

Legislature

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024



Indicator

Sufficient Legislative Resources

Question

Do members of the legislature possess sufficient personnel and structural resources to effectively monitor government activities?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = As a group, legislative members have access to a range of resources that are suited for effectively monitoring all government activity.
- 8-6 = As a group, legislative members have access to a range of resources that are suited for effectively monitoring a government's key activities.
- 5-3 = As a group, legislative members have access to a range of resources that are suited for selectively monitoring some government activities.
- 2-1 = The resources provided to legislative members are not suited for any effective monitoring of the government.

Finland

Score 10

In Finland, the parliament has full control over its resources, allowing it to finance its own operations. The legislature has resources such as deputy expert staff and administrative support staff (legislative libraries and legislative research units). It also has monetary allowances allocated for conducting independent research. This includes parliamentary committees, which can commission small-scale research projects. The legislative research unit consistently produces reports and studies.

The Information Service of the Library of Parliament offers resources for accessing information related to law, social sciences and parliamentary matters. The Information Service conducts thorough information searches within these domains, utilizing the library's collections, international organization materials and EU resources, serving legislators, their advisers and the general public. The focus is on empowering clients to independently discover and utilize parliamentary documents, statutes, legal cases, and materials from the EU and international organizations. Additionally, the center offers self-service access to databases.

The Library of Parliament offers an "Ask a Librarian" online reference inquiry service. The staff provide hands-on guidance tailored to specific needs, covering topics such as library and archive collections, electronic materials, and information sources across various subjects. Personal training sessions, lasting about an hour, can be conducted in person or through remote access applications such as Microsoft Teams.

Citation:

Parliament

Information

Service,

<https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/naineduskuntatoimii/kirjasto/palvelut/tietopalvelu/Pages/default.aspx>

Germany

Score 10

The legislature in Germany includes the Federal Parliament (Bundestag), the state parliaments (Landtage), and the Federal Council (Bundesrat).

The finances of the Bundestag and the Bundesrat are part of the federal budget. For 2023, €1.141 billion was allocated for parliament, constituting 0.24% of the overall budget. The budget for the Council was set at €9.7 million, which is 0.01% of the total budget (Bundesministerium der Finanzen, 2023). According to the V-Dem Index (2023) score of 0.99, the legislature controls the resources that finance its internal operations and the perquisites of its members.

While the federal budget is designed by the Federal Ministry of Finance and decided on by the government, parliament holds the budgetary right, meaning the budget draft must secure a majority in parliament. Consequently, the budget must be submitted to the Bundestag and Bundesrat for discussion and frequent revision before it can take effect (Deutscher Bundestag, n.d.). The budgeting process at the state level follows the same procedure.

The Bundestag has additional resources in the form of administrative support staff, totaling 3,200 employees. The administration consists of multiple departments. For example, the central division of the administration is responsible for financial and personnel resources. Specifically, it draws up the budget and financial plan and handles public procurement. This means that the legislative body exercises control over its own resources.

Additionally, as part of the administration, the Bundestag has a library and documentation directorate responsible for collecting documents necessary for parliamentary work starting from 1949. Furthermore, the Bundestag has a research service directorate, which is divided into ten thematic research sections. These research sections are intended to strengthen the decision-making ability of individual members of parliament and parliamentary committees in the legislative process by compiling and preparing information in a way that covers, if possible, all opinions or alternatives on an issue (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023a).

According to the federal budget for 2023, the legislature has approximately €4.5 million allocated to parliamentary committees and citizens' councils. However, the budget does not make it clear how much of that allowance is spent on independent research (Bundesministerium der Finanzen, 2023).

Even though the exact monetary allowance available for the research unit is unclear, the legislative research unit produces a significant number of reports each month. For instance, in October 2022, 28 reports were published, while in September, the

different thematic units published 59 reports. Moreover, the research unit provides internal briefing documents to parliamentarians. Nevertheless, most of the publications were reports and not studies (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023b).

Citation:

Bundesministerium der Finanzen. 2023. “Sollwerte des Haushalts 2024.” <https://www.bundeshaushalt.de/DE/Bundeshaushalt-digital/bundeshaushalt-digital.html>

Deutscher Bundestag. n.d. “Der Bundeshaushalt.” https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/aufgaben/haushalt_neu

Deutscher Bundestag. 2023. “Die Verwaltung des Deutschen Bundestages.” <https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/verwaltung>

Deutscher Bundestag. 2023. “Dokumente, Gutachten und Ausarbeitungen.” <https://www.bundestag.de/analysen>

Varieties of Democracy. 2023. “Variable Graph.” https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/

Sweden

Score 10

The Riksdag Administration (Riksdagsförvaltningen) has a staff of about 700 employees and is a public agency tasked with providing administrative support and services to the members of the Swedish parliament (Sveriges Riksdag 2023). These services include providing expert knowledge as a basis for policy decisions. The agency is also mandated to ensure that the Riksdag constitutes a good work environment.

Riksdagsförvaltningen is responsible for a range of tasks, including communicating the Riksdag’s work to the public and maintaining the buildings and artifacts it houses. Reports drafted by Riksdagsförvaltningen are available upon request.

Citation:

Sveriges Riksdag. 2023. “The Riksdag Administration.” <https://www.riksdagen.se/en/how-the-riksdag-works/the-riksdag-administration/#the-council-for-members-affairs-02>

United States

Score 10

The United States is an example of a system with a “strong” legislature (Polsby 1968). The executive branch has little control over Congress.

Congress accrues its own financial resources, sets its own operational rules, can sit at a manner and time of its choosing, and allocate time to legislation as it sees fit. Congress has the legal authority to compel members of the executive branch to provide evidence and testimony and can even imprison individuals who resist its subpoenas (Kornberg 2023). Until a century ago, Congress held prisoners in the Capitol building, but now it allows penalties to be determined through the courts (Jones et al. 2019). For example, in January 2024, Peter Navarro, an adviser to President Donald Trump, was sentenced to four months in prison for failing to adhere to a subpoena from the House of Representatives to testify about the Jan. 6, 2021, attacks on the U.S. Capitol.

Congress has extraordinary legislative powers (Johnson 2020). The president's signature is not required for legislation to go into effect. If the president fails to sign a bill within ten days (excluding Sundays) of its passage by both houses, it will become law without his signature. A president can try to prevent a bill from becoming law by vetoing it, but if two-thirds of each chamber override the president's veto, the bill will become law anyway. This enables Congress to pass legislation that might be opposed by the president. Although this happens rarely in practice, in theory, Congress could pass transformative legislation even if the president did not support it.

In addition, the Senate has the special power to block the president's appointments to the federal judiciary and executive branches (Swift 2019). This is an extraordinarily powerful authority, which the Senate regularly uses to stymie presidents. For example, a president cannot even reshuffle a Cabinet without the Senate's votes for each individual change, making such changes within the executive branch rare during a president's term (Mayhew 2005).

Citation:

Bryan Jones, Sean Theriault, and Michelle Whyman. 2019. *The Great Broadening*. Chicago: Chapter 9 – 'The Administrative State and Its Legislative Oversight.'

David Mayhew. 2005. *Divided We Govern*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Elaine Swift. 1996. *The Making of an American Senate*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Nelson Polsby. 1968. "The Institutionalization of the US House of Representatives." *American Political Science Review*.

Richard Johnson. 2020. *The End of the Second Reconstruction*. Cambridge: Polity.

Belgium

Score 9

Belgium is a parliamentary democracy where the government relies on the support of parliament to function. De jure, the legislature has full authority to monitor and constrain government actions. It can summon ministers and experts, and propose legislation without needing government approval. Parliament frequently establishes special committees or investigative commissions (commissions d'enquête) for in-depth investigations. Since the government is often a coalition of parties holding a parliamentary majority, members of parliament typically play predictable roles: coalition members defend the government's actions, while opposition members criticize nearly every action. This dynamic is not unique to Belgium and is a common feature of parliamentary democracies (Sieberer 2020; Bäck et al. 2022).

Recurring tensions within coalition parties have facilitated the work of the opposition, enhancing parliament's capacity to monitor government actions. Not all coalition partners are always willing to defend the actions of a single minister. While Belgium is generally considered an average-to-good performer in legislative oversight (Bäck et al. 2022, Fig. 5), recent performance has been above this long-term average.

Members of parliament are sometimes criticized for having excessive budgets and personnel, with several MPs using their resources to support their parties. MPs are also expected to transfer some of their wages to their party.

Citation:

Bäck, H., Müller, W. C., Angelova, M., and Strobl, D. 2022. "Ministerial Autonomy, Parliamentary Scrutiny and Government Reform Output in Parliamentary Democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* 55 (2): 254-286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211024312>

Sieberer, U. 2020. "Party Unity in Parliamentary Democracies: A Comparative Analysis." In *The Impact of Legislatures*, eds. Olivier Rozenberg and Shane Martin, 141-169. Abington: Routledge.

https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20190307_04238571

https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20190704_04494384

Czechia

Score 9

The parliament has resources to conduct its legislative work. The Office of the Chamber provides professional administrative and technical support for the deputies. Additionally, legislators have access to a parliamentary library. Legislation is prepared in parliamentary committees; currently, there are 18 committees. The parliament can also establish ad hoc and investigative committees. All parties and movements form political clubs.

Citation:

Czech parliament. <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/hp.sqw?k=2000>

Library of the Czech parliament. <https://www.psp.cz/sqw/hp.sqw?k=181>

Denmark

Score 9

Work in the Danish parliament is organized in committees structured to mirror the line ministries. The Danish legislature is strong compared to other parliaments and is consistently ranked as the most powerful in Western Europe (Binderkrantz 2015). This power partly explains why minority governments are comparatively common, as opposition parties can expect to secure policy concessions even if they are not formally part of the government (Strøm 2022).

There are three readings of a proposal in committees, during which the committee can request information and summon expert opinions to clarify any unclear issues. Furthermore, according to the Standing Orders of the Danish parliament, at least 30 days must pass from the time a law is proposed until it is passed. This measure is intended to give parliament time to scrutinize the proposal. Thus, committees effectively serve as a monitoring mechanism that allows opposition parties to scrutinize government proposals.

The Danish parliamentary groups (parties) are well funded. A parliamentary group, defined as a group containing four or more members, receives DKK 4.1 million per year. Additionally, the group is allocated DKK 1.5 million annually for expert

advice. Each member of parliament is provided approximately DKK 850,000 each year to seek individual advice (Danish Parliament 2023). Moreover, members of parliament earn the right to pay for further education that might help them in their parliamentary career or if they are not reelected.

Citation:

Danish Parliament. 2023. <https://www.ft.dk/da/partier/om-politiske-partier/gruppestoette-og-regnskaber#180037B74C7A413C877CC45EEA9A1B41>

Martin, et al. 2023. *Legislative Resources, Corruption, and Incumbency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strøm, K. 2022. *A Land of Minority Governments*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Italy

Score 9

The Italian parliament has a symmetrical structure with two houses, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, both elected by the people. Both houses have the same powers in terms of lawmaking and control over the executive branch. Each house of the Italian parliament enjoys considerable independence, with its own internal rules governing its operations, including administrative, financial, and even judicial matters (known as *autodichia*). This autonomy is established in the Italian constitution (Article 64).

In line with these principles, two distinct bureaucratic bodies, fully autonomous from the executive branch's bureaucracy and from each other (except for recently expanded collaborative efforts), currently serve the two houses. Gianniti and Lupo (2023) report 1,042 employees in the Chamber of Deputies and 585 in the Senate, divided between senior officials, stenographers, documentalists, secretaries and assistants. These figures encompass all full-time, permanent employees recruited through public competition and directly hired by the administration. The number of permanent staff is significantly reduced compared to the past due to the empowerment of the executive following attempts to shift the Italian political system toward majoritarianism.

In addition to the permanent staff, which is generally characterized by a high qualitative level, there are also employees hired directly by parliamentary groups – whose funds have been increased to compensate for the end of parties' public funding – and individual members of parliament. The recruitment processes for these positions are less transparent and regulated, often relying on informal arrangements. The two parliamentary administrations play a crucial role in supporting the legislative and oversight functions of the Italian parliament. They provide technical, legal, procedural, documentary, and administrative assistance to both houses of parliament. These administrations operate independently and impartially, adhering to the principles of autonomy and fairness.

Both chambers of the Italian parliament are equipped with specialized units dedicated to providing parliamentarians with the necessary documentation to carry

out their duties effectively. Alongside the resources offered by the two parliamentary libraries and historical archives, parliamentarians can access the House and Senate Research Departments. These departments compile comprehensive documentation that accompanies and explains the contents of each bill under consideration in parliament. These resources empower members of parliament, particularly those from opposition parties, to scrutinize the information presented by the executive. Research departments periodically produce reports on legislation.

For in-depth technical assessments of the budgetary implications of proposed legislation, the Italian parliament relies on the expertise of the State Budget Departments in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. These departments evaluate the financial impact of bills, amendments, and other laws. Additionally, the Parliamentary Budget Office, established in 2014 following the 2012 constitutional amendment introducing the principle of budget balance, provides specialized analysis and support to Parliament. Operating within parliament with a high degree of independence, the Parliamentary Budget Office maintains its administrative structure, distinct from the two parliamentary departments.

While parliamentarians have significant resources available for effectively monitoring the executive, members of parliament do not always fully utilize them, often opting for more politically visible disputes instead.

Since a 2020 constitutional amendment, the Italian Senate comprises a total of 200 elected (reduced from 315) and so-called life senators, who are appointed for life. The Chamber of Deputies has also been reduced, from 630 to 400 deputies, starting with the 19th legislative term in October 2022. Before this constitutional reform, members of parliament were members of only one committee; however, beginning with the 19th legislature, they may be required to serve on multiple committees. Consequently, the workload of members of parliament within committees is expected to increase, potentially reducing the effectiveness of legislative action and oversight.

Citation:

Gianniti, Luigi, and Nicola Lupo. 2023. "Italy's Parliamentary Administration." In Thomas Christiansen, Elena Griglio, and Nicola Lupo, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Parliamentary Administration*. Abingdon: Routledge, 306-319.

Norway

Score 9

In the Norwegian parliamentary system, the legislature – the Storting, at the national level – has a monopoly on determining taxes and deciding any public expenditure. Formally, the legislature may allocate the resources it regards as necessary for its own activities. However, according to the constitution, the executive is responsible for preparing the knowledge base for new policy proposals.

The Storting's administration consists of seven departments and 29 sections, including a Knowledge and Documentation Department, and employs a staff of about 450 (the Storting, 2024). Compared to the apparatus in the ministries, the resources available to the legislature and the members of parliament are modest. If the legislature wants an issue investigated, the normal procedure is to require this from the government, rather than initiating it on its own. It is the obligation of ministers to come to the parliament to answer any questions the legislature might have. In recent years, a special parliamentary committee may require ministers and others involved in a case to come to a separate hearing to answer questions from the members of parliament. The control of the legislature over the executive is not so much a matter of material resources, but rests in the legal and procedural controls embedded in the parliamentary system.

Citation:

The Storting, 2024. "Administration." <https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/Administration/>

Slovenia

Score 9

The National Assembly is adequately resourced. Although the Assembly has its own job classification system, its administration has always employed fewer staff than provided for in the HR allocation plan classification system. In 2022, the Assembly employed around 250 people in its administration.

Although the Assembly had already enjoyed various types of autonomy before 2019, it was legally strengthened by the National Assembly Act. This Act ensures greater coherence between its different forms of autonomy, including administrative, financial, regulatory, and security autonomy. Deputies can rely on the support of the Assembly's administration, the research-documentation division, and, within this division, the research unit. The unit provides expert, objective, and politically neutral support to members of parliament and other parliamentary actors, such as working bodies, PPGs, and the secretary-general, or on their own initiative.

In the 2018 – 2022 legislature, for example, the Section prepared 157 research requests. As in the previous legislature, most requests came from opposition members of parliament (59), followed by ruling coalition members of parliament (22), while Assembly working bodies requested nine and political groups requested 17 such requests.

The parliamentary groups employ several staff members who have been paid by the Assembly for administrative, organizational, and technical tasks since 1993. Each parliamentary group is entitled to several staff members, with larger groups allocated slightly more staff. During the last parliamentary term, more than 100 people were employed in the political groups.

Each member of the European Parliament also has a personal allowance for their office, which ranges from €500 to 800 per month, and additional entitlements. They

also have a budget for education and training. For 2022 and 2023, 90 members of parliament spent around €45,000 per year.

Citation:

Državni zbor. 2022. “Poročilo o delu državnega zbora v mandatnem obdobju 2018-2022.” https://fotogalerija.dz-rs.si/datoteke/Publikacije/PorocilaDZ/Mandat_2018%E2%80%932022/Porocilo_o_delu_Drzavnega_zbora_v_mandatnem_obdobju_2018%E2%80%932022_.pdf

Krašovec, A. 2023. “Slovenia’s Parliamentary Administration.” In T. Christiansen, E. Griglio, and N. Lupo, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Parliamentary Administrations*, 425-434. Routledge.

N1. 2024. “Izobraževanja poslancev: Koliko denarja so porabile poslanske skupine?” <https://n1info.si/novice/slovenija/izobrazevanja-poslancev-koliko-denarja-so-porabile-poslanske-skupine/>

Dnevnik. 2022. “Poslanci DZ: poleg plače dobijo še vrsto dodatkov.” <https://www.dnevnik.si/1042988624>

Austria

Score 8

Members of the Austrian Nationalrat receive administrative support from the parliamentary administration (Parlamentsdirektion). Within this administration, a specific unit, the “Rechts-, Legislativ- & Wissenschaftliche Dienst (RLW),” provides legal, economic, and social science-based information to all MPs and the wider public. This service aims to ensure that MPs are informed about national and international media reporting at all times. In 2019, the parliamentary administration launched the EULE Media Monitor / 360° Topic-Monitoring system, which helps parliamentarians stay up to date by delivering information in an easy-to-access web-based form.

Further, the parliamentary staff members law (“Parlamentsmitarbeiter:innen-Gesetz”), which can be amended by parliament, provides all MPs with a monthly allowance for hiring support staff. In 2018, the amount available for such support staff was approximately €3,600 per month, gross (after deduction of other employers’ costs for this personnel), which compares favorably with the situation in several other countries (see Rada for Europe, Assistants to MPs; www.undp.org/sites).

Parliamentary assistants are typically responsible for preparing parliamentary meetings – both plenary and committee sessions – and maintaining contact with citizens and the wider public. These assistants can work for several MPs and can form working groups serving up to seven MPs. It is common to split financial resources and tasks among multiple assistants. Many MPs employ two part-time assistants: one serving in their constituency and another in Vienna.

Citation:

<https://www.parlament.gv.at/verstehen/das-hohe-haus/parlamentsdirektion/#:~:text=Die%20Parlamentsdirektion%20ist%20f%C3%BCr%20den,Plenarsitzungen%20von%20Nationalrat%20und%20Bundesrat>

<https://www.ipu.org/innovation-tracker/story/austria-uses-ai-keep-mps-informed>

<https://www.diepresse.com/3825077/mitarbeiter-die-heimlichen-helfer-im-parlament>

<https://www.vol.at/nationalrat-mit-hoeheren-spesen-in-die-sommerpause/4022548>

https://austria-forum.org/af/AustriaWiki/Nationalrat_%28%C3%96sterreich%29

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ua/assistants-to-MPs-EN.pdf>

Greece

Score 8

Members of the Greek parliament have access to a variety of resources to support their legislative duties.

One of their key resources is the parliament’s library, established in 1846, making it one of the oldest and largest libraries in Greece. Located in three buildings in central Athens, the library is equipped with modern systems and is also accessible to researchers. Each member of parliament is entitled to employ two researchers and three additional assistants, with the cost covered by the state budget. In the past, some MPs were criticized for employing family members as assistants rather than qualified researchers.

Political parties represented in parliament have their own research support groups, and the largest parties also maintain affiliated research institutions. For instance, the Democracy Institute “K. Karamanlis” is affiliated with the New Democracy party, while the “N. Poulantzas” Institute is linked to the Syriza party.

Although the Greek legislature does not have a dedicated research unit like the US Congress or the UK House of Commons, it relies on several specialized research units covering different fields:

Hellenic Parliament Budget Office: This unit, composed of economics professors and experts, provides respected reports on Greece’s economic and fiscal performance.

Scientific Service of the Parliament: A committee of public law professors and legal experts offers legal advice to MPs, particularly regarding submitted bills.

Foundation of the Parliament: This research unit focuses on historical studies and is staffed by history professors and other experts.

Citation:

<https://library.parliament.gr/%CE%A0%CE%BB%CE%B7%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%86%CE%BF%CF%81%CE%AF%CE%B5%CF%82/%CE%97-%CE%92%CE%B9%CE%B2%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%B8%CE%AE%CE%BA%CE%B7>

Hellenic Parliament Budget Office: <https://www.pbo.gr/>

Foundation of the Parliament: <https://foundation.parliament.gr/>

Scientific Service of the Parliament, <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Dioikitiki-Organosi/Ypiresies/Epistimoniki-Ypiresia>

<https://idkaramanlis.gr/en/>

“N. Poulantzas” Institute: <https://poulantzas.gr/en/>

Canada

Score 7

In British parliamentary systems of government, legislatures play a crucial oversight role over the executive branch, ensuring accountability, transparency, and responsible governance. The oversight functions of legislatures in these systems involve various mechanisms designed to better scrutinize the actions, policies, and decisions of the government (Stewart 1974).

Members of the legislature, especially those from the opposition, have the opportunity to question government ministers during question periods. These sessions provide a platform for holding the government accountable for its decisions and actions. Debates on proposed legislation, policies, and government initiatives also allow for thorough examination and scrutiny.

Federal members of Parliament each receive a budget to support their activities and hire staff, typically 4-5 per member of Parliament. Some of these staff members work in the House of Commons, while others are based in local constituency offices (House of Commons of Canada, 2021).

Committees are another essential component of parliamentary oversight. Composed of members of the legislature, committees specialize in specific policy areas or functions. They conduct inquiries, investigations, and hearings, producing reports that scrutinize government activities, propose recommendations, and hold ministers to account.

Legislatures in Canada typically have research offices that aid legislative committees in their work. Individual MPs and others also have research allowances, which allow them to hire staff to research public policy issues. However, Westminster-style government means that, barring a minority government situation, a majority government controls Parliament during its time in office. This includes key committee assignments and appointments, allowing the majority government to quash or ignore criticisms and complaints as it wishes.

