of invited experts to inform parliamentarians in working groups, capacity-building activities, and published articles.

Accountability and transparency There is no formalised reporting mechanism. All communications (for example, the Plenary Assembly's recommendations or those made by the Group of Women Parliamentarians) are posted on the organisation's website. Members of Parliament (MPs) often report back to their home parliament, although there is no established procedure to do this. From an institutional point of view, new rules of governance have been instituted, making participation more regulated.

Advisory work and nature of recommendations By its very nature, the work of ParlAmericas is participatory and engaging. Representatives of national parliaments can bring specific proposals for debate and participate in the creation of recommendations in topic-specific working groups, thereby ensuring that national and regional concerns are reflected. In this way, ParlAmericas' work, and eventually its recommendations, takes into account the interests of diverse perspectives. In addition, ParlAmericas seeks to have recommendations and resolutions passed by consensus where possible. This is often achieved because of the inclusive and participative process employed



before recommendations and resolutions reach the plenary session. Where, following debate on the floor, consensus cannot be reached, a vote is held and a simple majority is enough to pass the proposal. This process ensures that all recommendations and resolutions passed by the Plenary Assembly carry democratic value.




ParlAmericas: Achievements and Challenges

Achievements

According to some parliamentarians with insider knowledge of ParlAmericas, one advantage of the organisation is that its permanent structure (the Secretariat) allows for the flow of communication and exchange between national parliaments, between members of ParlAmericas, and between ParlAmericas and their membership base. Furthermore, it is perceived as a space to bring together national parliaments and to give answers to the concerns of the people they represent. It is also regarded as an effective hemispheric forum for discussing transnational challenges (Quispe, interview with authors, 2012).

ParlAmericas is also seen as a positive initiative as it helps to strengthen parliaments as a key democratic institution (Quispe, 2012, interview with authors). Participants note the value of sharing experience and best practice between national legislators of the region. FIPA, and successively ParlAmericas, has developed a number of initiatives to strengthen parliaments and address common challenges. Workshops, congresses and training programmes have provided information, tools and experiences in a number of topics (Trade Knowledge, 2007 and 2008; Trade Liberalization, 2008; Training programme for candidates in Haiti, 2009; Citizen Security, 2011, among others). Both these subjects and discussions are relevant, especially since politicians and parliaments in Latin America suffer from a lack of trust and are perceived as ineffective and corrupt, which some have labelled as a 'crisis of representation' (Panizza, 2005; Dominguez, 1997).

ParlAmericas' recommendations are another perceived strength. For example, during the Eighth Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas held in September 2011, a working group tackled the issue of transnational citizen security and issued a number of recommendations approved by the Plenary Assembly. These included the incorporation within national legal frameworks of guidelines from reports of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; establishing standards to select government officials in positions relevant to public security; revising legal frameworks in order to consider the transnational aspects of criminal organisations; and making local governments responsible for crime prevention by ensuring that they are endowed with sufficient financial means. The Plenary Assembly also recommended that the OAS establish a body to identify and analyse the factors that lead to drug abuse (ParlAmericas, 2011a: 11-12).



Interviewees underlined the importance of these events, as they help parliamentarians from different countries discuss the challenges and solutions to citizen security, which can in turn be used and adapted by national parliaments with similar concerns to inform relevant legislation (Blanco, 2012, interview with authors). As expressed by a parliamentarian from the Caribbean region attending a capacity-building event on strengthening budgetary oversight organised by ParlAmericas, ‘as a new parliamentarian and new to PAC [Public Accounts Committees], I really feel much more equipped to fulfil my mandate. Thank you’ (Dubrow, no date: 14).


Finally, as an organisation, it should be emphasised that ParlAmericas is the only Pan-American organisation of parliaments in which the government of Canada takes part alongside the Caribbean and Latin American countries (other forums are regional or sub-regional only, not hemispheric in nature). Moreover, Canada’s fully-fledged and active participation endows the organisation with additional legitimacy. Having an established democracy such as Canada (along with others, for example Chile) as members of the organisation helps other members learn from experience and best practice, and also provides an opportunity to address North/South debates (Hill and Benamor, interview with authors, 2012). After all, upon joining the Organization of American States as a full member in 1990, Canada was pivotal in the creation of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD), a tool used to consolidate democracy in the region by supporting the organisation of elections, legislative processes and citizens’ education (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada; Ramis, 2010: 12).

Box 1 Impact of ParlAmericas

The following are two illustrations of the impact of ParlAmericas, based on the personal experiences of the interviewees.

