

The second Global Parliamentary Report on *Parliament's power to hold government to account: Realities and perspectives on oversight*

About the second Global Parliamentary Report

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Performing oversight is a formal constitutional or long standing statutory obligation of most parliaments. Parliament's oversight role has grown in importance in response to the growth in the power of the executive. From a citizen's perspective, it is important that the elected body can exert control on the executive and hold it accountable. Yet, while the public demand side for oversight has been increasing for nearly all legislatures, the parliamentary supply side differs enormously.

Thus, it is time to take stock of parliamentary capacity to hold government to account and to sketch out the perspectives for the future. The second Global Parliamentary Report will address two central questions:

- How effective is parliament in carrying out its role to hold government to account?
- How could it become more so?

To answer these central questions, the report will investigate four inter-related areas:

Enabling environment. How conducive is the political and institutional environment to effective oversight? What influence do the system of government and the electoral system have? How responsive is government to parliamentary oversight? What is the impact of political party competition and the role of the opposition? Is there public demand for oversight?

Institutional capacity. What efforts are made to strengthen parliament's capacity for effective oversight? What are recent developments in parliamentary rules, procedures, systems and tools? What is the capacity of the parliamentary administration to support oversight with independent research and analysis? How can partnerships such as those with Supreme Audit Institutions and civil society be strengthened?

Political will. What motivates individual parliamentarians to carry out oversight? What are the incentives and disincentives for parliamentarians to undertake oversight activities? What is the link between representation and oversight, and meeting citizens' needs and expectations?

Measurement and evaluation. How does parliament account to the public for its oversight performance? To what extent can the impact of parliamentary oversight on the functioning of government and on people's lives be identified? What are the challenges of measuring effectiveness in parliamentary oversight?

The report will mainstream a gender perspective throughout these areas by investigating the willingness and capacity of parliaments to keep governments accountable on the goal of gender equality and ensure parliamentary oversight is gender-sensitive, as well as the opportunities available to both women and men parliamentarians to engage in oversight and the impact that increased

numbers of women in parliament has on parliamentary oversight. Is there an enabling environment that promotes gender equality and women's political empowerment? Has parliament created mechanisms to facilitate oversight on gender equality commitments such as dedicated gender committees or women's caucuses, and if so, how effective are they?

Major thematic areas that will be covered throughout the report include budgetary oversight, oversight of performance in different policy areas and oversight of international obligations, such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

The report will include a discussion of the importance of oversight; the meaning and constituent elements of "effective oversight"; and what happens in the absence of oversight.

The report will take into account different national contexts, such as post-conflict and fragile States; democratic transitions; Small Island Developing States; and decentralized systems of government.

Based on the research, the report will make recommendations on ways to increase the overall effectiveness of parliamentary oversight, by:

- improving the environment in which oversight can take place;
- building parliament's institutional capacity for oversight;
- reinforcing political will among parliamentarians to carry out oversight activities.

Note on terminology: This project uses the term "oversight". Some parliaments use different terms, such as "scrutiny", "control", "evaluation of public policies", to describe what are essentially similar functions. "Oversight" can be defined as any activity that involves examining (and being prepared to challenge) the expenditure, administration and policies of the government of the day. Oversight activities include such things as questioning ministers, holding public hearings, reviewing reports from government departments, examining audit reports, etc. For the purposes of this project, oversight does not include activities related to law-making, such as pre-legislative scrutiny.

More information about the second Global Parliamentary Report is available at www.ipu.org/gpr2.