The legislature also has the power to approve the government’s budget, providing a significant avenue for fiscal and program oversight. Budget debates and reviews allow members to examine government spending priorities, fiscal policies, and the allocation of public funds. The legislature can question ministers on financial decisions and hold them accountable for effective financial management. Public

Accounts Committees – a subset of parliamentary committees – focus specifically on overseeing government expenditures and auditing government financial reports. These committees examine the effectiveness of government programs and ensure fiscal responsibility.

In a parliamentary system, the government must hold the confidence of the majority in the legislature to remain in office. A vote of no confidence can lead to the government’s resignation or the calling of new elections. The prospect of such votes provides a powerful mechanism for the legislature to express approval or disapproval of the government’s performance.

Legislatures also have the authority to launch investigations and inquiries into specific issues, policies, or government actions. This can involve summoning witnesses, requesting documents, and conducting hearings. Inquiries serve to uncover information, assess the government’s conduct, and recommend changes or reforms. Legislatures facilitate public engagement by providing a forum for representatives to express the concerns and interests of their constituents. Public input, inquiries, and petitions contribute to the oversight process and help ensure that government policies align with public expectations.

The legislature also reviews or confirms certain appointments made by the government, including the Speaker of the House. This process ensures scrutiny of individuals chosen for key positions, such as judges or heads of independent agencies.

Most Canadian legislatures also have independent officers, such as ombudsmen and auditors general, who report directly to the legislature. These officers conduct audits, investigations, and reviews of government operations, finances, and administrative practices, providing impartial assessments to the legislature.

Citation:
House of Commons Canada. 2021. “Members’ Allowances and Services.”
<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/MAS/mas-e.pdf>
Stewart, J. 1974. The Canadian House of Commons. Montreal: Publisher Name.

Estonia

Score 7

Compared to the parliaments of many other countries, the Riigikogu has a modest support structure. All administrative staff are employed by the Chancellery of the Riigikogu, and can be divided into three categories. The first category includes analysts working in the Law and Analysis Department, who provide expert advice and produce information sheets and study reports. Due to budget and personnel limitations (10 advisers in total), their studies are typically very limited. At the request of parliamentary committees, the Analysis Department can also commission studies from universities or research institutes. In 2022 – 2023, only one such

external study was commissioned. There is also a small Foresight Center (Arengliseire Keskus, ASK) with six people that carries out various studies on public policies. ASK is independent in terms of deciding on studies and research priorities, but its budget depends on the allocations in the state budget, approved by the Riigikogu.

The second category of staff includes standing committee support staff. A standing committee typically has three to five advisers. The third group is made up of the advisers to party groups. In total, 31 people work for the six parliamentary party groups. Legislators can use a reading room in the parliamentary building and the National Library, which serves as a parliamentary library. Members of the parliament also benefit from allowances that they can use to order expert analyses, studies or information overviews. However, there is little evidence that the allowances are extensively used for such purposes.

France

Score 7

French legislators usually have two members of personal staff each. They also benefit from the staff of legislative committees, who are usually highly qualified and selected through competitive exams. Finally, they may draw on the resources and staff of the Court of Auditors if needed. There is no substantive parliamentary research unit, but there is a library, and parliamentarians are increasingly resorting to hearings, even if the number of hearings remains modest in comparative terms. Generally speaking, the 2008 constitutional reform has improved the parliament's prerogatives.

Each legislature produces several thousand legislative reports, and the number has been increasing over recent legislatures.

Citation:

Rozenberg, Olivier, et al. 2017. "La révision constitutionnelle du 23 juillet 2008 a-t-elle renforcé le Parlement français?." Débats du LIEPP 3: En-ligne

Ireland

Score 7

The legislature, Oireachtas Éireann (the Irish parliament), has three main tasks in policymaking: participating in the legislative process, performing control and scrutiny functions, and providing legitimacy for public policy. Connaughton (2021) notes the emergence of executive and party-political dominance due to the existence of the party whip system, a historical lack of resources, a weak committee system, the use of standing orders rules, and Ireland's political culture of service through local constituency affairs. Following 2016, a sub-committee on parliamentary Dáil reform recommended more independence for the Dáil and less government control. Under the label of "New Politics," much depends on the nature of government and opposition (Connaughton 2021).

The legislature now exercises control over its resources and operations. A 2016 parliamentary business committee determines committee and parliamentary activity, supported by deputies' expert staff, administrative support staff (e.g., research units) and monetary allowances for independent research. Parliamentary committees play a crucial role by allowing members to call expert witnesses and explore the implications of proposed legislation. Notable progress has been made by the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action, a cross-party and bicameral initiative that has proposed innovative policies. Additionally, the mechanism of parliamentary questions, both oral and written, has been used innovatively, though sometimes misused. The Parliamentary Budget Office, a practice well established in other parliaments but new to Ireland, is still evolving but has already proven useful to opposition parties. It aids in costing alternative budgets and policy proposals and advancing processes such as gender and poverty proofing.

The Oireachtas Library and Research Service, which manages the Irish parliamentary library, has become more effective in recent years, servicing individual members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, committees and staff of both houses. Although resources are considered inadequate relative to peer jurisdictions in the EU (e.g., Denmark, Finland and Sweden), they are improving. While ministers recruit advisers and experts, there are no internships that allow members to recruit researchers. However, a system of secondments has recently been established, indicating growth in legislative and research capacity.

Connaughton, B. 2021. *Committees and the Legislature: Policy Analysis in Ireland*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Houses of the Oireachtas. 2023. "Library & Research Service." https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2024/2024-01-03_bill-digest-thirty-ninth-amendment-of-the-constitution-family-bill-2023_en.pdf

Houses of the Oireachtas. 2023. "Parliamentary Questions." <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/questions/>

Houses of the Oireachtas. 2023. "The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)." <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/publications/?author=parliamentary-budget-office>

Israel

Score 7

Each member of the Knesset has three assistants who are hired directly. Each member of the Knesset also has a personal budget to use at their discretion. In addition, members of the Knesset can utilize the resources of the Knesset Research and Information Center. The center has significantly increased its staff in the last couple of years and now has about 50 full-time employees. The center publishes about 300 research papers a year, including budget assessments for bills, policy papers and comparative reviews on specific issues. It can also respond to short questions from members of the Knesset. This significantly improves the analytical capacity of members of the Knesset and, as a result, enhances their oversight ability. Demand for the center's papers and evaluations increases every year.

In addition, each committee chair has a legal advisor who can assist with legislation brought before the committee and the Knesset has a legal advisory department to assist members of the Knesset.

At the same time, the budget for each member of the Knesset is limited and typically used for political purposes rather than research. Although the number of assistants increased from two to three, it remains insufficient. One assistant generally handles media issues, another oversees legislation and only one is responsible for all other tasks, including oversight. Furthermore, while some members of the Knesset have very experienced assistants, many others recruit young, inexperienced assistants who are frequently replaced. This high turnover is partly due to the relatively low salaries. Thus, although members of the Knesset have greater access to resources than before, these resources remain insufficient for effective oversight.

Lithuania

Score 7

Members of the Seimas have adequate personnel and structural resources to monitor government activities effectively. They have access to personal staff, personnel assigned to parliamentary committees and commissions, and other structures, as well as the Parliamentary Research Unit. This unit provides analyses of other countries' policies and other issues deemed important by Seimas members. Additionally, the parliamentary Committee for the Future, established after the 2020 Seimas elections, has reinforced focus on the Seimas's analytical capacities, often organizing discussions with scholars and expert institutions.

Proper impact assessments of draft legislation are very rare. Although the Statute of the Seimas includes a provision requiring impact assessments for proposed draft laws, members of the Seimas usually do not provide them. Expenses incurred by calling experts for testimony or consultation can be reimbursed, but members of parliament are typically unwilling to allocate adequate funds for commissioning external impact assessment studies so as to avoid being perceived by the media as wasting taxpayers' money. Thus, despite the availability of resources, political incentives frequently prevent effective parliamentary oversight, including the commonly held assumption that introducing draft legal initiatives reflects a member of parliament's diligence, which in turn leads to a heavy focus on lawmaking,

Parties that are part of governing coalitions are often unwilling to engage in self-monitoring, while opposition parties frequently lack the capability for constructive external oversight. They use external expert impact assessments of draft legislation to delay governing coalition initiatives rather than to obtain a genuine analysis of the possible effects of the draft laws. Additionally, the parliament utilizes the results of audit reports produced by the National Audit Office. It is also common for members of the Seimas to employ their party colleagues as advisers or assistants based on relationships of trust rather than these individuals' specific expertise.

New Zealand

Score 7

Members of Parliament (MPs) have access to pooled personnel and sufficient resources to monitor government activities. For one, the Parliamentary Service provides support to MPs, including administrative, research and advisory services. However, given the small size of New Zealand's Parliament, these services are relatively limited compared to those in other democracies. Although MPs also participate in select committees, which have their own staff, legal advisers and resources to investigate executive actions, governments frequently call urgency motions to rush legislation through Parliament and bypass select committees (Martin 2015).

MPs also have access to party research budgets and party research units. However, the larger parties (National, Labour) are at a distinct advantage, as minor parties (ACT, Greens, Te Pāti Māori) command far fewer resources (Schnapp and Harfst 2005). Moreover, a proposal to create a parliamentary budget office to enable parliamentarians to engage more fully in budget and pre-budget scrutiny activities failed to gain traction, although calls for its introduction have remained a topic of conversation in the media (Transparency International 2023).

Citation:

Martin, J. E. 2015. "Parliament." In J. Hayward, ed. *Government and Politics in Aotearoa New Zealand*. 6th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schnapp, K.-U., and Harfst, P. 2005. "Parlamentarische Informations- und Kontrollressourcen in 22 westlichen Demokratien." *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 36: 348-70.

Transparency International. 2023. "The Election Campaign Highlights Why New Zealand Needs a Parliamentary Budget Office." <https://www.transparency.org.nz/blog/the-election-campaign-highlights-why-new-zealand-needs-a-parliamentary-budget-office>

Slovakia

Score 7

The Slovak parliament (NR SR) and its members of parliament fully control their resources. NR SR has a separate chapter in the state budget, and the amount of allocated resources is annually determined by the Law on the State Budget. Members of parliament have access to a parliamentary library, and the office of the parliament provides an information service to all members of parliament. They also have a budget for assistants, who are expected to perform research and analysis.

The Parliamentary Institute is a specialized research and information center that, upon official request, delivers analyses related to laws negotiated in parliament, responds to members' of parliament information requests, drafts comparative analytical papers, and provides training for MPs. The parliament may commission expertise, such as from think tanks, to enhance evidence-based decision-making. Political parties also provide additional research and analytical support to their

members of parliament (see Mackie, 2022). However, the evidence available through these channels and from other sources, like universities, is not systematically prepared and used for political decision-making in Slovakia (see, for example, Nemeč, 2022).

Citation:

Mackie, I. et al. 2022. Quality of Legislative Process: Building a Conceptual Model and Developing Indicators. Luxembourg: European Union

Nemeč, J. 2022. Public Administration and Governance: Slovakia. Brussels: European Union.

Australia

Score 6

Legislators have a range of resources to monitor government activities and influence the lawmaking process, which tends to be dominated by the executive under Westminster-style principles. Parliaments have well-resourced libraries that undertake research and produce reports. Perhaps more significant are the activities of parliamentary committees, which can question ministers to ensure accountability and conduct inquiries drawing on expertise from the community, such as academics and civil society actors.

Parliamentarians also have access to advisers. However, after the 2022 election, the Labor government reduced the number of advisers for independent members of parliament funded by the Commonwealth from four to one, and reduced funding for advisers to minor parties. This move met with fierce opposition from independents and minor parties, but the government argued that increased resourcing of the Parliamentary Library would ensure that parliamentarians continued to have sufficient resources.

Despite the significant resources at their disposal, Australian parliaments' capacities have declined relative to the executive's. Political scientists like James Walter identify a decades-long strengthening of the Prime Minister's Office, with greater focus on the leader and personal advisers at the expense of parliamentary influence (Walter 2021).

Citation:

Walter, J. 2021. "Power without Purpose." Inside Story. <https://insidestory.org.au/power-without-purpose/>

https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2022/July/Personal_employee_positions

Hungary

Score 6

With its budgetary rights, the Hungarian parliament has the de jure right to control its budget. De facto, the parliamentary majority usually follows the policies set by the core executive. According to the standing orders of the Hungarian parliament, all parliamentary party groups can invite experts, and committee sessions are open to

the public. In practice, however, Fidesz's overwhelming majority, reinforced in the 2022 elections, as well as the hectic pace of legislation, have reduced the involvement of experts to a mere formality. While the rights are in place, and there are few legal obstacles to the summoning of experts, the consultation of experts does not play a significant role in policymaking. The reduction in the number of parliamentary seats from 386 to 199 made the parliament better fitted to a country the size of Hungary, and made the legislature more cost-effective. Still, it reduced the amount of experts and assistants, who are essential to parliament's work in general. Today, the parliament has a support staff of 741 people. Compared to parliaments of the same size (Austria: 250 legislators, 460 staffers; Czechia: 200/460), the Hungarian ratio is excellent and maybe even indicates overstaffing. At the same time, it should be noted that due to the governing party's direct access to public funds through its control over the administration, it has a sizable advantage over opposition parties when it comes to employing staff and experts (Susánszky et al. 2020). Opposition parties try to compensate by reallocating the more generous funds provided for their European Parliament members.

Citation:

Susánszky, P., Unger, A., and Kopper, Á. 2020. "Hungary's Over-Powerful Government Party and the Desperate Opposition." *European Review* 28(5): 761-777.

Japan

Score 6

Individual parliamentarians have only a few staff members to support their work. Until the 1990s, each parliamentarian could employ only two official secretaries in their legislative office. In reality, secretaries usually served in the politician's electoral office and communicated with voters. An additional secretarial post in charge of policymaking was introduced in 1993, but even they often lack the expertise and time to focus on policy matters. As a result, proposed bills sponsored by lawmakers are usually drafted by Diet bureaucrats who enjoy considerable independence and leeway due to their expertise. Research bureaus in the secretariats of both chambers examine all matters processed by parliamentary committees. The legislative bureaus of both houses, in turn, examine the constitutionality of bills.

The National Diet Library Research and Legislative Reference Bureau conducts research in cooperation with scholars and experts, which involve interviews, roundtable discussions and field studies. The bureau regularly publishes reports on various studies concerning important national matters.

Due to the rationalization of budget expenses in 2005 and 2010, the number of staff in the secretariats of both chambers was reduced, which contrasts with a gradual increase in the number of Cabinet Office staff. This trend indicates a relative empowerment of the executive against the legislative branch.

Citation:

Zakowski, Karol. 2023. "The Parliamentary Administration of Japan: The Kokkai." In *The Routledge Handbook of Parliamentary Administrations*, eds. Thomas Christiansen, Elena Griglio, and Nicola Lupo, 656-665. London – New York: Routledge.

Latvia

Score 6

There is an Analytical Service and a library accessible to the legislature. Established in 2017, the Analytical Service's functions include research, analysis, and providing sectoral information. It reports to the Saeima Presidium and is also responsible for the parliamentary library, which offers up-to-date periodicals and books.

Research topics may be proposed to the Analytical Service by the Saeima Presidium, the Fraction Council, a Saeima committee, or the leadership of at least two fractions, provided the proposal is signed by at least 20 Members of the Saeima. Research and reports are publicly available and cover many themes. In 2023, there are eight thematic reports (usually 12 pages long) and one synthesis. There were seven researchers at the beginning of 2024.

Overall, the legislature can access the library and request reports from the Analytical Service. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms in practice can vary. Under current statutes, the Analytical Service can only accept a limited number of requests.

The allocation of staff for parliamentary factions is predetermined and based on the number of members in each group, as governed by a decision from the Saeima Presidium. Every group is entitled to one technical secretary. Additionally, the group size determines the availability of further staff positions: A group with five MPs can appoint one consultant. In comparison, a group with six to ten MPs can appoint both a consultant and a senior consultant. An additional staff position is allocated for every increment of five members in a group.

Despite these regulations, the composition of staff typically remains constant and is not influenced by changes in party representation within parliamentary factions. Staff members are often party affiliates and remain the same even when the party is re-elected. In parliamentary committees, the staff generally stays consistent across multiple terms. They are familiar with experts in relevant fields, as well as non-governmental organizations and public authorities, and their roles stay consistent with changes in political party representation in parliament.

Citation:

Saeima. 2017. "Infografika: Saeimas Analītiskais dienests - zināšanas balstītai likumdošanai." <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/par-saeimu/informativie-materiali-par-saeimu/infografika-saeimas-analitiskais-dienests-zinasanas-balstitai-likumdosanai/>

Netherlands

Score 6

The competition for media attention, political fragmentation, political pressures, the demands of social media and the accessibility of legislators through media accounts all put significant pressure on legislators' parliamentary activities and on parliament's civil servant support staff.

Dutch MPs are underfunded and understaffed, a circumstance that hinders their ability to work rigorously and hold ministers accountable. Although the Netherlands has a relatively small parliamentary staff, research shows that parties often allocate funds to public relations and campaign staff instead of hiring experts and researchers to support legislators' parliamentary work. There is a lack of transparency regarding how many staff members are working on substantive issues versus those who are essentially campaigners.

During the Rutte IV government, 10% or 15 MPs stepped down for health or personal reasons. The second chamber, consisting of 150 legislators, employs about 1,000 people. Individual MPs have two to three personal political assistants employed by foundations established by their political party, with funding based on the party's number of seats in parliament (in 2021: €243,000 per seat). Additionally, around 600 civil servants serve parliament as a whole, led by an administrative officer accountable to the speaker of the house and her presidium. The high level of work pressure likely contributes to the frequency of public clashes between civil servant support staff and the speaker. The administrative service comprises various departments, including security (85 staff), communication and external relations (23), clerks (62) and archives and information (42). The permanent commissions' secretariats (120 staff) and analysis and research division (40 staff) provide legislators with planning serves, expertise and knowledge brokering. The A&R department explicitly links parliamentary work to scientific judgment and advice, offering tools such as network exploration, scientific fact sheets, breakfast meetings and formal scientific assessments of bills.

Parliament does not have the power to set its own budget; this responsibility lies with the Ministry of Domestic Affairs. In the Dutch dual system, parliament both oversees the government and co-produces legislation and public policies. It is estimated that a political party needs a minimum of 13 seats in parliament to meaningfully fulfill both roles and participate in all parliamentary activities. During the Rutte IV cabinet period, only four parties (VVD, D66, PVV and CDA) met this minimum size. The next five parties with some influence had nine seats (SP, PvdA) or eight seats (GL, FvD). These parties sometimes combined forces in the permanent commissions or chose to participate only in the more important ones.

Fearing negative voter reactions, Dutch legislators are reluctant to request more and better staff support. Consequently, the Council of Public Administration (Raad

Openbaar Bestuur, ROB) has advocated doubling the parliament's support functions. The Dutch parliament is small by international standards (one seat per 110,000 inhabitants). Increasing the number of seats to about 250 and providing more and better support would be an obvious solution, pending the advice of a parliamentary subcommittee.

Citation:

Parlement.com. 2022. "Werkdruk in de Tweede Kamer." <https://www.parlement.com/9353000/1/j9vvknrZl7sjtxl/vlnpfx1mj0y0>

Parlement.com. n.d. "Tussentijds vertrek tot de Tweede Kamer."

Raad Openbaar Bestuur. 2021. "Briefadvies Ondersteuning Tweede Kamer." Verdubbeling ondersteuning Tweede Kamer is nodig, November 4.

Parlement & Wetenschap. n.d. "Instrumentarium." parlementenwetenschap.com

Otjes, S. 2022. "What explains the size of parliamentary staff?" West European Politics. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402382.2022.2049068>

https://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/id/vlvrf2354sct/nieuws/een_kamer_met_weinig_ondersteuning_hoe?colctx=vljnkeqq63pg

Portugal

Score 6

According to the Law on the Organization and Functioning of the Services of the Assembly of the Republic (LOFAR), Law No. 77/88, of July 1, members of parliament and their respective groups have the authority to establish offices staffed by individuals of their choosing. These offices are responsible for managing allocated funds, a duty that falls on each parliamentary group. Additionally, support is provided for parliamentary committees, and committee chairs can propose the requisition of technicians or other support staff to assist with advisory tasks.

Despite the ample funding available, with total subsidies amounting to €8.4 million in 2022 – a figure that has remained relatively stable in recent years – there continues to be a significant shortage of expert support staff, according to the latest report (Assembleia da República, 2022). This indicates that the parliament's ability to oversee government activities largely depends on the expertise of its legislators.

Furthermore, the number of staff assigned to the support offices of parliamentary groups has been steadily decreasing, with only 216 workers in 2022 compared to 244 in 2021 (Assembleia da República, 2022).

Moreover, the parliament's website consistently publishes only a limited number of reports on government activities and statistical reviews of parliamentary activities.

Citation:

Law on the Organization and Functioning of the Services of the Assembly of the Republic (LOFAR). 1988. Lei de Organização e Funcionamento dos Serviços da Assembleia da República (LOFAR). https://www.parlamento.pt/Legislacao/Documents/Legislacao_Anotada/LOFAR_Anotada.pdf

Assembleia da República. 2022. "Relatório da Conta de Gerência da Assembleia da República – 2022." <https://www.parlamento.pt/GestaoAR/Documents/oar/RelCGAR2022.pdf>

Spain

Score 6

The Cortes Generales is a bicameral assembly consisting of the Congreso de Diputados (Congress of Deputies) as the lower chamber and the Senado (Senate) as the upper chamber. Article 72.1 of the constitution ensures the independence of both chambers, allowing them to equip themselves with the necessary personnel and resources to perform their constitutional duties effectively. According to Article 60 of the rules of procedure for the lower chamber, "the Congress shall have all necessary personal and material means and facilities available for the conduct of its business, including technical, documentary, and advisory services." Article 60 further specifies that the Budget Committee should be provided with suitable allocations to enable technical advice on legislative proceedings related to revenue and public expenditure.

Each parliamentary group receives funds to hire personnel, with budget amounts based on the party's electoral results. However, individual members of parliament do not have dedicated assistants, and the limited staff is shared among them.

No formal parliamentary research units exist, and studies are rarely produced, except for legal reports. Committees have few independent administrative resources but rely on the legal expertise of clerks. Temporary staff hired through a procurement system assist parliamentary members and institutions, offering specific expertise in areas like economics, budgetary affairs, and journalism.

Parliamentary committees can invite independent experts without legal limitations, and requests for expert testimony have increased, especially at the beginning of legislative processes or in specialized subcommittees. However, limited staffing and financial resources hinder systematic involvement from university scholars, think tank analysts, and other experts. Collaborations with public administrations or the Bank of Spain occur but often include political judgments from the executive. In 2022, the Congress, in collaboration with the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), established the Science and Technology Office to prepare reports on scientific and technical topics of interest to members of parliament.