Canadian-Venezuelan Relations

In 2011, formal relations between Canada and Venezuela had cooled to such an extent that diplomatic representatives of Canada in Venezuela no longer had their calls answered. Visa wait times had increased dramatically for Canadians visiting Venezuela, and there were no guarantees of visas for those travelling on diplomatic passports. A high-ranking Canadian minister who visited the country saw all his meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cancelled.




In this context, upon the suggestion of the Canadian mission in Caracas, a group of parliamentarians from the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas embarked on a bilateral visit to Venezuela in November of that year, and the delegation received visas within only 48 hours. They were welcomed in Venezuela with full protocol, and had unprecedented access to key individuals. This included meetings with chairs and members of a number of committees of the National Assembly of Venezuela (including the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Oil and Energy Committee, the Family Committee, and the Venezuela-Canada Friendship Group), and with the President of the Venezuelan National Assembly. A reception held at the residence of the Canadian Ambassador before the delegation's departure was well attended by parliamentarians from multiple political backgrounds, Chavez supporters and detractors, and the President of the Assembly in person.

These encounters led to reinvigorating diplomatic relations between both countries and the previously lapsed Venezuela-Canada Friendship Group, and clearly show the power of parliamentary diplomacy. This said, the larger impact in this particular case is still to be measured objectively (see comments in Conclusion).

The Canadian Section of ParlAmericas Visits Peru

In 2009, whilst Canada was finalising a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Peru, the Canadian section of ParlAmericas travelled to the country to discuss both countries' involvement with ParlAmericas (then FIPA). The Canadian section of ParlAmericas took the initiative for this bilateral visit. However, it was actively supported by ParlAmericas' International Secretariat on items including: a) providing summary information on a trade knowledge workshop organised for parliamentarians from both countries with the support of a Canadian university (this included discussions on past activities and support with implementing a workshop in a bilateral versus a multilateral context); b) providing key dates in the Peruvian legislative calendar, which greatly facilitated planning of specific events and the overall dates of the visit; and c) providing key contacts in the Peruvian Congress, including identifying key political players, past participants in FIPA activities, and current lists of presidents of committees.

During the visit, Canadian parliamentarians had the opportunity to speak with their counterparts, including a significant component of



indigenous parliamentarians. In the process, they heard at first hand the likely implications the FTA would have for citizens and communities of Peru. This first-hand information, which was not available to them domestically, allowed them to take a constructive and critical approach to ratifying the Agreement. Upon their return, Canadian parliamentarians also reported back to their peers who developed a better understanding in advance of debating and approving the legislation. It has also been suggested that support for the agreement among Canadian legislators, particularly among parties that had initially been reluctant to lend their support to the text, increased as a result of the visit and the engagement between parliamentarians that took place under the FIPA banner. Legislation ratifying the FTA was passed in the Canadian House of Commons in 2009.

Source: Hill, interview with authors, 2012


Challenges

ParlAmericas' strategic plan states that:

[O]ther organizations in the hemisphere (COPA, PARLADINO, PARLATINO, PARLACEN, MECOSUR, LAIA, UNASUR, ACTO, etc.) duplicate objectives, increase competition for funding and distract ParlAmericas' positioning. This trend increases ParlAmericas' need for uniqueness and relevance. (ParlAmericas, 2011a: 25)

This, essentially, summarises the organisation's main weaknesses and challenges. How can ParlAmericas improve its visibility with national parliaments? And how can it be unique and relevant when other organisations are also working towards achieving regional integration, albeit through different means? This is particularly the case of the Parliamentary Confederation of the Americas (COPA).

As a space for inter-parliamentary dialogue, COPA was first created in 1997 in Québec as a way to address the democratic deficit afflicting the negotiations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (ALCA) and as a means for parliamentarians to participate in the process. COPA was later institutionalised in 1998 through the creation of an Executive Committee and the drafting of guiding principles in 2000. Its structure is similar to that of ParlAmericas, and comprises a General Assembly, an Executive Committee, six permanent committees, the Network of Women Parliamentarians, thematic working




groups, and three executive secretariats based in Mexico, Brazil, and Québec (allegedly to ensure there is linguistic and geographic coordination). In contrast to ParlAmericas, which includes national parliaments only, COPA is open to all national, sub-national and regional parliaments. COPA is peculiar in that it includes parliaments and congresses, legislative assemblies of federal states and inter-parliamentary associations on an equal footing (COPA, interview with authors, 2012; COPA, no date, a, b).

COPA’s main objectives are to foster parliamentary democracy by fostering exchange and lessons learned between parliamentarians. It also promotes the ideals of human rights, peace, democracy, social justice and gender equality, among others, and has established electoral observation missions as well. In addition, COPA is well known for its legal harmonisation initiatives and the development of framework laws, which are similar to the activities of ParlAmericas. COPA fosters dialogue on issues related to inter-American cooperation and integration at the hemispheric level, which initially referred to the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas. It does so in close cooperation with the projects and mechanisms stemming from the summits of the heads of state and government of the Americas. This presents a difference compared with ParlAmericas, since the latter’s agenda is not tied to any third party (COPA, no date, a; del Carmen Trejo García et al., 2007: 1-3; COPA, interview with authors, 2012).


