

[How to avoid career politicians](#) [1]

Written by [Sam Bowman](#) [2] | Monday 15 November 2010



PJ O'Rourke (whose new book will be launched in the UK later this month) has a [good piece this week](#) [3] which talks about what we could do to improve the quality of the politicians we get. As O'Rourke says, we know one thing: that career politicians are precisely the opposite of whom we want to rule over us. Wanting to be involved in politics might be attributable to different factors ? for instance, principled idealism, or enjoying wielding power. But any politician whose livelihood depends on being elected will have to sacrifice his beliefs to improve his electability. After all, a sitting politician is nothing but someone with a comparative advantage in telling voters what they want to hear. All that doesn't mean that all politicians are necessarily bad, but undoubtedly quite a few are the ones who are there for the wrong reasons. These are the ones we should try to avoid.

How can we do it? PJ O'Rourke suggests legislative juries to minimize the influence of anybody who has any kind of urge to rule others. As usual, it's a great idea. Candidates would be selected by lottery from the general population, with the really wacky ones being weeded out by primary voters, and would legislate like a jury does in a trial ? listening to the arguments put forward by different groups and choosing on that basis. This might yield considerably better results than if the legislation was based on popularity ? the government that can rob Peter to pay Paul will always be able to count on the support of Paul. (It's a pity it so often has Peter's support too, but that's a different story.)

This might be fanciful, but there might be more minor changes we can make. For instance, we could stop paying MPs a salary: if a politician isn't dependent on winning an election to feed his family, he might be slightly less interested in voting to please public opinion and the party whips. This would also be a good way of ensuring that politicians have achieved something professionally rather than simply living off the taxpayer. Term limits could also be a good idea, but should include all elected jobs to prevent careerists from shifting around jobs, as happens in the US. But maybe even these minor reforms are as hopeless as trying to implement a jury system ? we'd have to get these reforms passed through parliament and, in the end, turkeys rarely vote for Christmas.

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