Citation:

Kölling, M. and I. Molina. 2023. "The Administration of the Spanish Cortes Generales: Organizing Legitimacy, Executive Dominance and Party Discipline." Routledge Handbook of Parliamentary Administrations.

Switzerland

Score 6

The Swiss parliament is not broadly professionalized. Officially, it is still a militia parliament, meaning that legislators serve alongside their regular jobs. However, this construction is far from the reality (Vatter 2018a: 283). Almost 90% of members use

more than a third of their working time for their political roles. Legislators' incomes have also been increased over time. On average, the various components of remuneration total more than CHF 100,000 annually (about €104,000). Because of this, fewer and fewer members of parliament have other professional activities beside their political mandate (including external mandates, paid or otherwise, that are related to their activity as a politician). In other words, an increasing number of members of parliament can be considered "professional politicians." The parliamentary system is, therefore, often today described as semi-professional. However, legislators do not have personal staff, and the parliamentary services division offers only very limited research services, though legislators do have access to the parliamentary library. Thus, from a comparative perspective, the resources available to members of parliament are very limited. The parliamentary services are staffed with 238 employees (2022); much less than in comparable small countries (Austria 485; Belgium 603). According to one recent review, the Swiss parliament is "an influential pseudo-militia parliament with modest resources" (Bailer and Bütikofer 2022: 182, 188). However, since 1990, the Federal Assembly has had an internal evaluation unit called the Parliamentary Control of the Administration (Parlamentarische Verwaltungskontrolle), which is permanent staffed by policy experts with extensive inquiry prerogatives. Parliamentarians can mandate reviews of administrative activity within any policy sector as well as within the Federal Chancellery or the federal courts (Ledermann 2016).

Citation:

Bailer, Stefanie, and Sarah Bütikofer. 2023. "Parliament." In *The Oxford Handbook of Swiss Politics*, eds. Patrick Emmenegger, Flavia Fossati, Silja Häusermann, Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, and Adrian Vatter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 174–194. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780192871787.013.9>

Bieri, Niklaus. 2018. "Das Parlament und die Vernehmlassung. Der Wandel der parlamentarischen Rezeption des Vernehmlassungsverfahrens als Hinweis auf die Erstarkung des Parlaments nach den Parlamentsreformen der frühen 1990er-Jahre." *Traverse – Zeitschrift für Geschichte / Revue d'histoire* 2018 (3): 33–45. <https://boris.unibe.ch/127608>

Bütikofer, Sarah. 2014. *Das Schweizer Parlament. Eine Institution auf dem Pfad der Moderne*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Ledermann, Simone. 2016. "Die Ausgestaltung der Unabhängigkeit von Evaluationsdiensten: Die Parlamentarische Verwaltungskontrolle im Kontext der Aufsichtsorgane des Bundes." *LeGes – Gesetzgebung & Evaluation* 27 (1): 63–82.

SRF News. 2019. "Im neuen Nationalrat sitzen noch mehr Berufspolitiker." <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/die-jobs-der-neugewählten-im-neuen-nationalrat-sitzen-noch-mehr-berufspolitiker>

Vatter, Adrian. 2018a. *Das politische System der Schweiz*. 3rd ed. Baden-Baden: Nomos (UTB).

Vatter, Adrian, eds. 2018. *Das Parlament in der Schweiz. Macht und Ohnmacht der Volksvertretung*. Zürich: NZZ Libro.

United Kingdom

Score 6

The House of Commons Library is a resource available to any member of Parliament (MP), providing research and briefings. Its stated role is to "provide a range of research and information services for MPs and MPs' staff. Our work helps MPs

scrutinize legislation, prepare for debates, develop policies, and support their constituents. We are a team of researchers, statisticians, librarians, indexers, communications, and customer service professionals, working together to provide an impartial and trusted service.”

All-party parliamentary groups are informal, cross-party bodies formed on an ad hoc basis to focus on specific subjects. They have no official status and often involve individuals and organizations from outside Parliament.

Parliamentary committees in both the Commons and the Lords can call witnesses for inquiries and routinely produce reports examining aspects of government policy. Clerks, paid by the legislature, play a pivotal role in producing these reports, although the committee “owns” the final document.

Each MP in the Westminster Parliament can employ up to four full-time staff members, paid for by Parliament and regulated by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. MPs decide how to allocate this staff resource, which can include research. Additionally, it is common for MPs to have interns and additional staff paid from other sources. Parties typically provide a constituency agent to support MPs with local casework.

Through these various channels, MPs have access to resources, although on a smaller scale than in some other legislatures. While the Scottish and Welsh parliaments were established with a commitment to improve on Westminster scrutiny, they face similar limitations in research and staff capacity.

Citation:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/about-us/>

Poland

Score 5

The offices of the Sejm and the Senate assist the Polish parliament in legal, organizational, advisory, financial and technical matters. They consist of several organizational units, including the Legal and Personnel Affairs Bureau, the Analysis Bureau, the Financial Bureau, the Sejm Information Center, the Legislative Bureau, the Library, the Social Communication Bureau, the Internal Audit Office and the Publishing House.

These institutions assist deputies in carrying out the work of the parliament and its bodies, and in fulfilling their parliamentary mandates in their electoral districts. The offices also provide services to parliamentary clubs and groups, parliamentary teams, and independent deputies.

The legislature exercises oversees the financing of its operations; however, every year, the Supreme Audit Office audits the implementation of the state budget,

including the functioning of parliament. In both 2021 and 2022, the Sejm and Senate offices received approval in these audits. The Sejm budget has grown from less than PLN 500 million under the liberal PO-PSL coalition to PLN 576.9 million in 2022 and PLN 683.2 million in 2023 (Rzeczpospolita, 2023).

After the 2015 elections, both the Analysis Bureau (Biuro Analiz Sejmowych, BAS) and the Legislative Bureau lost their fully independent status. Additionally, the choice of experts was directed by the political majority. The BAS is responsible for preparing legal opinions and other information. It publishes journals including the Legal Notebooks of the Sejm Analysis Bureau, INFOS: Socioeconomic Issues, BAS Analyses, BAS Studies and others.

Citation:

Rzeczpospolita. 2023. "Rekordowy budżet Sejmu. Na każdego posła pójdzie 1,6 mln zł." 01.08.2023. <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art38884141-rekordowy-budzet-sejmu-na-kazdego-posla-pojdzie-1-6-mln-zl>.

Indicator Effective Legislative Oversight

Question Are legislative committees able to exercise oversight of government activities in practice?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = The legislature is able to exercise its oversight function.
- 8-6 = The legislature is able to exercise its oversight function most of the time.
- 5-3 = The legislature faces constraints in exercising its oversight function in a significant number of cases.
- 2-1 = The legislature's oversight function is frequently and severely compromised.

Norway

Score 10 The 169 members of parliament are divided into 12 committees, roughly corresponding to the ministries. Norway is a small country, and the processes of policymaking are generally open and transparent. The conditions under which the government may withhold a document from a parliamentary committee are clearly specified and very rarely a matter of dispute. Ministers are required to come to parliament and answer any questions committee members may have. If dissatisfied with the response or with any other aspect of how the office of being a minister is executed, a vote of no confidence may be proposed.

Sweden

Score 10 Parliamentary committees have the right to review all public documents, with the exception of those that are classified or part of an ongoing decision-making process. The Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Affairs (KU) is responsible for reviewing the work of members of parliament. The committee has the mandate to weigh in on any issue raised by members of parliament, including EU subsidiarity issues, which have been on the rise in 2023 (Sveriges Riksdag 2023). KU also has the authority to summon parliamentarians and access documents. While this access to documents has been an issue in past years, current reports do not indicate the continuation of this problem.

Citation:
Sveriges Riksdag. 2023. "Uppföljning av riksdagens tillämpning av subsidiaritetsprincipen."
https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/betankande/uppfoljning-av-riksdagens-tillampning-av_hb01ku5/

Switzerland

Score 10

Parliamentary committees can be regarded as one of the major elements of the Swiss legislative process. They are equipped with major prerogatives (Sciarini 2023: 272, 278). They design, debate and reach compromises on legislative projects. “A more recent study of all votes in the National Council between 1996 and 2018 confirms that the committees are very often followed by the plenum: During this period, in 87% of cases, the plenum supported the proposal of the majority of a committee, rather than the proposal of the minority” (Sciarini 2023: 453). They, like individual members of parliament, have access to government documents and receive copies of these promptly upon request. Legislators have also electronic access to the majority of government documents.

Parliamentary committees can summon ministers for hearings. Formally, this request is not binding. However, for political reasons, ministers typically respond to these requests and answer the committees’ questions.

Parliamentary committees are free to invite experts to provide testimony at hearings. This right is actively used. For example, in the summer of 2018, the National Council’s Foreign Policy Committee decided that it would publicly hear from experts on the outcome of the negotiations on the institutional agreement between Switzerland and the European Union. The committee set the relevant hearings for the afternoon of 15 January 2019, and the hearings were broadcast live over the internet.

Citation:

Sciarini, Pascal. 2023. *Politique suisse. Institutions, acteurs, processus*. Lausanne: Épistémé.

Belgium

Score 9

Parliament currently runs 11 permanent commissions, 14 ad hoc commissions, and 1 inquiry commission. Defense, justice, and interior commissions are chaired by opposition members, while other commissions, such as budget and external relations, are chaired by members of the government coalition but co-chaired by opposition members. They can summon ministers, documents, and experts at will. Chiru and De Winter (2023) show that portfolios are more often attributed to the opposition when the ideological gap between government and opposition widens, showing parliament’s de facto oversight capacity.

One concrete case that has bogged the government over the course of the legislature is Belgium’s energy policy. In line with the EU’s climate transition strategy, Belgium is actively moving toward electrification and efforts to phase out fossil-based energy. At the same time, it is shutting down its nuclear power plants, insufficiently investing in other dispatchable energies, and has witnessed delays in

the expansion of its green but non-dispatchable energy sources (namely solar and wind). This portends a significant energy deficit in the years ahead. Initially, the energy minister dismissed concerns about phasing out nuclear power and relying on imports. Another party in the coalition was from the start strongly opposed to the phasing out of nuclear energy. Opposition parties also constantly challenged the minister in parliament, but this was more a matter of form than of content and she proved able to sidestep the more “painful” questions on this issue. However, the invasion of Ukraine showed that Belgium could not rely on imports, intensifying questioning and challenges that eventually forced the government to redirect its strategy toward investing in nuclear power and accelerating investment in renewable power production.

Citation:

Chiru, M., and De Winter, L. 2023. “The Allocation of Committee Chairs and the Oversight of Coalition Cabinets in Belgium.” *Government and Opposition* 58 (1): 129-144. doi:10.1017/gov.2021.27

<https://www.lachambre.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=/none&language=fr&cfm=/site/wwwcfm/comm/LstCom.cfm>

Er dreigt betonrot in het huis van de democratie: ‘Het Vlaams Parlement wordt meer en meer een praatbarak’ | De Standaard: https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20230319_97203506

Denmark

Score 9

Parliament is entitled to access most government documents. However, some internal ministry documents are not made available. This practice is occasionally criticized by some politicians, especially from the opposition. Nevertheless, ministers and ministries understand the political importance of responding to parliamentary requests. While some documents may be stamped confidential, most committee documents are generally publicly available.

Committees regularly summon ministers for meetings called consultations (samråd). These meetings are key elements of the Danish parliamentary system. Consultations play an important role in the legislative process for members of parliament while also allowing them to exercise control over the government.

Most committee meetings occur behind closed doors. However, committees can choose to hold open meetings – including those without the minister present – and invite external experts, civil servants and representatives from interest organizations to explore and discuss issues. These meetings are also open to the press.

Committees may also decide to conduct larger hearings, occasionally in cooperation with other organizations. These hearings usually take place in the room where the former second chamber of the Danish parliament, the Landsting, met until it was abolished by the new constitution in 1953. To learn more about the issues they legislate, members of parliament also go on study trips and participate in conferences.

Finland

Score 9 In Finland's parliament, legislative committees can exercise oversight of government activities effectively. They have a legislated right to acquire the necessary documents from the government. Although they cannot summon ministers to committee meetings and hold them accountable by posing relevant questions, individual parliamentarians have the right to pose written and oral questions to ministers. The ministers are required to respond to these questions.

Germany

Score 9 As the Bundestag is a “working parliament,” parliamentary committees play a crucial role in the legislative process. Germany has several permanent committees established by the Basic Law (Article 44ff) that significantly influence policymaking (V-Dem, 2023). In addition to their legislative influence, these committees oversee government activities.

When investigating a subject, committees generally have the right to take evidence, and the executive branch is required to provide requested documents. However, the government sometimes attempts to withhold information. In such cases, the responsible minister must present reasons for the refusal. Additionally, the committee can appeal the decision to the Federal Constitutional Court or the Federal Court of Justice (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016).

Additionally, following Article 43 of the Basic Law, the legislature has the right to require presence. This means parliament and its committees can require members of the executive to attend committee meetings for questioning. If summoned witnesses are absent without excuse, the committee can order their compulsory appearance without a court order or impose a fine of up to €10,000 (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016). According to the V-Dem index (2023), the legislature regularly questions members of the executive branch, requiring ministers or the head of government to explain policies or testify regarding various issues. Committees specifically set up to investigate misconduct – so-called committees of inquiry – will be discussed in the next text on legislative investigations. It cannot be determined, however, if the answers provided are satisfactory to the committee.

Citation:

Deutscher Bundestag. 2016. “Sachstand, Befugnisse des Untersuchungsausschusses zur Beweiserhebung, WD 3 - 3000 - 265/16.” <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/493600/869bf4ce24e8f566ccc0c5fb4327112d/WD-3-265-16-pdf-data.pdf>

Varieties of Democracy. 2023. https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph

Greece

Score 9

Greek parliamentary committees have the authority to obtain necessary documents from the government and summon ministers to committee meetings to hold them accountable. These powers are guaranteed by the standing orders of parliament and are regularly exercised.

When documents are requested, the relevant ministry must provide them within one month, except for sensitive information related to diplomacy, military matters, or national security. Even in these cases, committees can request to inspect such documents. Ministers typically comply with these requests, as MPs are often demanding and can leverage the pressure from opposition media.

Ministers are also obliged to appear before committees if summoned by two-fifths of the committee members. While the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Foreign Affairs may limit the information they provide depending on the issue, they must still present information and engage in debates with the opposition. These exchanges can range from rational argumentation to more performative displays, especially when covered by the media.

Citation:

The supply of government documents to the parliament is regulated by article 133 of the Standing Orders of the Parliament.

Legislative oversight that requires the presence and responses of government ministers is regulated by articles 124-132 of the Standing Orders of the Parliament.

The Standing Orders of the Parliament are available at:

https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/f3c70a23-7696-49db-9148-f24dce6a27c8/%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%9D%CE%9F%CE%9D%CE%99%CE%A3%CE%9C%CE%9F%CE%A3%20%CE%9A%CE%9F%CE%99%CE%9D%CE%9F%CE%92%CE%9F%CE%A5%CE%9B%CE%95%CE%A5%CE%A4%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%9F%20%CE%9A%CE%A9%CE%94%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%9F%CE%A0%CE%9F%CE%99%CE%97%CE%A3%CE%97%202021_3_F.pdf

Italy

Score 9

Italian parliamentary committees, in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, are powerful bodies with significant influence over legislation and government oversight. They have the authority to request documents from the executive branch, compel ministerial appearances for hearings, and summon experts for specialized insights. These powers underscore the prominent role of committees in the Italian legislative process, distinguishing it from other European parliamentary systems.

Standing committees, in particular, hold legislative, investigative, policy-setting, and control functions. During their legislative activities, committees may acquire data and information from the government and carry out fact-finding missions. While the

government may not always respond to document requests immediately, there is no substantial evidence suggesting it consistently fails to comply.

In exercising their oversight functions, committees may summon ministers or undersecretaries for hearings and investigative inquiries. Hearings can be formal or informal, with formal hearings subject to a specific publicity regime and their verbatim records published. Summoning members of the executive branch for hearings is common practice, and they typically comply.

Committees also have the power to conduct investigative inquiries on matters within their respective competencies to gather useful information for their work and for the work of the Chamber or the Senate. The verbatim records of sessions held by committees during investigative inquiries are published.

Lithuania

Score 9

Members of the Seimas have the right to obtain information not only from the government but also from various government agencies, enterprises and other public sector organizations. When carrying out their oversight function, parliamentary committees can request information and relevant documents from ministries and other state institutions. These documents are normally delivered in full and within an appropriate time frame. Opposition members frequently seek the government's position on politically salient policy issues. However, there are restrictions on accessing information considered sensitive for state security reasons. Additionally, information from ongoing pretrial investigations and other investigations cannot be provided if it could harm the investigations.

Parliamentary committees can summon ministers and the heads of most other state institutions, with the exception of court judges. Invited individuals, who also attend parliamentary commissions and other groups, generally answer questions posed by members of parliament and provide other relevant information. In some cases, vice ministers or other authorized civil servants may substitute for ministers. However, this instrument of parliamentary control is often used to explain government activities on an ex post basis rather than serving as a forward-looking mechanism. During times of crisis – such as the management of pandemics or geopolitical crises – the more frequent practice of vice ministers substituting for ministers preoccupied with crisis management has sometimes led to friction among members of parliament and particular ministers.

United Kingdom

Score 9

The House of Commons has a permanent Select Committee for every government department, complemented by cross-cutting committees such as the Public Accounts Committee and the Environmental Audit Committee, which can scrutinize any government department. The Liaison Committee, composed of the chairs of all other

committees, notably questions the Prime Minister about policy, usually three times a year.

Committee chairs are elected by MPs, with some positions reserved for opposition MPs. These chairs can select topics for inquiries and call for evidence from the government, requiring witnesses, including ministers, to appear before them. However, the government may sometimes resist or delay in responding. The government is required to respond in writing to any inquiry. Special advisers are often appointed to assist committee members in formulating questions for witnesses and interpreting evidence.

Committees are known for their robust questioning of ministers and sometimes produce highly critical reports of the government. They also question business leaders, public servants, and other witnesses, such as senior representatives from the Bank of England. Additionally, committees hold hearings for candidates for public appointments, such as the Treasury Committee's examination of candidates for the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England, though they do not have veto power.

The devolved legislatures have equivalent roles and powers concerning devolved government ministers but do not have the authority to compel UK government ministers to engage.

Austria

Score 8

All parliamentary committees of the Austrian Nationalrat have the authority to request any type of document. However, documents classified as “secret” can only be viewed in a special parliamentary room and cannot be copied.

The Nationalrat – similar to the Bundesrat as the second chamber – is entitled to examine the administration of affairs by the government, interrogate its members about all subjects pertaining to execution, demand all relevant information, and articulate in resolutions their wishes about the exercise of executive power.

Every parliamentarian is entitled to ask brief oral questions to members of the government during plenary sessions. The deadline for responding to an oral question tabled in the plenary sitting is the end of the same day. A debate takes place whenever it is requested. Parliamentarians also have the right to submit written questions to the president of the House and the chairpersons of committees. The individual to whom a question is addressed replies in writing. If they are not in a position to answer, their reply must indicate the reason. In practice, however, many questions are answered superficially or evasively, without any consequences for the officeholders obliged to respond.

When summoned, ministers, or their state secretaries, attend the respective meetings. The legal ability to summon ministers is, in practice, limited by the majority that the governing parties enjoy in all committees. As the majority party groups tend to follow the policy defined by the cabinet, there typically is limited interest in summoning cabinet members, at least not against a minister's will. While this de facto limitation can be seen as part of the logic of a parliamentary system in which the government and the parliamentary majority are essentially a single political entity, this limitation is a major one in Austria given the established high level of party discipline.

The chancellor rarely attends the collective question time, sometimes less than once a year. As Serban (2022: 164) notes, "correspondence with officials indicated that this mechanism is considered perfunctory; instead, parliamentarians use urgent questions to summon the chancellor to answer questions on specific issues."

Citation:

http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/CtrlParlementaire/2017_F.htm#contradmin

Serban, Ruxandra. 2022. "How Are Prime Ministers Held to Account? Exploring Procedures and Practices in 31 Parliamentary Democracies." *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 28 (2): 155-178.

Czechia

Score 8

As specified in the rules of procedure of the Chamber of Deputies, Czech parliamentary committees may request nearly all government documents and information from government members, heads of administrative authorities, and local authority bodies necessary for performing their functions.

These requests are usually respected, and documents are delivered on time. Ministers and the top personnel of major state institutions are obliged to attend committee meetings and answer questions when asked. According to the rules, ministers are also required to present draft bills to appropriate committees. If the ministers send officials below the rank of deputy minister, committees may – and often do – refuse to discuss a legislative proposal.

Estonia

Score 8

Parliamentary committees have the legal right to obtain from the government and other executive agencies the materials and data necessary to draft legal acts and evaluate draft law proposals made by the government. The committees can also invite civil servants from the ministries to participate in commission meetings to provide additional information or explain government positions. Permanent committees have the right to request the participation of ministers in committee meetings to obtain information. Additionally, members of parliament can

individually forward written questions and information requests to ministers. These must be answered publicly at one of the national parliament's plenary sessions within 20 days.

As a rule, ministers comply with invitations and provide satisfactory answers to the questions posed. However, in 2023, when relations between the government and opposition parties became tense, both sides accused each other of destructive behavior, and the summoning practice broke down. In August 2023, the prime minister was invited to meetings of various parliamentary committees to explain cuts to the President's Office budget, and to explain her involvement with her husband's business activities in Russia – the so-called Eastern Transit scandal – but she repeatedly refused on various grounds. Similarly, the minister of finance ignored the invitation. Eventually the prime minister appeared at the committee meeting, and the conflict was resolved (ERR, 30. Aug. 2023).

Citation:

ERR. 2023. <https://www.err.ee/1609082321/kallas-laheb-riigikogu-komisjonide-ette-aru-andma>

France

Score 8

Committees generally have free access to all requested documents. However, areas such as national security, the secret service or military issues are deemed sensitive, with access thus being more restricted. In such cases, the government might be reluctant to pass on information, or even tempted to use information-access limitations to cover up potential malpractices. For instance, in the past, the Prime Minister's Office has had substantial amounts of cash at its disposal that could partially be used for the electoral activities of the party in power. No information was available about where the money actually went. In the same vein, it is only since the Sarkozy presidency that the president's office budget has become transparent and accessible to parliamentary inquiry.