Table 1 ParlAmericas and COPA: Two Parliamentary Forums in Comparative Perspective

	ParlAmericas	COPA
Objectives	The main objectives of ParlAmericas include fostering inter-parliamentary dialogue regarding joint issues of concern, sharing lessons learned and legislative harmonisation	COPA’s main objectives are to foster cooperation on issues regarding regional integration, and issues discussed by heads of state. COPA’s main strengths lie in fostering legal harmonisation and framework laws.
Membership	Actual membership is only open to national parliaments, but membership may be granted on an individual basis in the future and to countries with a ‘foothold’ in the Americas (France, the UK, the Netherlands)	It is open to sub-national, national and regional parliaments
Membership	Both organisations comprise members from diverse political groups, social backgrounds and nations.	



Working groups	ParlAmericas' Group of Women Parliamentarians is among the most active of the organisation.	Also includes Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas
Admin	One permanent Secretariat coordinates the work.	At the institutional level, three secretariats (in Mexico, Brazil and Québec) share responsibilities and are tasked with maintaining relations with parliamentary assemblies. Nevertheless, these secretariats are hosted in the three countries' national assemblies, which makes it difficult to sustain a permanent structure.
Decision-making	Both organisations issue non-binding recommendations or resolutions, either submitted by their general assemblies or specific committees, which are then presented to heads of states, parliamentary speakers, international organisations and/or any other relevant party.	

In response to the challenge of addressing viability, governance and relevance, ParlAmericas has introduced a strategic and communication plan, coinciding with FIPA's tenth anniversary and its embrace of a new corporate identity. Neither of these two existed under FIPA. The Strategic Plan emphasises the importance of broadening the geographic and membership reach 'to all sovereign States and controlling states of dependent territories of the region' (ParlAmericas, 2011a: 23). Because of a lack of communication in the past, ParlAmericas' first challenge is to gain legitimacy in the eyes of many national parliamentarians, for example in some Caribbean and South American countries where ParlAmericas has had little uptake to date (Blanco and Hill, interview with authors, 2012). The MoU signed between ParlAmericas and the OAS emphasises the need to create sub-regional communication hubs. Although the actual terms and structure of these remain to be determined, they respond to the need expressed by some countries, for example in the Caribbean, which have formulated a desire to deepen cooperation and dialogue at the regional level prior to entering the hemispheric scene. Another solution envisaged by ParlAmericas to broaden its scope is the creation of chapters in national legislatures. (At the moment, there is only one chapter in Canada formed by parliamentarians from the House of Common and the Senate from multiple parties.) This would provide parliamentarians with a more direct route to other colleagues, and would provide more stability for ParlAmericas. Up to now, participation is often hampered by high turnover in some parliaments (Hill, interview with authors, 2012).



The issue of visibility and outreach is intrinsically related to questions about funding. While the Canadian Parliament is ParlAmericas’ main financial supporter, it is not a sound financial strategy to rely on one sponsor alone. Member parliaments pay their dues, but this makes it complicated for smaller, less developed countries to contribute financially to the organisation. Membership fees are calculated according to a formula based on the dues paid to the OAS, with seven different financial levels. While some countries pay regularly, others contribute sporadically or not at all. Increasing and diversifying the source of funding, therefore, would impact on the type and frequency of activities organised by ParlAmericas. Funding for workshops can easily engulf travel and accommodation expenses as well as stipends (Blanco, interview with authors, 2012). But improving ParlAmericas’ financial situation will be largely contingent on its becoming a more legitimate and visible organisation, as described above.

Table 2 Summary: ParlAmericas’ Strengths and Weaknesses/Challenges

Strengths	Weaknesses/challenges
Hemispheric nature, contrary to many other organisations that are only regional or sub-regional.	This very dimension (hemispheric nature) causes coordination challenges (how do you coordinate work among a significant number of countries?)
ParlAmericas seeks to be ‘all-inclusive’ and representative of the American continent.	To increase its take-up, ParlAmericas needs to seek additional financial opportunities and become more independent. Because of austerity, the Canadian Parliament, ParlAmericas’ greatest contributor, could reduce its financial contributions, which would drastically affect the organisation. Moreover, participation of smaller countries (e.g. in the Caribbean) with less capacity to financially contribute to ParlAmericas is a challenge that the organisation needs to meet in order to become inclusive.
ParlAmericas’ primary concern is not economic integration, but tackling broader developmental challenges which concern all member parliaments.	Smaller countries face greater capacity challenges, as they have fewer parliamentarians who can devote time to attend events and engage in regional dialogues.