Committees can summon ministers for hearings, and frequently make use of this right. Ministers can refuse to attend but this is rather exceptional. Given the supremacy and the discipline of the majority party in parliament during the Fifth Republic, such a refusal does not result in serious consequences

New Zealand

Score 8

Legislative committees in New Zealand play a significant role in overseeing government activities. Each parliament establishes several "subject" select committees that correspond to specific areas of government activity (the 2023 – 2026 parliament has 12 subject select committees).

Select committees not only review proposed legislation, but also have the authority to conduct inquiries on specific issues or areas of concern. The Finance and Expenditure Committee scrutinizes the government’s budget proposals, expenditure plans and financial reports.

Committees can formally request documents and information from government agencies or departments. They can also summon government officials or relevant individuals to testify and provide information related to their inquiries. The extent to which documents are provided in their entirety and within a reasonable time frame depends on several factors, such as the nature of the information and the volume of documents requested.

A fundamental issue is that New Zealand’s Parliament – due to its relatively small size of 123 MPs during the current legislative period – is notoriously overworked. To manage the resulting legislative logjams, governments frequently resort to “urgency” motions that accelerate the usual processes, giving select committees less time to scrutinize legislation (Martin 2015). For instance, after the October 2023 election, the new National government invoked urgency to pass seven pieces of legislation in the six days it had left for lawmaking between Parliament restarting and the Christmas break (McConnell 2023). This problem is exacerbated by the three-year term currently in place.

Citation:

McConnell, G. 2023. “Every bill the Government has passed under urgency.” Stuff, 22 December. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/133493748/every-bill-the-government-has-passed-under-urgency>

Martin, J. E. 2015. “Parliament.” In J. Hayward, ed. *Government and Politics in Aotearoa New Zealand*. 6th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Portugal

Score 8

In assessing whether legislative committees effectively oversee government activities, the situation presents a mixed picture. According to the Assembleia da República (2023), parliamentary committees and members of parliament have the right to request information from the government, which is legally required to respond within 30 days. Although there is no specific dataset tracking the government’s responsiveness to committee inquiries, individual parliament members frequently report experiencing delays or receiving incomplete information. This issue is highlighted in the most recent SGI report.

Nonetheless, there is evidence of progress in government responsiveness. Data from the first session of the 15th legislature (March 25, 2022 – July 20, 2023) reveals that 86% of inquiries made by parliament members were answered. This figure represents an improvement over previous periods and is detailed in the latest Assessment of Parliamentary Activity report by the Portuguese parliament (Assembleia da República, 2023).

Moreover, the rules mandate that government members must appear before committees at least four times each legislative session. Committees and parliamentary groups also have the authority to request additional hearings, although for committees, this requires agreement across different political parties. This mechanism is designed to facilitate greater oversight of government activities by the legislative branch.

Citation:

Assembleia da República. 2023. “Balanço da Atividade Parlamentar – 1.ª Sessão Legislativa da XV Legislatura.” https://www.parlamento.pt/ActividadeParlamentar/Documents/RelatorioActividadeAR/RA_AR_XV_1_final.pdf

Slovenia

Score 8

Within the scope of their competencies and areas of work, the parliamentary working bodies also directly and indirectly control the government and its ministries. These working bodies can request that the government and other institutions provide all necessary documents and explanations to fulfill this function. The government must supply the requested information and documents unless it is against the law. However, governments have sometimes provided documents only at the last moment or with considerable delay, thereby compromising the Assembly’s ability to fulfill its oversight role.

Ministers generally honor the invitations of the National Assembly and the working bodies. If ministers cannot attend a meeting, State Secretaries may be authorized to represent the ministries. Ministers are also obliged to answer questions from members of parliament either orally or in writing, which is largely honored in practice. Additionally, the prime minister must personally answer four questions from members of the National Assembly at each regular parliamentary session. Notably, both Prime Minister Janša and Prime Minister Golob tended to avoid certain meetings of some parliamentary bodies and did not attend despite being invited.

In 2022, 372 questions and initiatives were put forward: eight to the prime minister, the largest number to the government as a whole – 140, followed by the minister of health with 40 questions and initiatives. Twenty-five remained unanswered.

Citation:

Državni zbor. 2022. “Poročilo o delu državnega zbora v mandatnem obdobju 2018-2022.” https://fotogalerija.dz-rs.si/datoteke/Publikacije/PorocilaDZ/Mandat_2018%E2%80%932022/Porocilo_o_delu_Drzavnega_zbora_v_mandatnem_obdobju_2018%E2%80%932022_.pdf

N1. 2023. “Goloba ni bilo na sejo Knovsa, za prisilno privedbo nimajo pristojnosti.” <https://n1info.si/novice/slovenija/goloba-ni-bilo-na-sejo-knovsa-za-prisilno-privedbo-nimajo-pristojnosti/>

Delo. 2021. “Težave z dvigovanjem pošte.” <https://www.delo.si/novice/slovenija/tezave-z-dvigovanjem-poste/>

Spain

Score 8 Article 110 of the constitution allows committees of either the Congress of Deputies or the Senate to summon government members to answer questions, provided the request comes from at least 70 deputies or one-fifth of the committee members. The Bureau of Congress and the Board of Spokespersons must vote on the request. The ruling party may attempt to reject opposition requests, but if approved, ministers are obliged to respond. Ministers often comply with these invitations and even request to report on their departments' matters.

The power to request information is a specific aspect of the Cortes Generales' control function under Article 66.2 of the constitution. The government must provide requested information within 30 days in the most suitable manner. This legal framework allows the government some flexibility, such as withholding documents on grounds of secrecy or delivering them incompletely or late. Access to documents may vary by ministry. According to parliamentary sources, the government generally provides the requested documents in full and within a reasonable time, though delays and shortcomings prompt parliamentary claims of rights violations.

Citation:

Constitutional Court. 2023. Judgement 165/2023 of 21 November 2023.

United States

Score 8 Congressional committees routinely compel executive branch agencies to furnish documents about their functions as a form of oversight. Some of this oversight occurs through regularly scheduled reports submitted to relevant congressional committees (Kornberg 2023). However, Congress can also direct these agencies to provide information on an ad hoc basis (McCubbins and Schwartz 1987).

The executive branch sometimes attempts to withhold information by claiming executive privilege (LaPira et al 2020). The Supreme Court has confirmed the existence of this privilege, though it is qualified. The privilege is most clearly defined in cases where confidentiality is considered a matter of national security. The judicial branch can, albeit infrequently, evaluate whether information held by the executive should be deemed materially important for legislative or judicial oversight.

Citation:

Matthew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz. 1984. "Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms." *American Journal of Political Science*.

Kornberg, Maya. 2023. *Inside Congressional Committees: Function and Dysfunction in the Legislative Process*. Columbia: Columbia University Press.

Timothy LaPira, Lee Drutman, and Kevin Kosar, eds. 2020. *Congress Overwhelmed: The Decline of Congressional Capacity and Prospects for Reform*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Australia

Score 7 Parliamentary committees are critical to the Australian accountability architecture. These committees have the power to call witnesses and demand documents for review. While governments can attempt to stall committees' efforts, a bigger constraint is the executive's power to influence committee membership. The majority party has disproportionate influence in this process, posing problems for oversight committees. For example, the parliamentary committee overseeing the new National Anticorruption Commission was proposed to be chaired by a non-government politician, but this was rejected (Public Integrity 2022).

Citation:

Public Integrity. 2022. "Media Release: Independent Oversight Key to Effective National Anti-Corruption Commission." Centre for Public Integrity. <https://publicintegrity.org.au/media-release-independent-oversight-key-to-effective-national-anti-corruption-commission/>

Canada

Score 7 In the Canadian version of Westminster government, legislative committees should play a crucial role in scrutinizing government actions, policies, and legislation. While committees were originally intended to operate independently, the government – typically formed by the majority party or coalition in the legislature – can exert influence over committees in various ways (Savoie 1999).

Committee members, particularly those from opposition parties, often strive to scrutinize government actions, policies, and legislation but may not be able to do so.

The majority party or coalition in the legislature typically maintains a dominant position in committee assignments. Members of the majority party chair committees, and their members typically outnumber those from opposition parties. This structural advantage impacts the committee's agenda and decisions. By controlling these leadership positions, the government can shape the direction and priorities of the committee's work. Governments strategically place members on committees who are more likely to support government positions.

And while committees have the authority to set their own agendas, the government may attempt to influence the topics and issues taken up by committees. This can be done through informal channels, discussions with committee leaders, or public statements expressing government priorities. Party whips play a role in ensuring party discipline and use their influence to guide committee members in line with the party's position. Members may be expected to adhere to party policy and vote in a manner consistent with the government's preferences.

Parliamentary committees have the right to receive government documents during their deliberations, and committee members frequently ask ministers and officials who give testimony to provide additional information in writing.

However, these requests may be ignored or delayed by the government. Ministers, for example, are normally expected to appear before parliamentary committees, but they too may decline a committee invitation or send a representative, even when receiving a formal summons approved through a committee motion. A deputy minister may appear instead of a minister for questions linked to departmental operations. Alternatively, a parliamentary secretary may stand in for the minister if the matter at hand is legislative in nature.

The government has the ability to influence committee proceedings by suggesting or providing witnesses for committee hearings or refusing to do so. This impacts the information presented to the committee and shapes the narrative around government policies. Additionally, the scheduling of committee meetings is influenced by the government.

Citation:

Savoie, Donald J. 1999. "The Rise of Court Government in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32 (4): 635–64.

Ireland

Score 7

The system of legislative scrutiny in Ireland involves each bill passing through five stages between both houses and relevant committees before approval. This process allows the legislature to exercise its oversight function. However, it can become ineffective when the government controls committees, guillotines debates, rejects amendments and exerts excessive control through party whips. Local government in Ireland has long been considered weak by international standards, with highly centralized controls (Torney and O'Mahony, 2023; Collins and Quilivan, 2010). This centralization results in national legislators focusing less on national policy, which is detrimental to good governance (Murphy, 2019).

The financial crisis that emerged in 2008 highlighted the shortcomings of an ineffective committee system and related weaknesses in policymaking, analysis and scrutiny. Since then, significant improvements have been made in legislative committee capacity and practice, enhancing effective oversight of the government (Connaughton 2021). Reforms include the establishment of a new business committee and a budget oversight committee, an increase in the number of committees and the time allocated to committee hearings, the extension of pre-legislative scrutiny to non-government bills, the introduction of a formal post-legislative scrutiny process, and increased scheduled time for private members' bills. Parliamentary committees now have the power to acquire documents from the government, summon ministers to committee meetings, and hold them accountable

by posing relevant questions. Generally, documents are provided in their entirety and within a reasonable timeframe, and ministers comply with invitations and provide relatively satisfactory answers. However, in practice, evasive answers are common, and there is often a need to ask precise questions to avoid uncomfortable conclusions.

Citation:

Connaughton, B. 2021. *Committees and the Legislature: Policy Analysis in Ireland*. Bristol: Policy Press.
Murphy, M. P. 2019. “More Power to You – Democracy Works If You Let It.” *Fórsa Report*. <https://www.forsa.ie/morepower/more-power-to-you-launch-and-report/>
Collins, N., and A. Quinlivan. 2010. “Multilevel Governance.” In *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 5th edition, eds. J. Coakley and M. Gallagher. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203869505>
Torney, D., and O’Mahony, T. 2023. “Transforming Governance and Policy.” Volume 4 of *Irish Climate Change Assessment*. https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring-assessment/climate-change/ICCA_Volume-4.pdf

Japan

Score 7

All parliamentarians may pose questions in written form to the cabinet, which have to be answered within seven days. If an answer cannot be given on time, the cabinet has to clarify a reason and the time by when the answer will be provided. Questions of an urgent nature may be posed orally by a resolution of the house. Since the abolishment of the government commissioner system in 1999, cabinet members cannot be replaced by bureaucrats when answering questions in the Diet, though the answers are prepared by ministerial administrative staff. Answers tend to cite the general policy of the government without addressing the contents of questions in any detail.

Traditionally, the budget committees of both houses serve as the prime venues for the interrogation of the prime minister and ministers by the opposition. Cabinet members are often faced with difficult questions and the deliberations are broadcast live. Prime ministers generally comply with requests to participate in budget committee proceedings, but there have been cases of procedural maneuvers with the goal of avoiding having to face criticism in the committees.

The Board of Oversight and the Review of Specially Designated Secrets were established in 2014 to assess the appropriateness of the designation of “special secrets” by the government. However, the heads of administrative organs may decline board requests for document submissions if the cabinet clarifies why such an act would endanger national security. In practice, often only the lists of “specially designated secrets” – not their contents – are provided to the boards.

Citation:

House of Councillors, The National Diet of Japan. “The Diet Law.” <https://www.sangiin.go.jp/eng/law/diet/index.htm>

Zakowski, Karol. 2023. “The Parliamentary Administration of Japan: The Kokkai.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Parliamentary Administrations*, eds. Thomas Christiansen, Elena Griglio, and Nicola Lupo. London – New York: Routledge, 656-665.

Latvia

Score 7

The Saeima holds certain powers and resources to exercise oversight of government activities. The assessment of these capabilities can be divided into de jure (legal) and de facto (practical) aspects.

Legally, the Saeima has the right to request and receive information and documents from the government. This is a fundamental aspect of parliamentary oversight and is typically enshrined in the national constitution or in the Rules of Order of the Saeima.

Parliamentary committees have the legal authority to summon ministers to committee meetings. This allows them to hold ministers accountable and ask pertinent questions regarding their departments and actions. Deputies can submit a request to the minister or prime minister to answer questions raised by members. The Rules of Order of Saeima regulate the procedure.

In practice, the effectiveness of the provision process can vary. There might be instances where documents are provided in full and on time, but there can also be delays or instances where the information is incomplete or redacted. The extent to which ministers comply with invitations and provide satisfactory answers can vary. While some ministers may fully engage with the process, others offer limited or evasive responses.

In 2022, the 13th Saeima submitted 11 requests to the prime minister and ministers. No requests were submitted by members of the 14th Saeima in 2022.

Members of the Saeima may also submit questions to the prime minister, their deputy, a minister, and the president of the Bank of Latvia on matters within the competence of these officials. The concerned official shall give the answer in writing or orally at a sitting scheduled to answer members' questions. In 2022, 91 members' questions were submitted. The 13th Saeima had 77 questions, and the 14th Saeima had 14 questions. The parliament's website, www.saeima.lv, provides access to members' questions and the answers provided by the Cabinet of Ministers.

The parliament is somewhat hesitant to use instruments for government oversight.

Citation:

Saeima. 1994. "Rules of Order of Saeima." <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/57517-rules-of-order-of-saeima>
Saeima. 2010. "Saeimas komisija rīt uz sēdi aicinājusi labklājības ministri." <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/aktualitates/saeimas-zinas/17830-saeimas-komisija-rit-uz-sedi-aicinajusi-labklajibas-ministri>
Saeima. 2023. "Saeimas gada pārskats 2022. gads." <https://www.saeima.lv/files/PP/Saeimasgadaparskats2022.pdf>

Israel

Score 6

In general, Knesset committees in Israel are considered weak compared to parliamentary committees in other countries. Each member of the Knesset is a member of several committees, which is problematic because they cannot attend all the meetings, making it more difficult to professionalize. The norm that committees are chaired by members of the opposition has been violated in the last four years. This further reduces committee powers (Hazan 2001).

Knesset committees can summon any official in the executive and request any information. While representatives of the executive are not legally obligated to appear before a committee or present documents, they have typically appeared before committees. However, in recent years, there have been increasing instances of ministers instructing their officials not to appear before a committee, which has weakened the Knesset's oversight power.

Each committee holds at least one meeting a year with the respective minister, during which the minister introduces the ministry's work plan for the upcoming year. This usually occurs during deliberations for the annual budget. The minister answers the committee's questions and high-ranking officials always accompany the minister to address additional inquiries.

Committees often ask for documents, which are frequently not provided on time. This is either because the ministry does not have the information or because it is trying to delay the response. In most cases, however, the information is eventually provided, even when it is uncomfortable for the government.

Members of the Knesset frequently use parliamentary questions as a tool to obtain information. However, ministers often do not provide answers in a reasonable timeframe and some ignore the questions altogether. There is no mechanism to compel ministers to respond.

Hazan, Reuven. 2001. *Reforming Parliamentary Committees: Israel in Comparative Perspective*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Netherlands

Score 6

Public trust in the House of Representatives is at its lowest level in a decade, according to research by CBS. By the end of 2022, only a quarter of people aged 15 or above reported having confidence in parliament, the lowest such level since the survey began in 2012. This decline reflects a public perception that the legislative and oversight functions of both chambers (the lower house and the upper house or Senate) have diminished in quality.

Several factors have contributed to this decline, including the government's conduct toward parliament. Pieter Omtzigt, a prominent legislator and founder of the new political party Nieuw Sociaal Contract, which gained 20 seats in the 22 November 2023 national elections, highlighted several government-related issues in his Thorbecke lecture: 1) Decisions are made by selective parts of the Council of Ministers in the prime minister's official residence or office, at climate "tables" with stakeholders or lobbyists, bypassing the full cabinet and parliament, thereby diminishing parliamentary control; 2) Budget rights are being eroded by labeling initiatives as "emergency" programs with special budgets; 3) The government has a problematic habit of allowing laws adopted by parliament to enter into force only partially or not at all; and 4) Insufficient information is being provided to the legislature, as parliamentary inquiries and investigations often reveal that the chamber has been incorrectly, belatedly or incompletely informed on crucial issues. For example, the childcare allowance scandal would have been uncovered three years earlier if the government had properly informed the chamber, Omtzigt said.

Another significant contributor to the decline in trust is the fragmentation of political parties, driven by voter behavior and the highly proportional electoral system. When the Rutte IV government took office in March 2021, 17 parties entered the new House of Representatives. By 2023, due to party splits, the lower house had 20 political groups, a record. This fragmentation hampers the ability of MPs to thoroughly review laws, leading to insufficiently debated and increasingly complex legislation. Additionally, parliamentary support staff must spread their attention across too many topics. The importance of the co-legislation function has also declined as policy is increasingly shaped through other means, such as covenants or policy frameworks. The parliamentary agenda has become more varied, requiring attention to a broader range of subjects.

Tabling motions, even if they have not been financially reviewed, has become a trend among smaller groups. It is an easy way to score points during televised plenary sessions. In the parliamentary year 2022, more than 5,000 motions were submitted, compared to just a few hundred per year in the 1990s. This abundance of motions causes essential proposals to get lost in the noise. In a media climate where serious politics are overlooked and opportunistic politics are rewarded, resisting the temptation to table such motions is difficult.

Fragmentation also affects the constitutional relations between the House and Senate. Since 2010, Rutte cabinets have not had a clear majority in the Senate, even though every bill must pass both chambers. As a result, the government seeks support from Senate factions, compromising the Senate's role as a "chambre de réflexion" with a focus on the quality, consistency and enforceability of legislation.

There is currently a proposal by two small parties to increase the number of chamber members from 150 to 250, aligning with European standards. However, this change would take years to implement, as it would require a constitutional amendment in two separate sessions.

Citation:

Omtzigt. 2023. "Thorbecke lezing, Zwolle."

NOS Nieuws dinsdag 9 mei 2023

CBS: vertrouwen in Tweede Kamer in tien jaar tijd niet zo laag als nu

Th.J. van den Berg. 2022. "Ongemak over gedragscode TK." Parlement. com, October 21.

B. van de Braak. 2022. "Nutteloze debatten." Parlement.com October 28.

Groene Adammer. 2023. "Veel kleine fracties zorgen voor slechtere wetten." 16 november.

De Correspondent, Jesse Frederik, 29 september 2022 Moties indienen, doorgerekend of niet, is een sport geworden in de Tweede Kamer.

Chavannes. 2023. "Pop-up verkiezingen voor de Eerste Kamer (en o ja, de provincie)." De Correspondent, March 3.

NRC-H, Valk. 2023. "Volt en ChristenUnie willen Tweede Kamer uitbreiden naar 250 zetels." 29 August.

Hungary

Score 5

Until 2012, parliamentary committees in Hungary enjoyed extensive access to government documents. However, the standing orders of the Hungarian parliament were significantly altered under the 2012 Act on Parliament. These changes do not regulate the access of parliamentary committees to public documents. Subsequent Orbán governments have used their parliamentary majority to restrict access to public documents, even for discussions within parliamentary committees. Additionally, the minutes of committee meetings on sensitive issues, such as national security, are often classified, limiting opportunities for public scrutiny in cases as critical as the Pegasus wiretapping scandal. The parliament's oversight function is formally regulated by the right to summon ministers, among other things. The standing orders of the Hungarian parliament require ministers to report personally to the relevant parliamentary committees at least once a year. However, these orders do not guarantee parliamentary committees the right to summon ministers for other hearings. Additionally, ministerial hearings suffer from severe time restrictions, with individual members of parliament allotted only two minutes to speak. Overall, the number of interpellations is declining. During the 2018 – 2022 term, the number of interpellations fell to 484, down from 820 in 2014 – 2018. The decline occurred in both government and opposition-initiated cases, indicating that even the opposition is losing trust in this instrument. In contrast, the number of prompt questions remained stable, while oral questions dropped by 50%, returning to the level they were before 2014. Written questions remained consistently high during the last two terms.

Poland

Score 5

Alongside the marshal of the Sejm, the Presidium of the Sejm and the Council of Elders, committees constitute one of the primary organs of the Sejm, and their existence is constitutionally guaranteed. There are three types of committees:

mandatory standing; ad hoc, which are established in exceptional situations; and investigative, which are designed to examine specific matters.

Parliamentary commissions serve both legislative and oversight functions. Governmental bodies and officials must answer questions and provide documents requested by commissions. However, this form of oversight is limited because opposition parties rarely hold a majority on such commissions, and the government often fails to support members of parliament with the necessary documents or timely responses. Ministers and leaders of the highest state administration bodies, or their representatives, are required to attend committee meetings when issues within their jurisdiction are being discussed.

In the Polish parliament, only investigative committees have powers that could be described as quasi-prosecutorial, as they can summon witnesses, appoint experts and order individuals to appear before the committee. However, in the 2022 – 2023 period, they were used only to interrogate former officeholders. On May 26, 2023, the Sejm adopted a law on the “State Commission for the Examination of Russian Interference in the Internal Security of Poland,” nicknamed “Lex Tusk,” alluding to the leader of the opposition in the upcoming parliamentary elections (Jałoszewski 2023). Initially, the commission was empowered to decide whether a person should be deprived of the right to hold public office in connection with the management of public funds for up to 10 years. As a result of strong pressure from the EU Commission, the U.S. Department of Justice and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, the power to impose a ban on holding office was amended. After the 2023 elections, the incoming governing majority established three new bodies to scrutinize mail-in votes in 2020, the visa scandal and surveillance through the spyware program Pegasus.

Citation:

Jałoszewski, M. 2023. “Lex Tusk is Violating EU Law, the European Commission has to Intervene [Analysis].” <https://ruleoflaw.pl/lex-tusk-is-violating-eu-law-the-european-commission-has-to-intervene-analysis>

Slovakia

Score 5

The National Assembly and parliamentary committees have the full ability to acquire documents from the government; they also have the exclusive right to summon ministers to committee meetings and hold them accountable. However, the ruling majority also holds the majority in these committees, which weakens accountability. Generally, documents are provided in their entirety and delivered within a reasonable timeframe. Ministers and other officials invited to parliamentary committee meetings normally comply with invitations and provide answers to the questions posed.

There are a few instances where ministers did not appear, or members of parliament from the ruling coalition parties did not participate, rendering the committees unable to even open the meeting. Opposition members of parliament are often not satisfied

with the responses (see for example Jabůrková, 2023). The competition between the government and the opposition hinders effective oversight.

Citation:

Mackie, I. et al. 2022. Quality of Legislative Process: Building a Conceptual Model and Developing Indicators. Luxembourg: European Union.

Jabůrková, N. 2023. "Mimoriadny ústavný výbor sa mal zaoberať ministrom vnútra, nakoniec však bol neuznášaniaschopný." Noviny PLUS, November 10. <https://plus.noviny.sk/855454-mimoriadny-ustavny-vybor-sa-mal-zaoberat-ministrom-vnutra-nakoniec-vsak-bol-neuznasaniashopny>

Indicator

Effective Legislative Investigations

Question

Do legislative committees have the capacity to investigate unconstitutional or illegal activities carried out by the executive branch?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = The legislature is able to exercise its investigation function.
- 8-6 = The legislature is able to exercise its investigation function most of the time.
- 5-3 = The legislature faces constraints in exercising its investigation function in a significant number of cases.
- 2-1 = The legislature's investigation function is frequently and severely compromised

Norway

Score 10

According to the Norwegian constitution, the government must have the support of a majority of members of parliament. Any initiative from opposition parties to investigate government actions would require a parliamentary majority, as there is no institutionalized right for a minority to take action. If an allegation of misconduct is raised by the opposition but not followed up by the government, the case would likely attract the interest of the media and independent agencies. However, for the opposition to impact the government, it would need to secure a majority vote in parliament. Given the fragmentation of the Norwegian party system and the reliance on party coalitions, any proposal to investigate alleged unconstitutional activities will most likely secure a majority in parliament.

Sweden

Score 10

Oversight and legislative investigations are conducted by the Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Affairs (KU). Any member of parliament can initiate an investigation by petitioning the committee. This holds true both de jure and de facto. KU includes members of all political parties in proportion to the seats they hold in parliament. Furthermore, the current chair belongs to the Social Democrats, a party currently in the opposition.

A vote of no confidence can be initiated by any party, as long as 35 members of parliament support it. For a vote of confidence to pass, a simple majority of 175 MPs is required. The Riksdag has voted on this issue 14 times in total (Sveriges Riksdag 2024).

In 2021 an unprecedented vote took place, partly demonstrating the increasing power of the radical right Sweden Democrats in Swedish politics. The Sweden Democrats initiated a vote of no confidence against the then Social Democratic Prime Minister Stefan Löfven. The vote passed for the first time in Sweden's history, with 181 for, 51 against, 51 abstaining, and 8 MPs absent (Sveriges Riksdag 2024). This event threw the government into turmoil since what is common practice in countries such as the UK or Greece – snap elections – is never done in Sweden. They are not unconstitutional, as in Norway, but they are not part of the normally stable Swedish political environment.

The result of the vote of no confidence was the Social Democrat Margareta Andersson replacing Stefan Löfven, leading a largely caretaker government until the 2022 elections. In those elections, the social democratic coalition lost to the right-wing alliance led by the Moderate Party.

Citation:

Sveriges Riksdag. 2024. "Misstroendeförklaring." <https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/sa-fungerar-riksdagen/riksdagens-uppgifter/kontrollerar-regeringen/#misstroendeforklaring-60>

Austria

Score 9

Since 2008, the creation of investigatory committees has been a minority right, allowing the opposition or any quarter of MPs in the Nationalrat to launch a parliamentary inquiry. In Austria, such inquiries have not only provided a showdown opportunity between government and opposition parties, but have also served as an arena for agreeing on political reforms considered desirable by all major parties.

However, the committees' power became particularly evident in 2021 when Chancellor Kurz's alleged false testimony to the Ibiza Investigative Committee led to his resignation shortly thereafter. In some of the literature, the Austrian system has been hailed as a role model for other parliamentary democracies, although without any comparative assessment (see Keppel 2023).

Actual proceedings in investigatory committees are often inefficient, as many questions go unanswered. The opposition has suggested that providing TV time for such committees might improve outcomes. However, even in its current format, investigation activities can lead to an unfavorable decision or report. The seriousness of the procedure was underscored by the conviction of Chancellor Kurz, who received an eight-month suspended sentence from a Vienna criminal court in February 2024 for making false statements to a parliamentary inquiry into alleged corruption in his first government.

Citation:

Pilgermair, Walter, eds. 2023. *Parlamentarischer Untersuchungsausschuss: Praxis und Perspektiven*. Vienna: Verlag Österreich.

Keppel, Matthias. 2023. "Political Control and Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry: Strengthening the Quality of Democracy." *Journal of the Knowledge Economy* 14 (2): 1298-1320.

Belgium

Score 9

Except during the COVID-19 crisis, when emergency measures tested constitutional rights, the government cannot overstep its constitutional powers without being challenged and corrected by the Council of State (Conseil d'Etat), federate entities, or opposition members in parliament. The Council of State investigates all such requests with complete independence from the government coalition. However, mistakes or unlawful behavior do not necessarily lead to the fall of the government or the responsible minister.

Denmark

Score 9

The Danish parliament has several instruments by which to hold individual ministers and the government accountable. First, parliament can give a minister a warning if it finds that the minister has not provided correct or sufficient information to parliament (Ministeransvarsloven). Parliament can also express a vote of no confidence in a minister. If the vote passes, the minister has to resign. It is very rare for a minister to face such a vote, because ministers typically resign if it is clear that there is a majority behind any such motion of distrust. Finally, parliament can express a lack of confidence in the prime minister, and consequently the government. If such a motion passes, the government has to resign, although it does not necessarily mean that an election will be called. In recent history, the small minority government led by the Liberal Party resigned in 1975 because the Social Democratic Party proposed a vote of no confidence. The government resigned before the vote. Parliament can also impeach a minister. Impeachment processes have to be backed by a majority in parliament. The impeachment process is headed by the president of the Supreme Court and can include up to 15 Supreme Court judges and an equal number of members appointed by parties in parliament. Impeachments are very rare, but in 2021, Inger Støjberg was convicted and sentenced to 60 days in prison because she unlawfully separated immigrant couples. These instruments are based in the Danish constitution and the Ministerial Accountability Act (Ministeransvarlighedsloven).

Parliament has other instruments it can use. In 2021, a law was passed giving parliament the right to initiate a "granskningskommission." This type of commission is chaired by a judge from the High Court and must report its findings within 12 months. The commission is formulated by parliament and is independent of the Ministry of Justice.

This type of investigation was recently used in a case against Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, investigating whether she knowingly ordered all minks euthanized despite the lack of a clear mandate for such action in the law. Commissions of this type cannot express a verdict; only parliament can do that. This instrument is based on the Act on Commissions of Inquiry Lov om Undersøgelseskommisioner)

Citation:

Grundloven. <https://www.ft.dk/da/dokumenter/bestil-publikationer/publikationer/grundloven/danmarks-riges-grundlov>

Lov om undersøgelseskommisioner. 1999. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/1999/357>

Ministeransvarlighedsloven. 1964. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/1964/117>

Switzerland

Score 9

Legislative committees have the capacity to investigate unconstitutional or illegal activities carried out by the executive branch. Both houses of parliament are “responsible for the overall supervision of the activities of the Federal Council, the federal administration, the federal courts and other federal bodies. In order to fulfill this supervisory duty, it can set up a PUK (parliamentary commission of enquiry) if incidents of major significance need to be clarified. ... It is important to note that a PUK is neither a criminal court nor a disciplinary authority. It is set up in the form of a simple federal decree. This decision is initiated by means of a parliamentary initiative by a member of the Council or a parliamentary group or a committee initiative. It is set up after consultation with the Federal Council” (Federal Assembly 2024). These commissions in some cases arrive at conclusions which are highly critical of the government. For example, a commission examining problems with the national pension fund in 1995 concluded: “The main responsibility for the debacle at the [pension fund] lies with the former head of the [finance ministry] and the two former directors of the [relevant administration]” (Federal Assembly 2024).

Unfavorable investigation outcomes are likely to have consequences within the federal administration. However, given the logic of coalition building in Switzerland (the government coalition does not result from the outcome of an election; rather it is a “historical” compromise between the major parties) and the quasi-presidential position of the government (it does not depend on the support of a parliamentary majority once it is elected at the beginning of the legislative term), it is not very likely that a governing party will be forced to leave the government or that a member of the government will feel pressure to step down.

Citation:

Federal Assembly (Bundesversammlung). 2024. “Parlamentarische Untersuchungskommissionen PUK.” <https://www.parlament.ch/de/organe/kommissionen/aufsichtskommissionen/parlamentarische-untersuchungskommissionen-puk>

Finland

Score 8 In Finland, ordinary legislative committees lack the capacity to investigate unconstitutional or illegal activities carried out by the executive branch. This authority is granted only to the police. Consequently, opposition parties cannot initiate investigative functions within the legislature against the will of the governing party or coalition. There is no constitutional court in Finland. However, opposition parties can initiate a motion of no confidence (interpellation) against the cabinet of ministers or an individual member of the cabinet. The Constitutional Committee in the parliament can investigate and decide if a member of the cabinet should be prosecuted for a criminal offense relating to actions taken as a minister (Eduskunta 2024).

Citation:

Eduskunta. 2024. https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/naineduskuntatoimii/kirjasto/tietopalvelulta-kysyttya/Sivut/milloin-valtioneuvoston-jasenien-virkatoimen-lainmukaisuuden-tutkinnassa.aspx?TSPD_101_R0=0814c91602ab20009fec0f35c979adef1afc2303c7f99019bc123a6d2aaf453d3d6af92b419aa1fa081bd2d2a51430004698c15da9fa331ac9e167862742dafa09df52ca9fa964c5ef1141250393f51e0d06d5345792ed6bfb76ffd631dc17b0

Germany

Score 8 As previously mentioned, parliamentary committees exercise oversight of the government. Specifically, committees of inquiry function to investigate possible misconduct by the executive branch. A committee must be set up at the request of at least one-quarter of the members of parliament, regardless of their party (Deutscher Bundestag, n.d). Thus, the opposition can, in principle, initiate the setup of a committee of inquiry, even against the will of the governing coalition. As of 2020, around three-quarters of the 46 committees of inquiry set up since 1949 were based on a request from the opposition (Knelagen, 2021).

Nonetheless, in July 2023, a committee of inquiry requested by the CDU to examine the CumEx Scandal was denied by the governing coalition on the premise that the issue was not within the government's competence. It was argued that, as a federal committee of inquiry can only examine misconduct covered by the government's competence, the committee would be unconstitutional. However, Article 44 of the Basic Law does not stipulate that a committee of inquiry can only deal with issues covered by the government's competence. Moreover, this was the first time in the Federal Republic's history that a majority denied a committee of inquiry despite at least 25% of members of parliament demanding it. The CDU filed a complaint with the Federal Constitutional Court (Kohnert and Kornmeier, 2023).

Regarding the actual capacity of committees to investigate unconstitutional or illegal government activities, the V-Dem index (2023) estimates that it is nearly certain the legislature would conduct an investigation resulting in an unfavorable decision or

report to the executive if the executive were engaged in unconstitutional or illegal activity.

As committees of inquiry are primarily an instrument of parliamentary control designed to hold the government accountable, the outcomes of such investigations do not necessarily have severe consequences for the government. Depending on the extent of an investigation's success, its outcome can have political consequences, such as damaging the reputation of government members or leading to changes in policy content. Additionally, the outcome can have legal consequences if illegal actions are uncovered. However, the impact of an investigation largely depends on two factors: whether the committee can expose illegal or unconstitutional activities and the amount of media attention the investigation receives, which creates additional public pressure on the government (Deutscher Bundestag, 2010).

Citation:

Deutscher Bundestag. n.d. "Untersuchungsausschuss." https://www.bundestag.de/services/glossar/glossar/U/unters_aussch-245546
 Deutscher Bundestag. 2010. "Das schärfste Schwer der Opposition." https://www.bundestag.de/webarchiv/textarchiv/2010/29580373_untersuchungsausschuesse-201648
 Knelagen, W. 2021. "Untersuchungsausschüsse." <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/handwoerterbuch-politisches-system/511480/untersuchungsausschuesse/>
 Kohnert, N., Kornmeier, C. 2023. "Union treibt Scholz mit Klage vor sich her." <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/union-scholz-warburg-cumex-100.html>
 Varieties of Democracy. 2023. https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph

Greece

Score 8

Historically, the ability to initiate legislative investigations depended heavily on the support of the parliamentary majority. However, a constitutional reform in 2019 changed this dynamic. The constitution now allows for the establishment of investigative committees by a two-fifths vote of all MPs (100 out of 300), enabling opposition parties to form such committees without the consent of the majority.

For example, in August 2022, the opposition initiated a parliamentary committee to investigate the wiretapping of journalists and politicians, and in November 2023, they launched another committee to investigate the causes of a major railway accident in February 2023. While the government majority did not support the first committee, it consented to the formation of the second.

These investigative committees can produce reports unfavorable to the government, although they cannot initiate criminal investigations against ministers. Such criminal investigations require a different type of committee, which must be established by an absolute majority of MPs (151 out of 300).

Citation:

The constitution provides for the launch of investigative committees, even without the consent of the parliamentary majority (article 68 paragraph 2).

The constitution does not allow the launch of a committee to investigate criminal liability of a minister, without the consent of the absolute majority of all MPs (article 86 paragraph 3).

Italy

Score 8

In addition to the Standing Committees, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate may form special investigative committees, with membership reflecting the strength of parliamentary groups. Article 82 of the Italian constitution regulates these committees, which can be established ad hoc to conduct investigations and research on public interest matters, possessing the same powers and limitations as the judiciary. Their activities include missions and inspections, ministerial hearings, report approvals, conference organization, and thorough research and documentation. Committees of inquiry can be unicameral or bicameral. Unicameral committees require a resolution from either the Chamber or the Senate for their establishment. Bicameral committees, composed of deputies and senators, must be established by law. In both cases, the opposition often finds it challenging to set up a committee of inquiry without agreement from the governing majority. The constitutive act outlines the purposes, composition, powers and limitations, secrecy regulations, internal organization, and budget ceiling for each committee of inquiry.

During the 18th legislature (2018–2022), 126 bills were introduced to establish bicameral commissions of inquiry, but only five were approved (OpenPolis). Between the start of the 19th legislature (September 2022) and December 2023, 78 bills were introduced for bicameral investigative committees, with three approved.

A parliamentary committee of inquiry into the management of the health emergency caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the measures taken to address it is currently being approved. The bill has passed the Senate and awaits debate in the chamber. Some observers suggest this committee aims to serve as propaganda and retaliation against former prime ministers Conte and Draghi by the new center-right majority, which has criticized mandatory mass vaccinations and pandemic-related movement restrictions.

In general, the work of these committees could benefit from greater transparency, as monitoring their activities is often difficult.

Citation:

OpenPolis. <https://www.openpolis.it/parole/cosa-cosa-fanno-le-commissioni-dinchiesta>

Lithuania

Score 8

The legislature is generally able to exercise its investigative function. As the 2004 impeachment of President Rolandas Paksas illustrated, the Seimas can make political decisions once sufficient evidence of unconstitutional activities by the executive is presented.

However, investigations of suspected illegal activities are mostly used for political purposes to attract media attention and create additional opportunities for criticizing the governing coalition and its decisions. They rarely lead to substantive policy changes or resignations. For example, in September 2022 the opposition initiated a motion for resignation against Minister of Energy Dainius Kreivys over alleged mishandling of the energy crisis and the reform of electricity market rules. At the end of 2022, another interpellation was initiated by the opposition against the minister of foreign affairs and the head of the main coalition party Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, Gabrielius Landsbergis, over controversial foreign policy decisions. Both of these motions failed when it came to the final vote on forcing the resignation of the ministers because the opposition did not have enough votes in the Seimas, and majority governing coalitions tend to defend their ministers during such votes.

Disagreements between opposition parties can sometimes complicate investigative actions. For example, in November 2022, the opposition’s attempt to establish a temporary commission to investigate the activities of Interior Minister Agnė Bilotaitė failed at the initial stage. This failure occurred not only because ruling coalition parties voted against it but also because some members of the opposition parties abstained from voting.

New Zealand

Score 8

In New Zealand’s Parliament, both “subject” and “specialist” committees have the capacity to investigate potentially illegal or unethical activities carried out by the executive branch. To perform this function, committees can summon government officials, experts or relevant individuals to provide testimony and produce documents related to the inquiry. Committees may suggest corrective actions to address any identified illegal or unethical activities; they cannot make binding legal judgments.

In 2023, Transport Minister Michael Wood and Education Minister Jan Tinetti were investigated by the Privileges Committee for not declaring shares in Auckland Airport (Neilson and Coughlan 2023) and for failing to correct a false statement in Parliament (Coughlan 2023), respectively. The former figure subsequently lost his cabinet role, and later lost his safe Labour seat in the 2023 election.

Citation:

Coughlan, T. 2023. “Jan Tinetti referred to Privileges Committee for possible contempt.” *New Zealand Herald*, 30 May. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/jan-tinetti-referred-to-privileges-committee-for-possible-contempt/VFNJBGV3YVHYLCKHON4DWCAFY/>

Neilson, M., and Coughlan, T. 2023. “Embattled MP Michael Wood Referred to Privileges Committee After Report Finds He ‘Cast a Shadow’ Over MPs’ Declarations.” *New Zealand Herald*, July 18. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/embattled-labour-mps-kiri-allan-and-michael-wood-return-to-parliament/UUBJLWLCTFAFVPGXAYC6ZO3FYF/>

Portugal

Score 8

Opposition parties can effectively initiate investigative processes by forming ad hoc parliamentary committees of inquiry. These committees are unique because they lack a predetermined role. According to procedural rules, the primary task of each new ad hoc committee is to define its purpose and competencies. This is a crucial aspect, as it requires political parties to negotiate to determine the committee's objectives. The outcome of these negotiations can significantly influence the committee's effectiveness and the results it achieves.

Over the past decade, ad hoc committees have become increasingly prominent and impactful in the legislative sphere (Fernandes 2016). Research suggests that these committees are indispensable for oversight by Portuguese political parties, as they are typically established with the express goal of ensuring compliance with constitutional mandates and conducting thorough examinations of various aspects of government and administrative actions (Fernandes and Riera 2019). This underscores the critical role of ad hoc committees in fostering accountability and transparency within the legislative process.

During the evaluated period, the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into the Political Control of TAP (Portuguese Airlines) Management exemplified such an initiative. This committee's primary focus was examining the government's oversight of TAP's management. However, the final report produced by this committee was met with controversy. It garnered approval solely through the absolute majority vote of the PS (Socialist Party), prompting criticism from opposition parties. The opposition condemned the report as an insufficient and incomplete evaluation of the situation, alleging it to be an attempt to shield the government from accountability regarding TAP's management practices.

Citation:

Assembleia da República. n.d. "Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito à Tutela Política da Gestão da TAP." <https://www.parlamento.pt/sites/COM/XVLeg/CPITAP/Paginas/Relatorio-da-Comissao.aspx>

Fernandes, J., and P. Riera. 2019. "Committee systems in Portugal and Spain." In Fernandes, J., and C. Leston-Bandeira, eds., *The Iberian Legislatures in Comparative Perspective*. London: Routledge.

Fernandes, J. 2016. "Intra-party Delegation in the Portuguese Legislature: Assigning Committee Chairs and Party Coordination Positions." *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 22 (1): 108–128.

Regimento da Assembleia da República n.º 1/2020, de 31 de Agosto. https://www.parlamento.pt/Legislacao/Documents/Legislacao_Anotada/RegimentoAR_Simples.pdf

Slovenia

Score 8

The National Assembly may order an investigation into matters of public importance and appoint a commission of inquiry. The constitution, the Law on Parliamentary Investigation, and the Rules of Procedure for Parliamentary Investigation determine

its role, status, and powers. Once the inquiry is completed, a commission may draw up a final report and submit it to the Assembly for presentation and discussion at a plenary session.

Commission meetings are generally open to the public, allowing them to exert some form of political and public pressure. A commission can also propose that the Assembly adopt a resolution on the political responsibility of officeholders or request the competent authorities to propose a legislative amendment in a specific area. Several such commissions have been set up in each legislative period since 1992, totaling 38. The highest number of such commissions was in the 2008 – 2011 and 2018 – 2022 legislative periods, each with seven committees of inquiry. Nonetheless, only 12 reports prepared by commissions were adopted by the National Assembly.

From June 2022 to January 2024, three commissions of inquiry were formed; the opposition requested one, which an opposition member of parliament also chairs.

In general, it is common for the opposition to call for establishing such commissions. As many have observed, the outcome rarely has important consequences for the government. The commissions often serve the political agenda and the election campaign. Therefore, many are highly politicized and misused for campaign purposes or discrediting.

Citation:

Državni zbor. 2024. "Vprašanja novinarjev in odgovori nanje." <https://www.dzrs.si/wps/portal/Home/is/PogostaVprasanja>

RTVSLO. 2022. "Rok Snežič: Kot podjetnik nimam kaj odgovarjati parlamentarni komisiji." <https://www.rtvslo.si/slovenija/rok-snezic-kot-podjetnik-nimam-kaj-odgovarjati-parlamentarni-komisiji/610175>

Spain

Score 8

Opposition parties can initiate investigations within the legislature against the governing party's will. According to the standing order of Congress, the Plenary of Congress – at the proposal of the government, the Bureau, two Parliamentary Groups, or one-fifth of the members of the House – may agree to set up a Commission of Inquiry into any matter of public interest. Those summoned by a committee of inquiry must comply or face serious disobedience charges.