The transition from FIPA to ParlAmericas has coincided with the introduction of new governance rules. Board members are parliamentarians who cannot cumulate this position with governmental functions in their home state.	Because ParlAmericas is not fully institutionalised, it greatly depends on the level of involvement of individual parliamentarians. However, there are plans to establish local chapters.
ParlAmericas has a permanent structure that allows continuous work and communication.	The U.S.A does not take part in ParlAmericas, arguably to mark its disagreement with Cuba's membership.
It is the only parliamentary association for national legislatures, mirroring the OAS membership (FIPA, 2009: 3)	ParlAmericas is relatively new, and needs to develop its visibility and image with national parliaments. The new strategic and communication plan is a step in this direction.
Specific working groups (e.g. the Group of Women Parliamentarians) have been put in place and appeal to both men and women to ensure the gender relevance of its work. Specialisation in certain cyclical and ad hoc topics (gender equality, indigenous rights, for example)	Some other regional organisations in the hemisphere may duplicate ParlAmericas' objectives, which, as we suggest in the next sections, warrants the need for specialisation and uniqueness.
Works in four languages: Spanish, French, English, Portuguese	Like many political forums, the overall impact of ParlAmericas (including recommendations) is hard to gauge.



Recommendations

The following recommendations provide ideas to improve the effectiveness of the work of ParlAmericas. They draw from our research findings but also reflect the views and ideas put to us during our interviews with relevant parties.


ParlAmericas and the OAS

ParlAmericas acts independently, even though communications are maintained with the OAS. The MoU is the basis for furthering cooperation between the two organisations. In this sense, discussions to establish a more formal legislative forum within the OAS to bring the executive and legislative branches together are a welcome development. Another possibility is to link the work of ParlAmericas to institutions of the OAS that enjoy widespread consensus, such as the Inter-American Democratic Charter or the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (supporting human rights is an important function of the OAS). This could consist in the creation of an ad hoc committee on human rights, charged with bringing human rights to the fore in parliamentary debates. The creation of any additional committee or stream of work, however, must be endowed with the appropriate administrative and financial support. As we have seen, these are still important challenges ParlAmericas needs to overcome. Moreover, to begin, human rights could also be mainstreamed into the broader subjects that ParlAmericas debates, rather than being institutionalised through a permanent body such as the Group of Women Parliamentarians.

ParlAmericas, regional parliaments and other organisations

Rather than think of other regional organisations that compete against one another, each organisation, including ParlAmericas, ought to refine areas of speciality. That is, in trying to develop a number of key issues (for example, gender or indigenous questions), ParlAmericas is likely to develop a natural advantage over other organisations, which will make for its uniqueness. Given the number of parliamentary organisations and forums, ParlAmericas could start identifying the areas in which it has a competitive advantage *and* in which it wants to specialise over the longer term. This too would help it become a reference in particular topics among parliamentarians and politicians in Latin America.

At the same time, it is important to coordinate with, but refrain from substituting, regional and sub-regional parliaments and organisations, as




there is a need to find complementary areas of work. Whilst actively targeting state parliaments to help legitimise ParlAmericas, there is a need to work with other regional organisations, primarily COPA, in order to help define each other's comparative advantages. This in itself would make ParlAmericas more democratic. One area of potential synergy is ParlAmericas' Group of Women Parliamentarians, and COPA's Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas. Surprisingly, the OAS recently turned to COPA's Network of Women, rather than ParlAmericas' own Group, to organise a survey on women parliamentarians in the Americas (Organization of American States, 2012c). This survey aims at identifying the main issues and strategies to foster women's rights and gender parity in legislative agendas.

This initiative was born out of exchanges between the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM, in Spanish) and COPA during the tenth meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians held in Québec in September 2011. COPA's Committee on Health also collaborates with the OAS' Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and other committees are also in regular contact with the OAS (COPA, interview with authors, 2012), showing that collaboration with the OAS is not the preserve of ParlAmericas.

To our knowledge, there is no coordination mechanism yet to address overlapping mandates between organisations, although discussions were held in 2009–2010 between COPA and ParlAmericas to discuss overlaps and opportunities for cooperation. It would be ideal to gather together leaders of these organisations and of regional parliaments in order to debate and clarify their individual roles and responsibilities. This would benefit everyone, including ParlAmericas, both in ensuring the effectiveness of its work and impact, but also in trying to obtain additional funding. This initiative could be embraced either by the OAS, or even by International IDEA (cf. Benamor, interview with authors, 2012).