During the 2019-2023 legislative period, several Commissions of Investigation were established, requiring appearances from the former prime minister and ministers. In the current legislative term beginning in August 2023, the opposition party Esquerra Republicana, supported by Bildu and BNG, registered several commissions, including one to investigate alleged Pegasus spying in Congress. The agreement between the Socialist Party and Junts per Catalunya in November 2023 includes creating commissions to investigate lawfare related to the Catalonia conflict. However, judges are "independent, irremovable, accountable, and subject only to the rule of law," according to Article 117.1 of the constitution.

Commissions of Inquiry address legislative defects or monitor government actions, serving as political control instruments with significant media impact. However, their scope is limited as their conclusions are not binding, and decisions need not be based on their findings. Partisan organization of conclusions can undermine overall coherence, and findings should be reported to the Prosecutor's Office for further action.

Citation:

El País. 2022. "Congress Ratifies That Rajoy Was Politically Responsible for 'Operation Kitchen'." <https://elpais.com/espana/2022-02-03/el-congreso-ratifica-que-rajoy-fue-el-responsable-politico-de-la-operacion-kitchen.html>

United Kingdom

Score 8

Opposition parties can initiate investigations, but the usual channel is through select committee inquiries. These committees typically have a government majority, but they value their independence. If the government tries to block an inquiry or influence it by whipping members, it would likely face a backlash. In some recent high-profile cases, particularly concerning privileges, committees have conducted inquiries against the government's wishes and published reports critical of the individuals investigated.

Two notable examples are the inquiry into Owen Paterson, a former minister, who was found to have taken money from private companies (not against the rules) and lobbied ministers on their behalf (which is against the rules). When then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson tried to persuade Parliament not to enforce the committee's proposed sanctions, Parliament overruled his request. Subsequently, Johnson himself was investigated for misleading Parliament and was found to have done so. In this case, Parliament voted overwhelmingly to approve the sanctions.

Investigations requiring more resources or independence from political parties are typically conducted through independent statutory inquiries, such as the UK COVID-19 inquiry.

Australia

Score 7

Parliamentary committees have considerable powers to call witnesses and demand documents. They are often well-resourced, enabling them to conduct in-depth probes of government action. A structural weakness is the executive's control over the appointment of chairs for key accountability committees. Governments can subtly influence the work of these committees, even though they are meant to be formally independent. For instance, the private office of then-premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews, was accused of pressuring Labor members to curtail potentially embarrassing hearings of the Integrity and Oversight Committee in the Legislative

Assembly (Love 2022). Moreover, just as important as its capacity to exert influence in the legislature is the government's considerably autonomy regarding its response to investigative/committee findings that are critical of the government or its proposals.

Citation:

Love, S. 2022. "Daniel Andrews' Private Office Accused of Directing Labor MPs While They Were on an Independent Parliamentary Committee." Sky News October 5. <https://www.skynews.com.au/australia-news/politics/daniel-andrews-private-office-accused-of-directing-labor-mps-while-they-were-on-an-independent-parliamentary-committee/news-story/f9658a5c55e7ca7d3c6294711ab0ee84>

Ireland

Score 7

Opposition parties in the Irish legislature can initiate investigations against the will of the governing party or coalition, particularly when they control and chair parliamentary committees. However, the most significant inquiry, the 2014 Banking Inquiry, revealed that despite directing issues of public controversy and policy fiasco toward such inquiries, the houses of the Oireachtas lack the competence, capacity and resources to effectively conduct them. After the 2008 banking and financial crisis, dissatisfaction with parliamentary committees' ability to establish personal liability led to an attempted constitutional amendment in 2011 to increase their investigative powers, which ultimately failed.

In general, it is unlikely that investigative activities would result in an unfavorable decision or report, as this could have major consequences for the government, potentially leading to its dissolution. However, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), always chaired by an opposition party member, is considered particularly effective in its investigative role. Recently, even committees chaired by government backbench representatives have proven effective. An example is the 2023 parliamentary investigation of the national broadcaster, RTÉ, conducted by several committees, including the PAC. Nonetheless, investigations can be less effective when the government controls the committees.

Citation:

Connaughton, B. 2021. *Committees and the Legislature: Policy Analysis in Ireland*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Latvia

Score 7

The Saeima can establish a parliamentary committee of inquiry if requested by at least one-third of members of parliament. Parliamentary committees of inquiry have the power to request information, invite public officials to their meetings, and order audits.

According to the Law on Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry, these committees will cease to function on the eighth day after the final report has been examined at a

meeting of the Saeima unless the Saeima decides otherwise. After the final report is published, the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee sends the proposals for eliminating the identified shortcomings mentioned in the final report to the committees of the Saeima, the Cabinet of Ministers, ministries or the institution of a public person responsible for implementing the relevant proposals.

The authorities mentioned in the final report must review its findings and determine the necessary measures to rectify the identified deficiencies. However, no subsequent report is required to assess whether these recommendations have been implemented, nor is an explanation required if the suggestions are not adopted within a specific timeframe. Consequently, it is not always possible to observe the actual impact of parliamentary investigation on policymaking.

There is a trend that parliamentary committees are established on controversial and politically sensitive issues. On April 8, 2022, a parliamentary committee of inquiry was set up, following an application from 36 members of parliament, to investigate possible government misconduct during the Covid-19 pandemic. The committee consisted of eight members and held 25 sittings. A parliamentary committee of inquiry was also established in 2023. It examined the adverse effects of a restructuring of the financial sector, linked to efforts to strengthen state supervision, on the country's financial and capital market system. Additionally, the committee investigated the possible insolvency of PNB Bank, the circumstances of the forced self-liquidation of ABLV Bank, and the suspension of Baltic International Bank.

Citation:

Saeima. 2003. Parlamentārās izmeklēšanas komisiju likums. <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/75140-parlamentaras-izmeklesanas-komisiju-likums>

Saeima. 2023. "Saeimas gada pārskats 2022. gads." <https://www.saeima.lv/files/PP/Saeimasgadaparskats2022.pdf>

Vīlpa-Folka, D., Kincis, J., and Līcīte, M. 2023. "Izveido parlamentārās izmeklēšanas komisiju par finanšu sektora 'kapitāla remonta' sekām." <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/izveido-parlamentaras-izmeklesanas-komisiju-par-finansu-sektora-kapitala-remonta-sekam.a494147/>

Netherlands

Score 7

Legislative investigations in the Netherlands can be highly effective and are even capable of bringing down an entire government. For instance, the Kok government fell due to a NIOD investigation into the role of Dutchbat during the Srebrenica massacre, and the Rutte III cabinet resigned following a parliamentary investigation into the childcare benefit scandal. However, initiating legislative investigations requires a parliamentary majority, meaning that opposition parties cannot launch such investigations on their own. This dependency on majority support is one reason why the role of the second chamber itself – and specifically its demand for a stringent anti-fraud law – often goes undiscussed.

Parliamentary inquiries in the Netherlands aim to investigate and improve political decision-making, policy implementation and government spending. The Dutch

parliament has recognized its inadequacy in performing legislative and oversight tasks due to the small size of the second chamber (150 members) and political fragmentation into as many as 20 factions or more. The complexity of the work and parliamentarians' reluctance to delve deeply into policy issues further exacerbate these challenges. Most of the effort during parliamentary inquiries involves examining documentation and conducting interviews with involved parties, tasks typically performed by officials and specialized researchers. The most visible and consequential part of these inquiries are the public hearings conducted by the Inquiry Committee, which focus on reconstructing decision-making processes and uncovering the truth. While most individuals questioned during these hearings do not face direct consequences, some (former) government officials have been held personally responsible and have resigned. The enduring impact of parliamentary inquiries lies not in political accountability but in substantive recommendations that lead to significant adjustments in government policy and regulations. Since the first modern parliamentary inquiry in 1984, inquiries have led to important changes in various areas. Research has shown that the most substantial learning occurs when inquiries focus on the legality and legal certainty for citizens and other actors, emphasizing long-term implications rather than the short-term fate of individual officials or politicians.

Political complications have arisen in the case of approved parliamentary investigations into the government's COVID-19 policies and the Groningen gas exploitation and earthquake problem. Major political parties have been reluctant to provide commission members, likely due to political polarization. These parties fear that opposition groups such as PVV and Forum for Democracy, which have sided with demonstrators and conspiracy theorists during past anti-pandemic-policy demonstrations, will use these investigations to showcase their political convictions.

Citation:

NRC-H. 2023. "Bruno Bruins: 'Niets kon Kamer of kabinetten weerhouden van het doorzetten van het hardvochtige fraudebeleid'." September 15.

NRC. 2023. "De parlementaire enquête naar het coronabeleid komt er nu niet, en misschien nooit." June 27.

Wolffram, D. J. 2021. "Enquêtes: gaat de Kamer ten onder?" *De Hofvijver* 12 (134).

<https://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/9394000/1/j9vllwqvzjxdyx/vlwkjbb869ss>

?pk_campaign=hofv-

2209&pk_kwd=vlwkjbb869ss

Tinnevelt, R., Jansen, R., and van Emmerik, M. 2023. *De weerbare democratische rechtsstaat*.

Straalen, L. V. 2023. *De Parlementaire Enquête: het kan nog steeds*. Master's thesis, Leiden Universiteit.

Czechia

Score 6

The opposition can initiate investigations. Forty MPs are needed to propose a new investigative commission, the formation of which is then voted on in the full parliament. Twenty-three commissions were established from 1993 to 2021, but

none since then. These commissions usually relate to long-running scandals, such as privatization cases in the 1990s and the allocation of procurement contracts since then.

The nature of Czech politics – with multiple parties represented in parliament and coalition governments that are not fully united – has meant that issues potentially embarrassing to government ministers can be subjects of investigation. A notable case continuing into the review period involved pollution of the Bečva River in Moravia. The worst incident occurred on September 20, 2020, when cyanide was released into the river, leading to the death of 40 metric tons of fish along 40 km of the river. There was suspicion that the issue was not being properly investigated, while a highly plausible culprit, a firm owned by Babiš, was not at the center of investigations.

The parliamentary commission was not aimed at finding the guilty party but rather at determining whether public agencies had conducted the investigation properly. It concluded that the investigation was not handled correctly. A final court decision on January 30, 2023, blamed a different firm but found no criminal offense. Several expert witnesses to the commission publicly expressed their astonishment at the verdict and the apparent lack of police investigation into other possibilities. Thus, in this case, the parliamentary commission could highlight the possibility of serious irregularities but could not influence or overrule a court's decision.

Citation:

<https://www.psp.cz/sqw/hp.sqw?k=8400&o=8>

France

Score 6

The right to initiate investigations exists, but the executive has historically had the ability to evade the scrutiny of unwanted commissions. Since 2009 – following the constitutional amendment of 2008 – the opposition has had the right to form one investigative commission (“Commission d’enquête”) per year in the lower house. In the upper house, each group can nominate a commission every year.

These commissions have to fulfill a certain number of conditions detailed in the internal rules of the two chambers. In particular, such a commission must not interfere with judicial investigations, which usually means that a commission is not created after a judicial process is initiated, or is dismantled within six months of this time. The commission can have up to 30 members whose political affiliation must mirror the share of parliamentary groups in the plenary.

Commissions have the right to summon ministers and can call upon the Court of Auditors to assist them. In principle, noncompliance or refusal to appear may lead to fines and other judicial sanctions. This is very rare, however.

While these commissions undeniably have power, it is worth mentioning that several major issues in the past few years, such as the handling of the yellow vest crisis or the pandemic, did not lead to the initiation of investigative committees. Moreover, the general impression is that the principle of noninterference with judicial investigations – in the name of the separation of powers – ultimately prevents the creation of investigative committees on the issues with the most political importance. For the same reasons, the effects of these committees, which regularly produce lengthy reports, are rather minor, and they are very rarely critical of government action. Interestingly, the last serious study of these committees is more than 20 years old (Vallet 2003).

Citation:

VALLET, Élisabeth. 2003. "Les commissions d'enquête parlementaires sous la Cinquième République." *Revue française de droit constitutionnel* 2003 (2): 249-278.

United States

Score 6

Congress has the power to remove any executive branch official for treason, bribery, or other "high crimes and misdemeanors." This last category of offense is undefined and gives the legislative branch, in theory, wide discretion to investigate and prosecute members of the executive branch (Gerhardt 2024).

In practice, however, the impeachment power is rarely exercised. Only eight individuals have been successfully convicted and removed from office by the Senate. All of these were judges, not members of the executive branch. The threat of impeachment, however, has occasionally driven executive branch officials to resign. President Richard Nixon resigned from office in 1974 rather than be convicted by the Senate, as he expected. William Belknap, the Secretary of War, resigned in anticipation of being impeached in 1876 over his corrupt dealings with Native American trading posts.

The threshold for a successful removal is quite high – two-thirds of the U.S. Senate. It is almost unheard of for a single political party to enjoy that kind of strength in the Senate. Thus, impeachments must be bipartisan to be successful. Because they are deeply embarrassing for the party affected, there is rarely such widespread support.

There is a serious issue at the presidential level because it is generally accepted that presidents cannot be tried for criminal offenses while in office. For them to face penalties for crimes committed as president, they must first be impeached and removed from office. In practice, this means presidents can evade consequences for crimes as long as one-third of the Senate is willing to back them up, which is a troubling state of affairs (Howell and Moe 2023).

Citation:

Michael Gerhardt. 2024. *The Law of Presidential Impeachment*. New York: NYU Press.

William Howell and Terry Moe. 2023. "The Strongman Presidency and the Two Logics of Presidential Power." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*.

Canada

Score 5 In majority situations, the government controls committee and parliamentary agendas and can block any inquiries it wishes.

In Canada, parliamentary and legislative committees are dominated by the government and provide some scrutiny but rarely criticize the government.

In the Canadian version of Westminster government, legislative committees should play a crucial role in scrutinizing government actions, policies, and legislation. While committees were originally intended to operate independently, the government – typically formed by the majority party or coalition in the legislature – can exert influence over committees in various ways (Savoie 1999).

The majority party or coalition in the legislature typically maintains a dominant position in committee assignments. Members of the majority party chair committees, and their members typically outnumber those from opposition parties. This structural advantage impacts the committee's agenda and decisions. By controlling these leadership positions, the government can shape the direction and priorities of the committee's work. Governments strategically place members on committees who are more likely to support government positions.

Party whips play a role in ensuring party discipline, and they use their influence to guide committee members to align with the party's position. Members may be expected to adhere to party policy and vote in a manner consistent with the government's preferences.

The government also controls access to the information, resources, and expert advice that committees may require to carry out their work effectively. Limited access to information can hinder a committee's ability to scrutinize government actions independently. While committees have the authority to set their own agendas, the government may attempt to influence the topics and issues they take up. This can be done through informal channels, discussions with committee leaders, or public statements expressing government priorities.

The government also has the ability to influence committee proceedings by suggesting or providing witnesses for committee hearings or refusing to do so. This impacts the information presented to the committee and shapes the narrative around government policies. The scheduling of committee meetings is also influenced by the government.

Committees often produce reports with recommendations or findings. The government has the opportunity to respond to these reports – or not – and the tone and substance of the government's response influence the public, media, and legislative perception and impact of the committee's work.

Members of legislative committees enjoy parliamentary privilege, protecting them from legal consequences for statements made during committee proceedings. However, concerns about party discipline or potential repercussions can influence committee members' willingness to openly challenge government positions.

Committee members, particularly those from opposition parties, often strive to scrutinize government actions, policies, and legislation but may not be able to do so.

These dynamics between the government and legislative committees can be complex, but in general, committees have limited abilities to investigate governments.

Citation:

Savoie, Donald J. 1999. "The Rise of Court Government in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32 (4): 635–64.

Israel

Score 5 The Knesset has the authority to establish a parliamentary inquiry committee. To do so, a majority in the plenum is required. This makes it difficult for the opposition to establish such a committee.

Even if such a committee is established, the law does not define its legal mandate. Therefore, parliamentary inquiry committees lack the authority to compel witnesses to appear before the committee and their powers are similar to those of a regular parliamentary committee. Over the years, several dozen such committees have been formed. However, while the respective reports were often critical of the government, the recommendations were rarely implemented.

Japan

Score 4 According to the constitution, each house may conduct investigations related to the government, summon witnesses and demand records. However, under the Diet Law, the cabinet may refuse to submit the requested reports and records if it declares that such an act would be severely detrimental to the national interest.

It is unlikely that the opposition parties will initiate an investigation into the government's mishandling of issues. Summoning witnesses is possible only if the ruling parties agree to investigate a scandal under popular pressure or if the opposition parties hold a majority in the upper house. Moreover, the approval of two-thirds of committee members is needed to charge a witness with violating the law by refusing to testify or perjury, which is almost impossible to achieve without

cooperation from the ruling parties. Special committees for investigating particular scandals are rarely established and witnesses are usually summoned by the budget committees of both houses. The last time a witness was summoned before the parliament was in 2018, when Ministry of Finance officials concealed documents related to Prime Minister Abe's involvement in the Moritomo Gakuen scandal, which concerned the purchase of land by a private school in Osaka at a reduced price. The investigation led to a temporary decrease in the popularity of the government.

Citation:

Giin ni okeru Shōnin no Sensei oyobi Shōgen-tō ni kansuru Hōritsu [Act on Witnesses' Oath, Testimony, etc. Before Both Houses of the Diet], 1947. e-Gov. https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/document?lawid=322AC1000000225_20220617_504AC0000000068

House of Councillors, The National Diet of Japan. "The Diet Law." <https://www.sangiin.go.jp/eng/law/diet/index.htm>

Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. 1946. "The Constitution of Japan." https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

Poland

Score 4

Individual members of parliament have the right to obtain necessary documents and information from government administration bodies, local self-government bodies, state-owned institutions or enterprises, social organizations, and non-state economic entities. Groups of at least 15 members of parliament and parliamentary party groups are entitled to request current information from government officials. A member of parliament can also submit important queries about government issues. Such queries should be concise, explain the situation and ask relevant questions. The person being questioned has to provide a written answer within 21 days of receiving the query.

Under PiS rule, opposition legislators investigated various issues in 2023, including the system of bonuses and awards for ministerial staff, the unauthorized publication of personal data by the minister of healthcare, and unclear competition procedures in the National Center for Research and Development (Narodowe Centrum Badań i Rozwoju, NCBiR). In most cases, reports prepared after such interventions were highly unfavorable to the government. In some instances, especially those made public by the media, the authorities decided to change the heads of the institutions, as in the case of NCBiR. However, they did not launch in-depth investigations or reforms.

Conversely, the number of parliamentary interpellations dropped year by year (from 15,988 in 2020 to 8,045 in 2022) due to the provision of unsatisfactory answers or the failure to respond to queries (Rzeczpospolita 2023). PiS government representatives often ignored this duty, and ministers occasionally declined invitations or did not respond to inquiries.

Citation:

Rzeczpospolita. 2023. “Interpelacje poselskie: Poseł już raczej nie pyta, woli skontrolować.” <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art37878761-interpelacje-poselskie-posel-juz-raczej-nie-pyta-woli-skontrolowac>

Estonia

Score 3

De jure, opposition parties can initiate investigations in the Riigikogu concerning the government or individual ministers. This right is stipulated in the Act on House Rules of the Riigikogu, which allows the establishment of temporary investigative committees to clarify issues of public interest. The decision requires a simple majority of MPs.

However, this right is difficult to realize in practice if the governing coalition holds a parliamentary majority, as is typically the case in Estonia. One unsuccessful attempt occurred in the fall of 2023 when a proposal by opposition parties to establish an investigative committee on the prime minister’s husband’s Russia-oriented business failed in repeated votes (ERR Sept. 27, 2023).

Citation:

ERR. 2023. September 27. <https://www.err.ee/1609114466/riigikogu-haaletas-uurimiskomisjoni-loomise-maha>
ERR. 2023. December 21. <https://www.err.ee/1609201612/koalitsioon-lukkas-peaministri-uurimiskomisjoni-loomise-riigikogus-tagasi>

Hungary

Score 3

In socialist Hungary, the parliament was de jure the highest and strongest institution in the political system; de facto, it was utterly impotent. After 1990, the Hungarian parliament became a stronghold of democracy and the central site for political debate. Since 2010, successive Orbán governments have constantly diminished the parliament’s role, easily achieving this through a two-thirds supermajority and centralized control over Prime Minister Orbán’s party ranks. The government can tailor regulations to fit its policy agenda without fearing opposition in parliament. In parliament, the opposition faces significant challenges in seeking to oppose the Fidesz supermajority. This difficulty has led even prominent politicians to use public media and the streets instead of parliament to set their political agendas. The government majority often changes the constitution or the house order. Since the government side controls agenda-setting and all parliamentary committees, the opposition has little opportunity to push reports through parliament if the government wants to prevent this, not to mention the severe consequences that might arise from such reports. Both de lege and de facto, the legislature faces strong constraints in fulfilling its obligation to oversee the government, especially since the government announced the pandemic-era state of emergency (which has persisted ever since), during which it has governed extensively through decrees, bypassing parliament. Moreover, due to the immunity enjoyed by members of parliament,

criminal investigations against any legislator may be launched only once there is a majority vote in favor of suspending their immunity, something that rarely happens with Fidesz parliamentarians or members of the government (although there have been such precedents). Potential investigations against the prime minister or members of his family are especially unlikely to occur under these circumstances. Overall, there is a certain danger that the parliament will be pushed back into a position resembling its state before the democratic transition.

Slovakia

Score 2

The main right of opposition parties is to call meetings of parliamentary committees to control the executive, including individual ministers, but not to initiate proper “investigations.” Even if such a control procedure did take place, the likelihood of an unfavorable decision or report is minimal, as coalition members of parliament usually boycott such meetings. This has been the common practice of all recent Slovak governments – for example, Jabůrková (2023). Slovakia’s parliamentary committees are the weakest among EU countries (Zubek 2021).

Citation:

Jabůrková, N. 2023. “Mimoriadny ústavný výbor sa mal zaoberať ministrom vnútra, nakoniec však bol neuznášaniaschopný.” *Noviny PLUS*, November 10. <https://plus.noviny.sk/855454-mimoriadny-ustavny-vybor-sa-mal-zaoberat-ministrom-vnutra-nakoniec-vsak-bol-neuznasanaschopny>

Zubek, R. 2021. “Committee Strength in Parliamentary Democracies: A New Index.” *European Journal of Political Research* 60 (4): 1018-1031.

Indicator

Legislative Capacity for Guiding Policy

Question

To what extent are the organization and operations of legislative committees effective in guiding the development of legislative proposals?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = The organization and operations of legislative committees are well-suited for effectively monitoring ministry activity.
- 8-6 = The organization and operations of legislative committees are, for the most part, suited for effectively monitoring ministry activity.
- 5-3 = The organization and operations of legislative committees are rarely suitable for monitoring ministry activity.
- 2-1 = The organization and operations of legislative committees are not at all suitable for monitoring ministry activity.

Finland

Score 10

In Finland, the task areas of legislative committees largely align with those of ministries.

The parliament comprises 16 permanent special committees alongside the Grand Committee, primarily dedicated to EU affairs. These special committees play a crucial role in preparing government bills, legislative initiatives and reports, facilitating the handling of these matters during plenary sessions. Additionally, committees provide statements upon request.

Typically, each committee focuses on issues falling within the purview of a corresponding ministry. For example, the Social Affairs and Health Committee addresses matters under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Education and Culture Committee handles issues related to the Ministry of Education, and the Administration Committee deals with matters falling under the Ministry of the Interior. Committees responsible for cross-cutting policy areas effectively cover and address these areas.

Committees are appointed for the entire four-year electoral period. The composition of each committee mirrors the proportional representation of parliamentary groups. In practice, parliamentary groups distribute committee seats among themselves and appoint members to fulfill these roles. An opposition party can also chair an important legislative committee. However, since Finland has predominantly had majority governments over the last few decades, there is only a small likelihood that draft legislation will change as a result of committee deliberations. The changes, if they happen, concern only details.

The committees are not overwhelmed with the task of monitoring ministerial activities. The size of committees and the frequency with which they meet enable effective monitoring and discussion of ministerial activities.

Citation:

Parliamentary Committees. <https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/valiokunnat/Pages/default.aspx>

Germany

Score 10

Committees in the Bundestag play a crucial role in guiding policies. Based on consultations within a committee and public hearings of experts, stakeholders and other relevant actors providing information on the issues, committees then give a recommendation to the plenary session (Deutscher Bundestag, 2016). Each legislative term, the legislature can independently decide on the number of its committees, with the exception of four committees defined in Basic Law. These are a committee on the European Union (Art. 45), a committee on foreign affairs and a defense committee (Art. 45a), and a petitions committee (Art. 45c).

For the 20th electoral term, the legislature set up 25 committees, whereby slightly more committees than ministries exist. Generally, the parliamentary committees for most policy areas fully align with the ministries' areas. For example, the corresponding committee for the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is the Committee of Labor and Social Affairs. In some cases, the overall policy areas of a ministry are split into two committees. This is the case, for instance, for the Economic Committee and the Committee on Climate Protection and Energy, which coincide with the responsibilities of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, or for the Ministry of Finance, which is covered by the Committee of Finance and the Committee of Budget.

Additionally, it is possible that multiple committees can bear the responsibility for the policy areas of one ministry or that one committee handles issues not clearly assigned to a single ministry. Nevertheless, the division into diverse parliamentary committees still allows for effective monitoring of the executive and guiding of the development of legislative proposals (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023a).

Generally, the sizes of the committees differ, but the distribution of seats is always proportional to the majority ratio in parliament. For the 20th electoral term specifically, committee sizes range from 19 to 49 members, with the Committee on Labor and Social Affairs being the largest (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023a). Every year, parliament has at least 20 session weeks that are mandatory for members of parliament. During those weeks, committees meet every Wednesday, while some committees also meet on Thursdays. To manage the workload, additional meetings for hearings are often held on Mondays (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023b).

Opposition parties regularly hold chairs of legislative committees. The number of committee chairs held by opposition parties is proportional to their seat shares. Out of the 25 committees, opposition parties hold the chairs of eleven committees. The opposition always holds the chair of the budget committee. In the current term, the CDU/CSU holds the chairs of the Economic and Finance committees, while Die Linke holds the chair for the Committee on Climate Protection and Energy (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023a).

Bills are routinely revised during the committee phase, although to varying degrees (Ismayr 2012). Generally, parliament makes its final decision based on the recommendations of the responsible committees (Deutscher Bundestag, n.d.), and only rarely does the final decision deviate from the committee recommendation.

Citation:

Deutscher Bundestag. n.d. "Beschlussempfehlung." https://www.bundestag.de/services/glossar/glossar/B/beschl_empf-245344

Deutscher Bundestag. 2016. "Ausarbeitung, Struktur und Aufgaben der ständigen Ausschüsse Ein Vergleich zwischen dem Deutschen Bundestag, der französischen Assemblée nationale und dem britischen House of Commons." <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/413430/415104a9c385a42db463e68c00b37d92/WD-3-255-14-pdf-data.pdf>

Deutscher Bundestag. 2023. "Die Ausschüsse des Deutschen Bundestages, Neuauflage 2023 20. Wahlperiode." <https://www.btg-bestellservice.de/pdf/20061000.pdf>

Deutscher Bundestag. 2023b. "Die Arbeit der Bundestagsausschüsse – Fragen und Antworten." https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/881160/681403d8f9c599f696cadb3cb5d737cd/arbeit_ausschuesse-data.pdf

Ismayr, Wolfgang. 2012. *Der Deutsche Bundestag*. 3rd ed. Wiesbaden: SpringerVS.

Sweden

Score 10

Parliamentary work takes place in 15 committees and one Committee on European Union Affairs. These roughly align with the ministries in the Government Offices. If there are issues cutting across two committees, a joint committee is formed. For example, if work needs to be performed across the Committees on Foreign Affairs and Defense, a joint committee would be created. Each committee has 17 members, proportionally divided according to the seats parties have in parliament. Committee chairs can – and often do – belong to opposition parties. The allocation of committee chairs is a bargaining process among political parties (Sveriges Riksdag, 2024).

In a rare public glimpse into parliamentary committee work, this bargaining was highlighted after the 2022 election. The radical right-wing Sweden Democrats had sufficient voter backing to negotiate the leadership of committees, including the chair of the Committee on Justice and the vice chair of the Committee on Defense.

Citation:

Sveriges Riksdag. 2024. "Så arbetar utskotten." <https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/sa-fungerar-riksdagen/utskotten-och-eu-namnden/sa-arbetar-utskotten/>

Austria

Score 9 The organization and operations of legislative committees in the Austrian Nationalrat are effective in guiding the development of legislative proposals, including the substantive review of government bills.

Although parliamentary committees outnumber ministries, their task areas are, with few exceptions, more or less identical to those of the ministries. The National Council's General Committee has a broad range of competencies, including determining the government's position within the European Council.

In the current lineup of legislative committees (as of early 2024), several committees have a cross-cutting policy profile, such as the Committee for Economics, Industry, and Energy. This structure does not neatly match the organization at the level of cabinet departments, which includes a Ministry for Labor and Economics (a result of a 2022 merger of two independent ministries for labor and economics) and a Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology.

Several policy areas, which are combined into one portfolio at the ministerial level, face individual specialized committees. For example, the Committee for Consumer Protection deals with a policy area integrated into the larger ministerial portfolio of Social Affairs, Health, Nursing, and Consumer Protection. Additionally, some legislative committees focus specifically on a single policy area that is not named in the titles of individual ministries, such as tourism.

Importantly, these committees are staffed for the entire legislative period. They bring together policy specialists from different parties and deliberate on bills behind closed doors, which promotes a highly substantive review of government bills. Additionally, some legislative committees, by convention, are chaired by MPs representing the parliamentary opposition.

Citation:

<https://www.parlament.gv.at/recherchieren/ausschuesse>

Schnapp, Kai-Uwe, and Philipp Harfst. 2005. "Parlamentarische Informations- und Kontrollressourcen in 22 westlichen Demokratien." *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 36 (2): 348-370.

Denmark

Score 9 Government policies have traditionally been consensus-driven. This applies both to parliament, as most governments have been minority governments, and to negotiations involving organizations and the political system, most notably concerning labor market issues.

The committee structure largely corresponds to the structure of ministries. The Ministry of Social Affairs, for instance, corresponds to the social affairs committee in the parliament (Folketinget). The Ministry of Taxation corresponds to the fiscal affairs committee in the assembly. Other committees, for instance, deal with the topics of energy, defense, culture, environment, healthcare and education, and have strong ties to the applicable minister.

A few committees, such as the European Affairs Committee, do not have a direct parallel. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for coordinating EU policy, the European Affairs Committee engages in consultations (samråd) with all ministers who take part in European Council meetings, and seeks a mandate for upcoming negotiations in the council. This may create internal coordination problems in parliament between the European Affairs Committee and the committees handling the substance of EU legislation (fagudvalg).

Committees in the Danish parliament typically have 29 members. The Finance Committee, however, has fewer members, at just 17. Membership of the committees follows a proportional allocation procedure among members of parliament. Traditionally, the parties in parliament form two coalitions across which committee memberships are assigned. Given that Denmark frequently has minority governments, it is not uncommon to have committee chairs who are not members of the governing parties (Green-Pedersen et al. 2022).

Committees meet weekly when the parliament is in session, and meeting dates are published on the website of the Danish parliament.

Citation:

Green-Pedersen et al. 2022. Offentlig politik. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel.

Norway

Score 9

The members of parliament are divided into 12 committees, which roughly correspond to the ministries in the government. The workload is substantial but not so high as to prevent effective oversight of government activities. The chairs of the committees are distributed according to the relative size of the parties in parliament, with the parliamentary majority – either as a formal or de facto coalition – naming the committee chairpersons. Since there are 12 chairs to fill, a parliamentary majority of fewer than 12 implies that some committees must be chaired by members of the opposition. It is an informal norm that the vice chairperson belongs to the opposing party or coalition of the chairperson. The conventional order of proceedings in a committee is that a government proposal is debated, and changes are common.

Portugal

Score 9

The committee system is pivotal to decision-making processes within the Portuguese Assembleia da República. These committees, essential in legislative lawmaking, have the authority to amend bills after their initial approval in the Plenum. Although changes made at the committee stage require a final floor vote, political parties often reach consensus on bill versions within the committees (Fernandes & Riera, 2019).

In the Portuguese legislative system, there are two distinct categories of committees: permanent (*comissões permanentes*) and ad hoc (*comissões eventuais*). These committees are designed to parallel the executive portfolios. Currently, the Assembleia da República includes 14 permanent specialized committees, each focusing on a unique policy area. Although there are 17 executive portfolios, the existing committee structure ensures comprehensive coverage of every policy domain.

These committees are supplemented by subcommittees and working groups, with the former requiring authorization from the Assembly's president. These groups focus on particular legislative aspects or monitor specific issues, including occasional committees of inquiry for government oversight.

Political parties play a crucial role in determining committee assignments. The allocation of committee positions follows a rule of proportionality, ensuring representation aligns with each party's size on the legislative floor. However, safeguards exist for smaller parties; regardless of their size, they are guaranteed at least one seat on every committee (Fernandes & Riera, 2019). In the most recent legislative term, the PSD (Social Democratic Party), as the largest opposition party, chaired five major committees, while the PS (Socialist Party) maintained a substantial presence across these committees.

The regular meeting schedule, typically occurring several times a month, facilitates consistent oversight of executive activities. Regular sessions are scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, with additional meetings as needed, indicating a system flexible enough to address emerging concerns (Assembly's Rules of Procedure, Article 57, Paragraph 7).

Citation:

Assembleia da República. n.d. "Comissões – Competências." <https://www.parlamento.pt/sites/COM/XIIIILeg/Paginas/Competencias.aspx>

Fernandes, J., and P. Riera. 2019. "Committee Systems in Portugal and Spain." In Fernandes, J., and C. Leston-Bandeira, eds., *The Iberian Legislatures in Comparative Perspective*. London: Routledge.

Regimento da Assembleia da República n.º 1/2020. 2020. Available at https://www.parlamento.pt/Legislacao/Documents/Legislacao_Anotada/RegimentoAR_Simples.pdf

Slovenia

Score 9

The National Assembly has two types of working bodies – commissions and committees. Some of the commissions are standing bodies, while the committees usually cover the work of ministries. In the 2022 – 2024 period, there were eight commissions. After the 2022 elections, 17 ministries (three without portfolios) were formed, and the Assembly had 13 committees. However, in 2023, while three additional ministries were established, the number of Assembly committees did not increase. This means some committees oversee more than one ministry. This situation is not unusual in Slovenia, even though the number of ministries and committees is relatively similar.

The rules of procedure for the National Assembly stipulate that the leading positions and the majority of seats in the Commission for the Control of Public Finances and the Commission for the Supervision of Intelligence and Security Services are held by members of parliament from opposition parliamentary groups. This is respected. When distributing seats in the individual working bodies, the ratio between governing coalition members and opposition members is considered. At present, all but one of the commissions are chaired by members of the opposition, while only in two committees does the president come from the opposition. As a rule, each parliamentary group is guaranteed at least one seat on each working body. In Slovenia, at least three members of parliament are required to form a parliamentary group. In the 2022 – 2024 period, almost all committees had 15 seats, some even 17, and in most commissions, there were more than 10. This means participation in working bodies is a considerable burden for parliamentary groups with fewer members.

Citation:

Državni zbor. 2024. "<https://www.dz-rs.si>"

Državni zbor. 2024. "Rules of Procedure." <https://www.dz-rs.si/wps/portal/Home/odz/pristojnosti/PoslovnikDrzavnegaZbora>

Switzerland

Score 9

The Swiss government is an oversized grand coalition of the four major parties, which together hold 80% (2023) of the seats in the House of Representatives (Nationalrat). The government-opposition dichotomy does not apply to the Swiss system. The federal government is elected every four years by both houses of the parliament (Vereinigte Bundesversammlung) and cannot be dismissed by parliament within these four years. There is no impeachment procedure. Corresponding to the quasi-presidential structure, political parties in the federal parliament did not follow strict party discipline in parliamentary votes for many years. This has changed considerably in recent decades. Currently, the political party with the largest vote share in national elections, the Swiss People's Party, systematically opposes the policies of the other three large parties, acting as an "opposition" – even though it

holds two of the seven seats in the collegial government structure. There is neither a prime minister nor a “super” minister. All seven members of the government are on equal footing. The president of the council, a position that rotates annually, is *primus inter pares* and has no superior role in directing the politics and policies of the government.

All attempts to enlarge the number of ministries have failed due to political opposition within parliament. Hence, most of the seven ministries have responsibility for many more issue areas than in other democracies. Both the first and the second parliamentary chambers have nine committees dealing with legislation and two committees with oversight functions. There are nine committees for policy issues (foreign policy; transport and communication; legal questions; social security and health; security, state policy and politics (i.e., organization of government and administration, relationship between federation and cantons, etc.); environment, spatial planning and energy; economy and taxes; and science, education and culture), and two supervisory committees for financial matters (examining budgets, supplementary credits and the federal government’s accounts) and general oversight (Geschäftsprüfungskommission; scrutinizes the conduct of business by the Federal Council, the federal administration and other bodies).

Members of these committees are elected by parliament in proportion to the parties’ seats in the parliament (Vatter 2018). Members of the (small) opposition may become committee chairs. For example, the current president of the Political Institutions Committee and the vice-president of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council are members of the Green Party, which is not represented in the federal government. Four other committees have additional tasks (e.g., the Drafting Committee, which checks the wording of bills and legal texts before final votes). Thus, the task areas of the parliamentary committees do not correspond closely to the task areas of the ministries. Nonetheless, this does not suggest that the committees are not able to monitor the ministries or legislative proposals. As the mismatch between ministerial committees and ministries is a function of how the federal government is organized, it does not impair parliament’s oversight function. The congruence between the task areas of parliamentary committees and ministries is therefore largely suited to the monitoring of ministries and legislative proposals.

Citation:

Vatter, Adrian. 2018. *Das politische System der Schweiz*. 3rd ed. Baden-Baden: Nomos (UTB).

Belgium

Score 8

The number of parliamentary committees in the Chamber of Deputies slightly exceeds the number of ministries. There are 11 permanent committees addressing key policy areas aligned with ministerial portfolios, while 14 special committees focus on specific topics or cross-cutting issues. Committees can effectively monitor

ministries, but this monitoring can be underwhelming, as demonstrated by the nuclear safety and electricity supply case. It ultimately took Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the imminent risk of power cuts to prompt effective government action.

While these committees can effectively monitor government actions ex post or amend government law projects, they are less effective at guiding policy ex ante. That role has been taken over by ministers' cabinets of experts, with almost all legislative proposals being tabled by the government rather than parliament.

Citation:

List and functioning of commissions:

<https://www.lachambre.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=/none&language=fr&cfm=/site/wwwcfm/comm/LstCom.cfm>

https://www.lachambre.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/pri/fiche/fr_12_02.pdf

https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20220611_94598864

Er dreigt betonrot in het huis van de democratie: 'Het Vlaams Parlement wordt meer en meer een praatbarak' | De Standaard: https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20230319_97203506

Czechia

Score 8

Major legislative committees align with ministerial portfolios. Opposition parties can hold and often do obtain the chairmanship of parliamentary committees, albeit not the most important ones. Draft legislation can undergo changes after deliberations in committees. The Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies do not prescribe a

The text edits are as follows:

The chamber is obliged to establish the Mandate and Immunity Committee, the Committee on Petitions, the Budget Committee, the Control Committee, and the Organizing Committee.

Committee, the Electoral Committee, and the Committee on European Affairs. However, the establishment of additional committees is within its competence. Committee meetings are public, except for Organizing Committee meetings and Mandate and Immunity Committee meetings. In the 2021 – 2025 term, there

There were 18 parliamentary committees, 15 of which shadowed government ministries or ministerial agendas. However, there was no exact match between the task areas of parliamentary committees and ministries. For example, the

The Economic Committee covered the agendas of two ministries: the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Transportation. Parliamentary committees can and frequently do establish subcommittees.

Latvia

Score 8

Committees play a crucial role in the work of parliament. Parliamentary commissions specialize in specific areas of legislation, preparing bills for consideration by the Saeima and exercising parliamentary control over the government's activities. Some parliamentary committees also undertake additional tasks, such as evaluating the justification of public spending, investigating ethical breaches, or assessing Latvia's national position on European Union (EU) issues. According to the Saeima's Rules of Procedure, the Saeima has 16 standing committees.

Committee representatives are elected at the start of each parliamentary term but can be changed later during the parliament's work. Each committee comprises members from different political groups, with proportional representation of the political forces elected to the Saeima. The exceptions are the Committee on Mandates, Ethics and Submissions, composed of two members elected from each parliamentary faction, and the National Security Committee, composed of one member from each faction. Article 150 of the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima provides that the Saeima may establish special committees to carry out specific legislative tasks.

Subcommittees may be established in addition to the Saeima committees. Their creation and election do not require a vote of the Saeima. Subcommittees may also include members who are not part of the relevant committee. The subcommittee submits its decisions and proposals to the committee. The subcommittee's work is conducted by a chairman and a secretary elected from among the subcommittee members. A member may serve on up to two standing committees and three subcommittees at any time. A member may hold the office of chairperson of only one standing committee.

In 2022, members of the 13th Saeima served on 18 subcommittees; members of the 14th Saeima served on nine. In the 13th Saeima, a range of standing and subcommittees (commissions) oversee various national governance and policy aspects. Each committee focuses on specific areas, with subcommittees diving deeper into specialized topics.

As a rule, a committee can be chaired by a coalition or opposition member of parliament. Members of opposition parties chair several committees: the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Defense, Home Affairs and Anti-Corruption Committee, and the Sustainable Development Committee. However, the leadership of the committees can change if the political parties forming the coalition change.

The Saeima's committees play a significant role in the legislative process. Out of 476 proposed laws, 359 were reviewed by committees, demonstrating their active involvement in evaluating legislation. Moreover, the high number of proposals

(4,446) assessed in the second and third readings highlights the committees' detailed scrutiny of legislative content. The acceptance of 207 laws, including 34 new ones, further underlines the practical impact of these committees in shaping legislation. This suggests that committees in the Saeima are actively engaged and influential in the legislative process.

Citation:

Saeima. 1994. "Rules of Order of Saeima." <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/57517-rules-of-order-of-saeima>

Saeima. 2023. Saeimas gada pārskats 2022. gads. <https://www.saeima.lv/files/PP/Saeimasgadaparskats2022.pdf>

Ministru kabinets. 2023. "Ministru kabineta sastāvs." <https://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/ministru-kabineta-sastavs>

Saeima. "Saeimas komisijas un apakškomisijas." <https://www.saeima.lv/lv/14-saeima/komisijas-un-apakskomisijas-14/>

Lithuania

Score 8

The organization and operations of legislative committees are for the most part well-suited for effectively monitoring ministry activities. There is extensive congruence between the current structure of 16 parliamentary committees and the primary areas of competence of Lithuania's 14 ministries. The Committee for the Future is the most recent addition, established in 2020.

However, there are a few mismatches. Several ministries, such as Economy, Transport and Communications, as well as other state institutions, are monitored by a single Committee on Economics. Conversely, there are several horizontal parliamentary committees, including those on the issues of government audits, European affairs, and human rights.

In addition to these, the parliament had 11 standing commissions as of 2023, some of which were related to policy areas assigned to the Lithuanian ministries. One such example was the Commission for Energy and Sustainable Development. Thus, the composition of parliamentary committees allows government policy to be monitored on both a sectoral and horizontal basis.

Committees meet regularly, but most of their activities focus on considering draft legislation. The workload of individual committees in the legislative process varies substantially, with the committees on Legal Affairs, State Administration and Local Authorities, Social Affairs and Labor, and Budget and Finance accounting for most of the legislative review work delegated to committees. The attention given to parliamentary oversight remains insufficient, although the exact amount depends on the particular committee and its chair.

Citation:

The Seimas, Committees and Commissions, https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35733&p_k=2

New Zealand

Score 8 Select committees actively engage in the legislative process and significantly contribute to the development and refinement of legislation by examining legislative proposals in detail. They also conduct consultations, seek public submissions and gather expert opinions.

The task areas of select committees usually align with the responsibilities of government ministries in related policy areas. Committees interact with relevant ministries and government agencies to gather information, seek explanations, and request documents related to their inquiries or the legislation under review. Committee chairs are generally allocated to reflect the proportionality of political parties in Parliament, following debates among a small number of MPs from different parties and invited submissions from interest groups and other stakeholders.

One area of concern is the size of New Zealand's Parliament, which is relatively small compared to other democracies with similar population counts, such as Denmark, Finland or Ireland. This small size is problematic because it means that MPs are stretched thinly across multiple committees, which in turn affects the ability of select committees to scrutinize proposed legislation (Boston et al. 2019: 71).

Despite the heavy workload, select committees have successfully changed draft legislation through their deliberations. One debated example was the "Three Waters" reform proposal by the previous Labour government, which aimed to consolidate responsibilities for drinking water, wastewater and stormwater into four regional entities. In November 2022, the government agreed to revise the bill based on recommendations made by the Finance and Expenditure Committee (RNZ 2022).