As part of its objective of fostering legal harmonisation, ParlAmericas should consider cooperating with other like-minded organisations. Key among these is the relatively unknown Forum of Presidents of Legislative Branches in Central America and the Caribbean (FOPREL), a regional institution based in Managua, Nicaragua, whose purpose is to enhance the role of parliaments in the region and contribute to developing constitutional rights, democracy, social security and cultural diversity in the region. A key characteristic of FOPREL is that it is mainly made up of leaders of national legislatures and/or of national parliamentary committees. Moreover, many inter-parliamentary commissions within FOPREL are headed by representatives who lead similar commissions in their home legislatures.



Permanent members of FOPREL include Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Panama, Honduras, El Salvador, Belize and the Dominican Republic. China and Taiwan have observer status and Mexico and Haiti are allegedly close to becoming fully-fledged members. It recently created a new Commission on Transparency and Probity, whose role will be to foster legal harmonisation with regard to taxation, probity, transparency and the appropriate use of state resources. Moreover, FOPREL recently held a small summit to discuss the impact of climate change in the region, which echoes the discussion organised by ParlAmericas during the last Plenary Assembly in Panama. It should be noted that ParlAmericas attended, as observers, two FOPREL activities organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Commission on Security and Justice on the topic of Citizen Security (Hill and Benamor, interview with authors, 2012; FOPREL, no date).

ParlAmericas: Internal Structure and Growth

As indicated in ParlAmericas' Strategic Plan, extending its membership base towards those countries with little to no participation (for example, some island nations in the Caribbean) will not only increase the legitimacy and democratic potential of the organisation; extending the membership base and institutionalising the organisation will also entail thinking of how to broaden the portfolio of services offered by the organisation, such as training or capacity-building activities.

Associated with this, financing remains a critical issue. In order to broaden the source of funding, it is recommended to put in place a strategy consisting in targeting the private sector, foundations and academic institutions.

Parliamentarians who take part in ParlAmericas are clear that they perceive a great strength of the organisation to be its role as a catalyst and resource centre. To further this role, they recommended establishing a database on comparative law accessible to all members so that each member state can explore planned and actual laws from other states (Blanco, interview with authors, 2012).

Similarly, ParlAmericas can position itself over time as an important facilitator of debates and exchanges between the private sector, international organisations (for example, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank) and non-governmental organisations, particularly on subjects such as citizen security, organised crime or the macroeconomic situation. Involving a greater number of stakeholders will make debates and participation livelier and richer.



Conclusions and Issues for Further Research

ParlAmericas has an important democratic potential and fulfils an important role. It is a platform for dialogue that gives voice to a number of regional and national concerns (Quispe, interview with authors, 2012; Blanco, interview with authors, 2012) As noted by one congressman, parliamentarians have an important role to play:

The citizen has taken on not only the role of social observer but also that of a builder of a collective community which is capable of producing changes, and that of the subject of cross-border relations. Parliamentarians are the channels used by that new internationalised society to express itself. (FIPA, 2009: 8)


Moreover,

It is crucial that Parliaments be entrusted with a bigger role than simply legislating and overseeing. The pressure exerted by fair popular demands has largely turned congresspersons into agents for the execution and provision of public works and services [. . .] People really value these efforts since they contribute to their wellbeing, but such efforts must be institutionalized. (FIPA, 2009: 8)

ParlAmericas is edging in this direction, by convening debates on subjects of shared interest for the continent and by ensuring that lessons learned are shared and serve as inspiration for other countries. ParlAmericas' role as a nexus between different actors and as a change agent is one of its greatest assets and needs to be recognised.

If fully institutionalised, ParlAmericas could be one of the only truly regional parliamentary organisation in Latin America, unlike many other sub-regional parliaments. This would be a unique achievement in itself. But while this would potentially make ParlAmericas an important and legitimate vehicle for regional integration, it would also constitute a challenge to combine over 30 viewpoints, both from a practical and ideological point of view. A number of more pressing challenges will need to be tackled first, however. These include the need to diversify sources of funding and to increase its visibility vis-à-vis national parliaments. ParlAmericas' first strategic plan and communication strategy provide the foundation upon which to institute a more dynamic and legitimate political forum. To sum up:

ParlAmericas requires a more narrow and parliamentary focus on issues, initiatives, and activities. ParlAmericas' future and sustainability will depend on its international awareness and



reputation. ParlAmericas' leadership must evolve to include more engaged, mobilised and resourceful contributors, as well as engage all institutions and individual parliamentarians in the Hemisphere, including the United States. (ParlAmericas, 2011a: 25)

Although a growing membership can be taken as a gauge of success, achieving the above objectives (and others set out in additional strategic documents) will require a more systematic way of assessing their impact in national parliaments. To our knowledge, there is no objective and rigorous way of measuring the impact of political forums—of knowing, for example, that recommendations are in fact implemented and bring real added value—other than that based on hearsay and personal recollection by parliamentarians about how the work of ParlAmericas is used in national legislatures (see Box 1). This is to say that the result of ParlAmericas' engagement cannot be easily quantified. Conducting the level of research and investigation needed to establish the connections between conversations held in the context of parliamentary dialogue and the specific pieces of national legislation is a challenging and resource-intensive proposition.

ParlAmericas has not yet found itself in a position to conduct this research in a comprehensive way, although it has signalled a clear interest. Thus, as a point of further research and engagement, both researchers and practitioners ought to clarify how the impact of regional parliaments and forums such as ParlAmericas can be assessed, and how the recommendations and work that takes place in the organisation (such as on legal harmonisation) can influence debates and legislation at the national level. Simply put, the question in this case is one of determining how many laws are ultimately the fruit of discussions that take place within ParlAmericas. ParlAmericas is currently implementing a project funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) that addresses this question and which attempts to trace the connections between activities and impact through specific indicators. The key will be to develop a robust methodology that rigorously ascribes causation in order to determine if a change at the national level can be pinned to what happens within ParlAmericas. Such a methodology could subsequently be applied to other case studies.



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Annexe

Regional Parliaments


The following provides additional information on the parliamentary organisations in Latin America. Some are fully-fledged regional parliaments, whilst others are parliamentary assemblies.

1. Parlamento Latinoamericano (PARLATINO)

PARLATINO has independent status, although it intends to become over time the legislative organ of the Community of Caribbean and Latin American States (CELAC) (CELAC, 2011). As such, it acts as a coordinating mechanism for member parliaments and as a political forum as well. Its objectives include the promotion of democracy, good governance and human rights, as well as fostering exchange between member parliaments. The oldest regional parliament, it was created in 1964. It is composed of representatives from 22 parliaments who send a limited number of plenipotentiaries (Parlatino, no date). One important function of PARLATINO is to harmonise legislation across member states, and many framework laws (*leyes marco*) have provided guidance for national laws. It is alleged to have strongly influenced the advent of peace in Central America, and helped promote partnerships with the European Union. PARLATINO is considered very adept at communicating with other international organisations, including the OAS and the European Parliament (Quispe, 2012: 66-7; Parlatino). Nevertheless, Malamud and de Sousa consider PARLATINO to be merely symbolic and lacking ‘both political significance and social rootedness’ (Malamud and de Sousa, 2004: 11).

2. Parlamento Andino (PARLANDINO)

PARLANDINO was created in 1975 as the legal and ‘representative’ body of the Andean Community (Comunidad Andina de Naciones, CAN), and as such enjoys a supranational nature. Only four Andean countries are members—Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru—but each has an equal number of representatives (five per country). A landmark decision taken in 1997 provides for the election of said representatives through universal suffrage. To date, only Peru, Ecuador and Colombia have organised elections, with Bolivia pledging to do so in 2015. The Parliament is primarily consultative, with its main role being to monitor different bodies of the Andean Integration System (SAI) and to issue recommendations on a socially equitable process of integration. Specialised institutions include El Observatorio de Seguimiento de Integración Andina, El Observatorio electoral del Parlamento Andino,



and the right to petition. It also facilitates exchanges between parliaments and fosters legal harmonisation. Recommendations are adopted by simple majority (Parlamento Andino, 2010a, b; Blanco Alvarado, 2011). Nevertheless, Malamud and da Silva argue that the Parliament lacks decision-making authority and is undermined by ‘contradictory national interests’ and suggest that ‘the Andean Community [is] a textbook example of what should not be done when designing an integration project’ (Malamud and de Sousa, 2004: 13).


3. The Central American Parliament (PARLACEN)

As with other regional parliaments, PARLACEN’s main purpose is to foster regional integration in Central America. PARLACEN was established by the Central American Integration System (SICA) and does not have any legislative function, although allegedly it will start issuing binding decisions soon (Alvarez, no date). It has the right to appoint and remove the highest executive officials of all SICA institutions.

PARLACEN includes Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic, although not Costa Rica, one of the most democratic countries in the region. President Ricardo Martinelli of Panama opted out of PARLACEN, but both the Central American Court of Justice, SICA’s supranational judicial entity, and the Panamanian Supreme Court of Justice ruled out its exit. PARLACEN’s members, 20 per country, are elected through universal suffrage, and each has the right to appoint an extra two deputies in the form of former presidents and vice-presidents. This has earned PARLACEN the reputation of being a safe haven for former heads of state with dubious track records (Mendez, 2010; Alvarez, no date; Malamud and de Sousa, 2004; Dabène, 2009).