Citation:

Boston, J., et al. 2019. *Foresight, Insight and Oversight: Enhancing Long-Term Governance through Better Parliamentary Scrutiny*. Wellington: Victoria University.
https://www.victoria.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1753571/Foresight-insight-and-oversight.pdf

RNZ. 2022. "Three Waters: Government Agrees to Changes after Select Committee Recommendations." 22 November. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/478549/three-waters-government-agrees-to-changes-after-select-committee-recommendations>

Spain

Score 8 The responsibilities of the regular parliamentary committees in the Congress of Deputies and the Senate align with government ministries' functions. Since 2020, 22 ministries have been monitored by 21 standing legislative committees in Congress, renamed to match ministerial portfolios. Changes in committee structures were approved in December 2023 due to the new government's redesign of ministries, ensuring no mismatch (Congreso 2023). However, limited committee resources present significant challenges for effective monitoring.

Non-permanent committees address cross-cutting policy areas, though no commission oversees the core executive, the office of the president. Committees effectively monitor and discuss ministerial activities, and opposition parties can chair legislative committees, reflecting the Chamber's power distribution. For example, during 2020-2023, the Finance Commission was chaired by the opposition.

Committee work is crucial for preparing legislative acts and reaching agreements among parliamentary parties, especially in minority governments. However, during the analyzed period, legislative capacity faced constraints due to increased emergency legislation use, exemplified by rule-by-decree practices to bypass parliamentary scrutiny. The Bills of Parliament mechanism, intended to facilitate legislative projects, was misused to avoid mandatory assessments by esteemed bodies like the Council of State. This practice empowered an acting government to expedite bill passage without proper legislative processing, even in crucial matters like the Amnesty Law.

Citation:

Congreso. 2023. "Index of Commissions, XV Legislature." <https://www.congreso.es/comisiones>
Index of Commissions, XV Legislature. <https://www.congreso.es/comisiones>

United Kingdom

Score 8

Because the House of Commons selects committees that match departments and adapt if the government reconfigures ministries, there is a clear correspondence in monitoring. A majority of members usually belong to the governing party (or, in the exceptional case of the 2010 – 2015 coalition government), but chairs of several committees are from opposition parties. By convention, the opposition usually chairs the powerful public accounts committee.

In addition to monitoring, public bill committees play an important role in passing legislation through Parliament. These committees handle the "committee stage" of bills, where detailed scrutiny occurs, and amendments are proposed. A separate committee stage takes place in the House of Lords. However, once the bill returns to the House of Commons, the amendments made in the Lords can still be overturned.

In deliberate contrast to Westminster, committees in the Scottish and Welsh parliaments combine the functions of select committees and legislative scrutiny. They consider bill principles and draft legislation before the plenary debate.

Australia

Score 7

Parliamentary committees are effectively organized to monitor executive activity. There is broad alignment of standing committees with executive functional areas, and select committees can be established to investigate important but non-enduring issues. The government retains significant influence over the chairmanship of

important committees and decides which committee recommendations to incorporate into legislative plans or actions, meaning the oversight powers of committees are not always fully exercised. This risk is greater in the House of Representatives than in the Senate. The House tends to have more seats allocated to the government and high party discipline, whereas the Senate has more minor-party and independent members of parliament, leading to more scrutiny of the government.

Committees benefit from being able to examine government activity in a small group. Generally, the small-group context supports mostly cordial and collegial relations in committees, even among politicians from rival parties. There are exceptions, however. For instance, the federal Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) has attracted attention following the Labor government's proposal to expand the committee membership (from 11 to 13 members) and open up spaces on the committee to minor parties and independents. The Liberal-National Coalition has expressed its strong opposition to these moves, causing tension in this normally collegial committee (Grayson 2023).

Citation:

Grayson, K. 2023. "Gatekeeping the parliamentary intelligence committee won't make Australia safer." *The Strategist*. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/gatekeeping-the-parliamentary-intelligence-committee-wont-make-australia-safer/>

Canada

Score 7

Governments control parliamentary committees and do not act as an effective check on the executive (Savoie 1999). However, they do play an important role in vetting legislation (Glenn 2018).

Parliamentary committees have the right to receive government documents during their deliberations, and committee members frequently ask ministers and officials giving testimony to provide further information.

in writing.

However, these requests may be ignored or delayed by the government. Ministers, for example, are normally expected to appear before parliamentary committees, but they too may decline a committee invitation or send a representative in their place.

A representative, even when receiving a formal summons approved through a committee motion, may be substituted. For example, a deputy minister may appear instead of a minister for questions related to departmental operations. Alternatively, a parliamentary secretary may stand in for the minister if the matter at hand is legislative in nature.

Parliamentary committees have the right to summon any expert they choose to provide testimony, and experts are frequent contributors to the work of committees. However, committees cannot compel experts to appear.

Documents often arrive incomplete and are redacted due to confidentiality considerations, further reducing the effectiveness of committees in this role.

Citation:

Glenn, Ted. 2018. "Canadian Legislatures, Public Policy and Policy Analysis." In *Policy Analysis in Canada*, eds. Laurent Dobuzinskis and Michael Howlett. Policy Press. <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447334910.003.0010>

Savoie, Donald J. 1999. "The Rise of Court Government in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32 (4): 635–64. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423900016930>

Estonia

Score 7

The 11 standing committees of the parliament generally mirror the structure of the government, which is composed of 11 ministries. In addition to committees that correspond to ministries, there is also a European Union Affairs Committee that monitors the country's EU policy. Legal affairs are divided between two permanent committees: the Constitutional Committee and the Legal Affairs Committee. Cultural and educational affairs both fall under the purview of the Cultural Affairs Committee.

The working schedule of the standing committees is established by the Riigikogu Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act, with committee work sessions spread over three days and totaling 12 hours per week. All members of parliament belong to one standing committee (excluding the EU Affairs Committee), with each committee having about 10 members. Currently, no standing committee is chaired by an opposition member of parliament, which represents a challenge to the democratic principle of checks and balances.

Greece

Score 7

Although there are more ministries than parliamentary committees, this mismatch does not hinder the committees' oversight responsibilities.

During the government term from 2019 to 2023, there were 19 ministries, which increased to 20 after the June 2023 elections with the creation of the Ministry of Family and Social Cohesion. Despite these changes, the number of standing parliamentary committees has remained at six.

Parliamentary scrutiny is conducted through joint committees when necessary. For example, the Standing Committee on Cultural and Educational Affairs oversees both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, while the Standing Committee on National Defense and Foreign Affairs scrutinizes both the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, special parliamentary committees

focus on narrower policy areas, such as armaments, and there are ten such “special permanent committees.” There are also “special standing committees” that address cross-cutting policy areas, such as Social Insurance and Pensions or European Affairs.

Committee debates can be lively, although absenteeism is not uncommon, especially when MPs prefer to visit their electoral districts. It is rare for an opposition member of parliament to chair a parliamentary committee, as the parliamentary majority typically controls the chair to coordinate the passage of legislation. Nonetheless, there is room for amendments to draft legislation within committees. Both opposition MPs and government-supporting MPs can propose amendments, many of which are accepted by the government and the parliamentary majority. However, if too many amendments are made, the quality of the final legislation may suffer.

Citation:

Greek Parliament. Year. “Categories of Parliamentary Committees.” <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/Koinovouleftikes-Epitropes/Katigories>

Prime Minister’s Office. “The Government’s Composition.” <https://www.government.gov.gr/kivernisi/>

Ireland

Score 7

The task areas of legislative committees generally align with those of ministries but there can also be effective specific task focused committees -for example gender equality committee- or overlapping coordination committees in the examples of Covid 19 and climate action. The size of committees (up to 15 members) and their frequent meetings (often weekly during parliamentary terms) enable effective monitoring and discussion of ministerial activities. Opposition parties can chair legislative committees, which are distributed on a pro-rata proportional basis. Notably, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the most powerful committee, must be chaired by an opposition member. Draft legislation can and does change as a result of committee deliberations. Cross-cutting policy areas, typically organized under specific ministries (such as PMOs, finance ministries or “super-ministries”), tend to be managed by cabinet-level committees or cabinet subcommittees. However, these entities face considerable challenges in delivering policy integration across the policy silos that characterize Irish policy, particularly in sustainable development and climate action, which significantly impacts policy effectiveness (Torney and O’Mahony, 2023; Flynn and Ó hUiginn, 2019).

The Government Legislation Committee (GLC) is chaired by the government chief whip and includes members such as the attorney general, the chief parliamentary counsel, the program managers of the main parties in government, the leader of Seanad Éireann (the upper house of the Irish Parliament) and representatives of the Department of the Taoiseach and the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC). The process of determining the legislative timetable can be opaque. The OPC works

closely with the GLC to ensure that the government legislation program is implemented. The GLC assists the government in setting legislative priorities and implementing the government legislation program. The OPC, part of the Attorney General's office, recommends to the government the level of priority for drafting each Bill and anticipates blockages, suggesting appropriate actions to avoid delays. Lynch (2017) and Lynch et al. (2017) have assessed the effects of legislative reforms on improving the Irish legislature. However, they express caution in drawing conclusions due to the complexities associated with coalition governments.

Citation:

Lynch, C. 2017. "The Effect of Parliamentary Reforms (2011-2016) on the Oireachtas Committee System." *Administration* 65 (2): 59-87.

Lynch, C., O'Malley, E., Reidy, T., Farrell, D., and Suiter, J. 2017. "Dáil Reforms since 2011: Pathway to Power for the 'Puny' Parliament?" *Administration* 65 (2): 37-57.

Flynn, B., and P. Ó hUiginn. 2019. *Environmental Policy Integration: Innovation and Change*. Environmental Protection Agency. https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/socio-economics/Research_Report_290.pdf

Torney, D., and O'Mahony, T. 2023. "Transforming Governance and Policy." In *Irish Climate Change Assessment*, Volume 4, Chapter 7. https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring-assessment/climate-change/ICCA_Volume-4.pdf

Israel

Score 7

In the Israeli Knesset, there is alignment between the task areas of Knesset committees and government ministries. In general, there are fewer committees than ministries. Some committees oversee only one ministry. For example, the Immigration and Absorption Committee oversees the Ministry of Absorption. Other committees oversee many ministries. The Economic Affairs Committee oversees the ministries of transportation, energy, environment, communication, economy, agriculture and tourism. The Economic Affairs Committee is, therefore, overwhelmed with both oversight and legislative tasks. Most committees, however, are less overwhelmed, overseeing two or three ministries, most of which do not produce much legislation.

The cross-cutting issues of finance and legal matters are addressed by the Finance Committee, and the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, respectively. By having each committee handle specific ministries, they can specialize in their respective issue areas.

The committees meet three times a week, with two or three meetings each day. This schedule allows for the discussion of many issues.

A member of the opposition chaired the Economic Affairs Committee until 2019, when they were replaced by a member of the coalition government. Today, only marginal Knesset committees are chaired by members of the opposition.

Draft legislation often changes following committee deliberations. There are, however, some important exceptions. The judicial reform suggested by Minister of

Justice Levin was deliberated for a very short period and remained unchanged following the deliberation.

Italy

Score 7

The Italian parliament possesses a robust committee system that effectively empowers the legislature to scrutinize, control, and amend government policies (Martin 2011; Martin and Vanberg 2020). Both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate have numerous standing committees that foster specialization and policy expertise among their members. Until the 18th legislature, both chambers had 14 committees. Following the 2022 constitutional reform, the Senate reduced the number of committees to 10, in line with the reduction of senators to 200. Conversely, the Chamber of Deputies retained 14 committees, even as the number of deputies was reduced to 400.

The organization of committees generally aligns with ministerial jurisdictions, with some minor exceptions, especially in the Senate following the reduction in committees. This structure further enhances policy expertise. Committees also hold the authority to propose amendments to draft bills and can substantially rewrite them. Additionally, committees convene frequently, and their members are supported by highly qualified technical personnel.

Although the Italian parliament retains a significant role in guiding policy, recent research suggests it has lost influence, particularly in the area of budget laws (Cavalieri 2023). The trend toward greater executive dominance, especially evident during the 2024 budget process, combined with Prime Minister Meloni's growing political clout, has raised concerns about parliament's ability to safeguard its institutional role.

The composition of parliamentary committees reflects the distribution of power among political parties in parliament. This is evident in the appointment of committee chairpersons, typically drawn from the governing majority parties. However, this does not preclude the opposition from influencing committee proceedings. Enlarged majorities often emerge in committee decisions, driven by members' seniority, shared interest in specific issues, and common expertise acquired outside the parliamentary sphere (De Micheli and Verzichelli 2004).

Citation:

Martin, S. 2011. "Electoral Institutions, the Personal Vote, and Legislative Organization." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 36 (3): 339–361.

Martin, L.W., and Vanberg, G. 2020. "Coalition Government, Legislative Institutions, and Public Policy in Parliamentary Democracies." *American Journal of Political Science* 64(2): 325–340.

De Micheli, C., and Verzichelli, L. 2004. *Il Parlamento*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Cavalieri, A. 2023. *Italian Budgeting Policy: Between Punctuations and Incrementalism*. Cham: Springer.

United States

Score 7 Congressional committees have sometimes been described as “Congress at work” (Bianco 2000). They are where bill drafting, markup, debate, investigation, and information collection take place (Kornberg 2023). Congress has strong committees that are well-resourced and contain expert staff who support committee members. Committee places are highly coveted and usually assigned based on some familiarity or connection with the policy area. Members can spend many years on the same committee, building policy expertise and gaining insights into the workings of the relevant executive branch agencies they are responsible for scrutinizing.

One issue for congressional committees today is the significant difference in their willingness to investigate the executive branch, depending on whether the committee’s majority party aligns with that of the president. This discrepancy has led some commentators to suggest that the United States now has a system more clearly structured by the separation of parties than by the separation of powers (Rubin 2017).

Citation:

Maya Kornberg. 2023. *Inside Congressional Committees: Function and Dysfunction in the Legislative Process*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ruth Bloch Rubin. 2017. *Building the Bloc: Intraparty Organization in the US Congress*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Poland

Score 6 In the ninth and tenth terms of the Sejm (2019 and 2023), there were 29 standing committees. The number of Senate committees increased from 16 to 20. The quantity of Sejm committees surpassed that of ministries. Nevertheless, most ministries, even the more significant ones, are associated with only one oversight committee, commonly called a branch committee. Consequently, allocating subject areas among committees does not compromise the parliament’s capacity to oversee ministries. During the 2019 – 2023 term, the committees varied in size, ranging from several members to more than 50. The number of sessions depended on the committee. For example, the Public Finance Committee held 460 meetings, while the Committee on National and Ethnic Minorities had only 75. In most cases, the frequency of meetings provided a sufficient overview of government activities.

Committee chairpersons and deputies are elected at the first committee meeting via an open simple majority vote. Agreements among parliamentary groups determine the political faction that will provide the committee chairperson. As a result, despite having a significant number of legislators, the opposition was able to exert appreciable influence within only a few committees of lesser importance after the elections in both 2019 and 2023.

Hungary

Score 5

Since the 2010 reduction in the number of ministries, there has been a significant mismatch between the task areas of ministries and committees. The fact that ministries are covered not by a single committee but by several has complicated the monitoring of ministries. Moreover, the decision-making centers – the Prime Minister’s Office and the Cabinet Office – are not covered by any parliamentary committee. Since 2022, the number of ministers (15 plus the prime minister) mirrors the number of committees, but area alignment has not yet been completely established. Several important policy areas with a designated parliamentary committee, such as sustainability and culture, do not have a separate ministry, but are represented at the state secretary level. The government controls most of the committees due to its two-thirds majority. Currently, five out of 15 committees are controlled by the opposition, not counting the exceptional committee for national minorities, reflecting the electoral outcome. Government-allied politicians control key committees for foreign policy and European integration, as well as the judicial committee. The only exceptions are the Budgetary Committee and the National Security Committee, which opposition politicians lead.

Japan

Score 5

Standing committees in the Japanese Diet generally correspond to the matters under the jurisdiction of separate ministries, while special committees deal with important matters exceeding the competence of one standing committee. Special parliamentary committees are sometimes used by the government to bypass standing committees, in which deliberations are subject to numerous institutional constraints.

Membership of parliamentary committees is distributed proportionally to the size of political groups in each house. All decisions in the committees are made by a majority vote, with the chairperson’s vote decisive in case of a tie. In the past, with a minimal majority in the house, the ruling party often had to choose between securing a majority of votes or the position of committee chairperson. As of November 2023, however, the ruling parties hold a majority in all House of Representative committees. Opposition politicians chair three of 25 committees in the lower house and seven of 25 committees in the upper house. Only in the House of Councilors, where the ruling coalition has a minimal majority, do opposition lawmakers chair some important committees, such as the Committee on Economy and Industry.

Committees typically meet on a weekly basis or less often. The schedule of Diet deliberations is established by the committees on rules and administration of both chambers, which host the representatives of all parliamentary caucuses. As the government has no way to directly control the legislative process after submission of

a bill to the Diet, it relies on a comprehensive advance screening of all bill proposals at the ruling-party level. Once a project is acknowledged as a party decision by the LDP General Council, all LDP lawmakers are obliged to vote for the bill. Because serious deliberations on bill proposals take place in the ruling party before their submission to the Diet, discussion in parliamentary committees is conducted mainly by the opposition parties. Discussion time during plenary sessions is greatly limited in comparison with other parliamentary systems in the world. Negotiations with opposition politicians are conducted outside the Diet by the Diet affairs committees of different parties, which decreases the transparency of the legislative process. For this reason, committee deliberations rarely play a role in modifying draft legislation or monitoring ministry activity.

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Netherlands

Score 5

There are 12 Permanent parliamentary committees (*vaste kamercommissies*) in the Netherlands, each corresponding to the policy domains of the ministries. In 2023, only two of these committees were chaired by opposition-party members. The prime minister’s Department of General Affairs is the only ministry without a corresponding parliamentary committee. There are also permanent commissions for interdepartmental policymaking on aggregate government expenditure, European affairs, and foreign trade and development aid. Parliamentary committees usually have 25 members, representing all political parties with seats in the States General. Smaller political parties tend to participate only in committees that align closely with their platforms. In recent decades, the core of parliamentary activity has shifted from plenary oversight sessions to the co-legislative committees. Most parliamentary work occurs in these committees, which held an estimated 1,700 public and nonpublic meetings per year, averaging almost three per committee per week. However, this trend has recently reversed.

The number of plenary debates on bills has been decreasing, paralleling the declining number of bills tabled. Instead, the chamber is increasingly holding plenary debates on subjects other than legislation. Retrospective debates, which examine the roles of ministers or knowledge institutes in the preparation of bills or important decisions, primarily serve an oversight function. Consequently, the relationship between legislation and control on the plenary agenda has shifted, with significantly more “oversight debates” now taking place.

Various publications have indicated that during legislative debates, there is little systematic attention to the quality of legislation, and especially to core values such as consistency, enforceability, practicability, constitutionality, the European dimension, and a proper understanding of citizens' needs and capabilities. To address this, the Van der Staay Working Group, which was tasked with developing proposals to strengthen the role of parliament, suggested nominating one legislator as a "rapporteur" tasked with alerting other MPs to salient issues in new bills. Currently, over 100 MPs hold the status of rapporteur' for designated bills.

Overall, it seems that in a fragmented parliament with many political factions of fewer than 10 members, the legislative capacity for policy guidance is in serious decline. This indicates that in the Dutch dual system, the executive branch increasingly outweighs the legislative branch. To counter this imbalance, the Van der Staay Working Group recommends not waiting for bills to come to the House but instead periodically discussing the legislative agenda in committees, especially after a new administration takes office.

Citation:

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Slovakia

Score 5

During the period under review, the National Council of the Slovak Republic has more parliamentary committees than ministries. This includes Mandate and Immunity Committees and at least three specialized committees overseeing intelligence services and the National Security Authority (NBÚ). Since the 1998 elections, the law has required proportional representation in these committees, with an informal practice that members of the opposition chair them. This practice has been respected since the 2023 elections.

The European Affairs Committee and the Committee for Human Rights and National Minorities have several ministerial counterparts, and the committees cover all ministerial task areas. Thus, allocating subject regions among committees does not hinder parliamentary oversight of ministries. The size of committees and the frequency with which they meet enable effective monitoring and discussion of ministerial activities.

Since the 2023 elections, the coalition has chaired 12 committees, and the opposition has chaired seven. The opposition currently chairs the following legislative committees:

Mandate and Immunity Committee

Committee public administration and regional development

Committee for human rights and national minorities
Special control committee to control the activities of the NBU
Special control committee to control SIS activities
The Special Control Committee oversees the activities of the Military Intelligence Service.
Committee to review the decisions of the NBU

This composition de facto means that only one “substantive” committee is chaired by an opposition member of parliament.

The likelihood that draft legislation will change due to committee deliberations is high, especially for “less politically sensitive” laws; however, exact data are unavailable.

Citation:

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France

Score 4

There is no congruence between the structures of ministries and those of parliamentary committees. The number of parliamentary committees is limited to eight (up from six in 2008) while there are 25 to 30 ministries or state secretaries. This rule, introduced in 1958, was meant as, and resulted in, a limitation of deputies’ power to follow and oversee each ministry’s activities closely and precisely. The 2007 – 2008 constitutional reform permitted a slight increase in the number of committees and allowed the establishment of committees dealing with European affairs.

Since 2009, the chair of the Finance Committee is given to the opposition. It is virtually impossible for an opposition politician to preside over any of the other seven permanent committees.

The influence on lawmaking is important to the extent that this provides backbenchers the opportunity to negotiate with the executive. However, the executive has several instruments to enforce the passage of its original proposal. It may reject any amendments that reduce government income or increase expenditure (Art. 40 of the constitution). Moreover, it may use a “package” vote (Art. 44.3) – a procedure that is no longer used very often.

The 2022 legislative election did not yield a clear majority for the presidential camp. This situation had not been experienced since the 8th legislature (1988 – 1993). Rather than strengthening the influence of committees on draft legislation, the situation repeatedly led to situations of gridlock, with the government having a hard

time adapting. As a consequence, Macron's government repeatedly resorted to the procedure specified in Article 49.3, which allows the government to declare a bill adopted unless the government is removed by a no-confidence vote. Prime Minister Borne had used this procedure 20 times at the time of writing (January 2024), illustrating how governments may have their way in the legislature even without a majority.

Citation:

Brouard, S. 2013. "France: Systematic Institutional Advantage of Government in Lawmaking." In S. Brouard, ed., *The Role of Governments in Legislative Agenda Setting*, 38-52. London: Routledge.

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