4. MERCOSUR Parliament (PARLASUR)

Created at the end of 2006 as a replacement to the Joint Parliamentary Commission of MERCOSUR, PARLASUR fulfils mainly a deliberative function. Its primary objectives are to guarantee an outlet for the democratic integration of citizens, to monitor and issue decisions, recommendations and/or publications on the process of integration (for example, it issues a yearly human rights report on member states), and to foster legislative harmonisation—that is, to incorporate MERCOSUR’s norms into the legislative framework of member states. As such, Article 12 of the founding Protocol states that the Parliament is allowed to issue a ruling on every legislative draft that is passed by national legislatures.



The MERCOSUR Parliament includes representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and, more recently, Venezuela. Currently, each member has 18 representatives in the Parliament elected for four years, but the introduction of direct universal elections began in 2011 and should conclude by December 2014. These elections will be run according to each member country's schedule and national legislation, although the final intention is to secure a proper gender, ethnic and regional representation from each state. In principle, the direct election of parliamentarians responds to the ideals of greater representation and legitimation of the Parliament. However, a strictly proportional system would hurt smaller countries such as Uruguay and Paraguay, roughly 3.5 and 6.5 million inhabitants respectively, and would benefit larger countries such as Argentina and Brazil (Parlamento del Mercosur; Alvarez Macias, 2009: 10-13; International Democracy Watch; MercoPress, 2010).

On the issue of effectiveness, Dri considers that 'the assembly displays considerable complexity and socialisation features, but has very limited autonomy and attributions' (Dri 2009: 90). Other analysts similarly consider that the Assembly still has some way to go before becoming truly representative. On the one hand, argues Maffei, there are still no mechanisms in place to help citizens feel part of a common space; while on the other hand, representatives still lack the conviction they are representing the population, rather than the interests of their home state (Maffei 2010: 127). However, it is worth noting the presence of the Youth Parliament of Mercosur (Parlamento Juvenil), which acts primarily as a communication channel between the organised youth of member states and the Mercosur Youth Parliament.

5. Other Parliaments or Assemblies

There are a number of other parliaments and assemblies that we have not elaborated on. The Indigenous Parliament (Parlamento Indígena de América), dating from 1987, is a political forum that aims at fostering partnerships with parliaments to support the creation of laws for the indigenous peoples of Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and Argentina. Similar organisations include the Parliament of the Amazonas (protection of the Amazon), and the Parliament of the Caribbeans (Dabène, 2009).

Table 3 Comparative Features of Five Regional Parliaments

		EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT	PARLATINO	CENTRAL AMERICAN PARLIAMENT	ANDEAN PARLIAMENT	MERCOSUR JPC
Representation	Popular election	Yes	No	Yes	In transition	No
	National representation	Proportional	Identical	Identical	Identical	Identical
	Party groups	Permanent, strong	No	Yes, but loose	No	No
	Accountability	To the national constituencies	To the national parliaments	To the national constituencies	In transition: parliaments to constituencies	To the national parliaments
Legislation	Decision on regional budget	Yes	No	No	No	No
	Law-making competencies	Co-decision	No	No	No	No
	Right of initiative	Yes	—	No	No	No
	Consultation procedure	Yes	—	*	No	No
Control or supervision	Government selection	Yes	No	Partial	No	No
	Government censure	Yes	No	Partial	No	No
	Bureaucracy monitoring	Yes	No	Partial	No	No
Leadership formation	Committees	Standing Specialised	Standing	Ad hoc	Standing	Ad hoc
	Hearings	Yes	No	No	No	No
	Salary and immunity	Yes	Already as national reps.	Yes	Yes	Already as national reps.
	Mechanism of decision	Different majorities	Plurality	Different majorities	Absolute majority	Consensus

Source: (Malamud and de Sousa, 2004)



The European Union and the European Parliament

The ancestor of the European Parliament (the 'Common Assembly' of the European Coal and Steel Community) first met in 1952. It was renamed the European Parliamentary Assembly in 1958 before formally becoming the European Parliament (EP) in 1962. Along with the European Commission and the Council of the European Union, which represents member states, the Parliament is the main institution of the European Union. All 754 members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected by direct suffrage every five years. The share of MEPs per country is roughly representative of its population, but limited to between six and 96, and the MEPs are grouped according to political affiliation, not country membership. Voting is normally done through 'co-decision', meaning that the Parliament has to approve legislation together with the EU Council. Although the EP does not have a formal power of initiative, it can call on the Commission to submit any appropriate legislative proposal.

The role of the European Parliament is to a) debate and pass European laws presented by the Commission in partnership with the Council; b) scrutinise other EU institutions, for example, by vetting the 27 members of the Commission or calling a 'motion of censure' on the Commission; and c) debate and adopt the EU's budget in partnership with the Council. The role of the EP extends to areas such as agriculture, energy policy, immigration and even EU expansion, as it must give its assent to the inclusion of any new country.

Through the 'citizen's initiative', one million citizens can directly petition the Commission to bring forward new proposals. Airing live sessions of the European Parliament and the Council also ensures representation and public scrutiny. Decisions taken in plenaries by the Parliament are displayed online, though because voting is often carried out through show of hands, it is not always possible to determine how individual MEPs vote. National parliaments have the important prerogative of ensuring that the Union only acts where results can better be attained at the regional, rather than national, level, a provision known as the Subsidiarity Principle (European Union, a, b).



The African Union and the Pan-African Parliament

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP) was established by the African Union (AU) in 2001 (and inaugurated in 2004) to promote popular participation and representation of African people in decision-making, good governance, oversight and accountability. The PAP currently has 235 members nominated by national parliaments, with President Zuma of South Africa and many other observers calling for the Parliament to instigate direct suffrage.


The PAP is mainly a consultative and advisory body, although it aspires to be given full legislative powers, as outlined in the founding Protocol. Its roles include among others: a) facilitating the effective implementation of the policies and objectives of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Economic Community (AEC); b) promoting the principles of human rights and democracy in Africa; c) facilitating the harmonisation and coordination of laws of member states; d) encouraging good governance, transparency and accountability between Member States; and e) promoting peace, security and stability.

A proposed amendment to the founding Protocol mandates the necessity to include two women in each state delegation of five members. If approved, it would also provide the PAP with the initiative to propose draft laws to the AU Assembly of Heads of States and Governments for consideration (African Union, 2011).

The impact of the PAP has been questioned, particularly as ‘it faces serious institutional challenges and capacity-related obstacles in making itself relevant and responsive to the goals of governance and democracy building in Africa’ (Kisiangani, 2010). In addition to under-funding of the PAP, some also question the legitimacy of such a body, since some national parliaments from where members are drawn come from countries with dubious governance records (Turianskyi and Corrigan, 2009; Pan-African Parliament).

Table 4 Summary: ParlAmericas, the European Parliament and the Pan African Parliament in Comparative Perspective

	Political Forum	Regional Parliaments	
	ParlAmericas	European Parliament (EP)	Pan African Parl. (PAP)
Election	Represents 35 member states, although not all participate (e.g. U.S.A). Members are designated by national parliaments.	Universal suffrage of 754 MEPs every five years	265 representatives elected by the legislatures of the 52 AU states
Structure	1 President; 2 Vice-Presidents; 1 Secretariat	1 President; 14 Vice-Presidents; 1 Secretariat	1 President, 4 Vice-Presidents, 1 Secretariat
Objectives of organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To contribute to the development of inter-parliamentary dialogue in dealing with issues on the hemispheric agenda, and to help strengthen the role of the legislative branch in democracy • To allow parliamentarians from diverse countries to learn from others, share ideas and lessons learned. • Work towards the harmonisation of laws of member states and to contribute to the process of integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To act as a co-legislator for nearly all EU laws • Adopt and amend proposals with the EU Council • The EP has the power of legislative initiative only by working with the Commission • Supervise the work of the Commission and adopt the EU's budget. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight, advisory and consultative powers, either on its own initiative or at the request of the AU. • Work towards the harmonisation of laws of member states • Promote the principles of human rights and democracy, and encourage good governance • Facilitate regional cooperation among regional economic communities and their parliamentary forums
Decision-making	n/a	Ordinary legislative procedure, giving the same weight to the EP and Council on a range of issues	n/a
Link to regional organisation	A defined status is yet to be formally agreed	European Commission is accountable to the EP.	Implements the objectives and policies of the African Union
Legislative power	Drafts recommendations for implementation by individual states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratifies and amends bills • In some cases, can call on Commission to propose draft bills 	Consultative and advisory powers only



Engagement with public/civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject area knowledge and discussion facilitation sought from among academic and civil society experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audiences of the Parliament and Council aired live • Citizen's initiative and right of petition 	A Consultative Dialogue between PAP and CSOs was held in 2009 in order to discuss opportunities to institutionalise CSO engagement
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Source: ParlAmericas, European Parliament, Pan-African Parliament

Note: Any attempt at comparing a regional forum like ParlAmericas and regional parliaments like the EP or the PAP is futile, as they fulfil different functions. The above table is provided purely for illustrative purposes.