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Parliamentary Reform and Enhancing Oversight

Greg Power

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GPG Background

- Supporting parliaments, parties, ministries and local government
  - Established 2005, aiming to provide more politically-astute and agile form of programming
  - Associates with direct political experience
  - Focus on problem-solving rather than activities

- Analysis, advice, delivery

- Delivery projects

  Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Honduras, Ukraine, Fiii. Nepal, Libya, Tanzania, Kuwait, Oman, Rwan Uganda, Afghanistan, …

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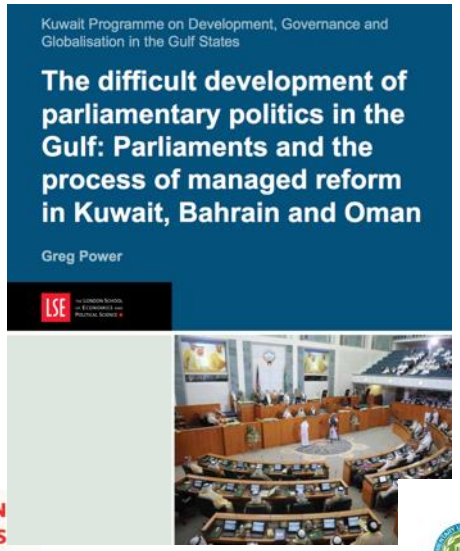
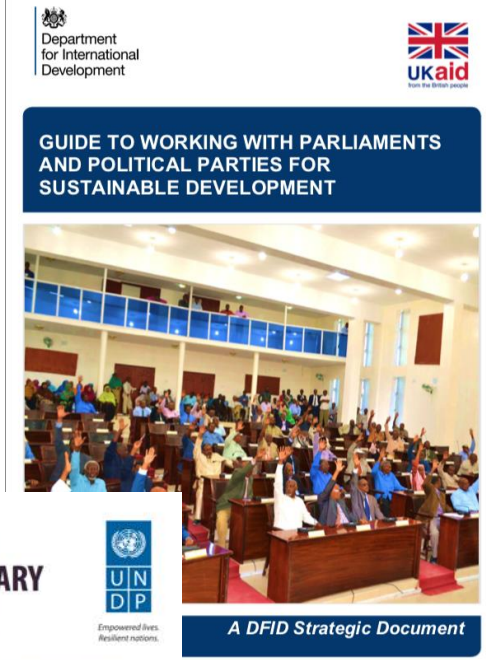
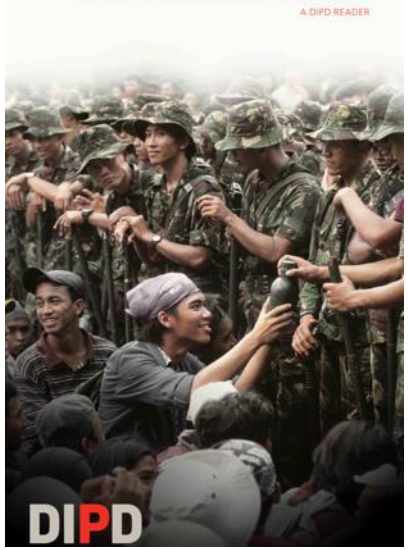
Strategic Analysis and Advice







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“Government by explanation”

Parliamentary oversight “is not a stop switch, it is the tuning, the tone and the amplifier of a system of communication which tells government what the electorate want”

“Parliamentary control of the Executive – rightly conceived – is not the enemy of good government, but its primary condition”

Professor Bernar

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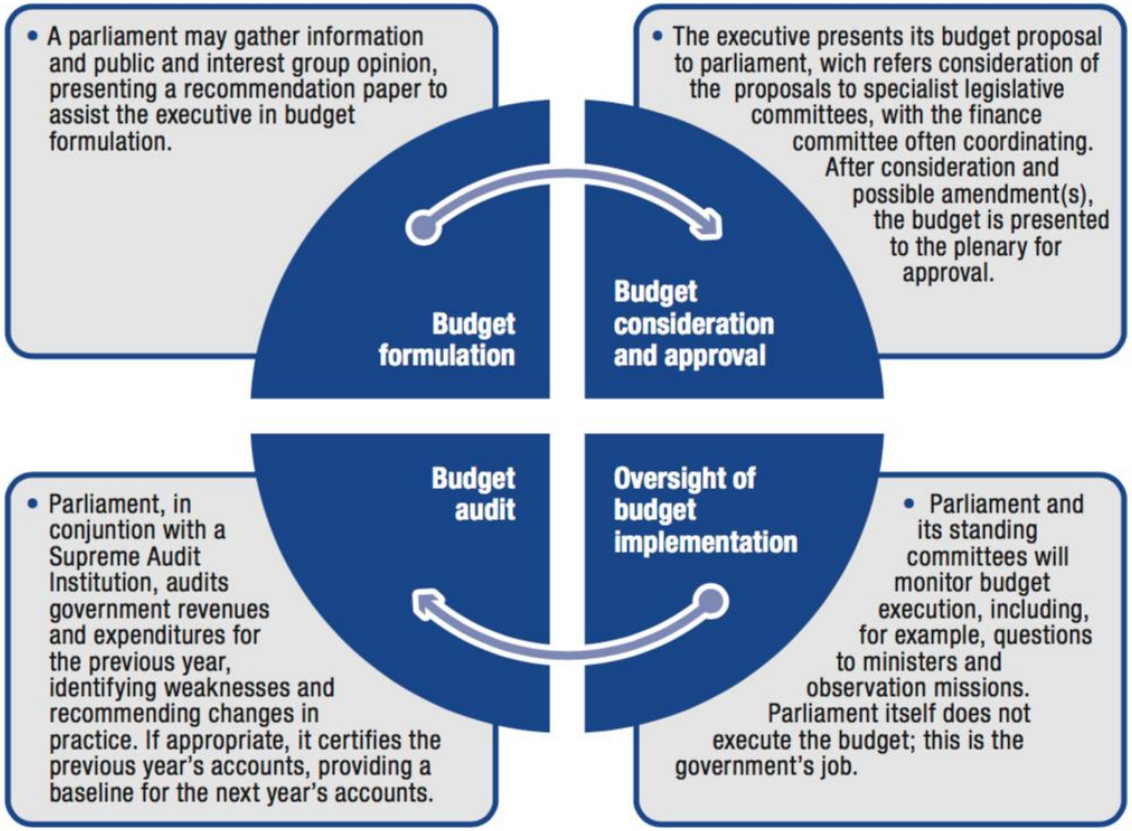
Parliament and the budget process

Figure 10: The role of parliament in a typical budget cycle



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Oversight mechanisms

- Plenary session – general principles
  - Debates, questions, interpellations
- Committees - the detail
  - Inquiries, evidence-gathering, questioning ministers
- External oversight agencies – the experts
  - Supreme audit institution, inspectors

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Budget Oversight Parliamentary Types

Role	Characteristics	Examples
Budget Making	Capacity to amend or reject the executive's budget proposal and capacity to formulate a budget of its own.	United States
Budget Influencing	Capacity to amend or reject the executive's budget proposal, but lacks capacity to formulate and substitute budget of its own.	Germany, Philippines, Poland, Hungary, India
Budget Approving	Lacks capacity to amend or reject the executive's budget proposal or to formulate a budget of its own. Confines itself to assenting to the budget that is placed before it.	South Africa, Israel, Namibia, United Kingdom, Canada

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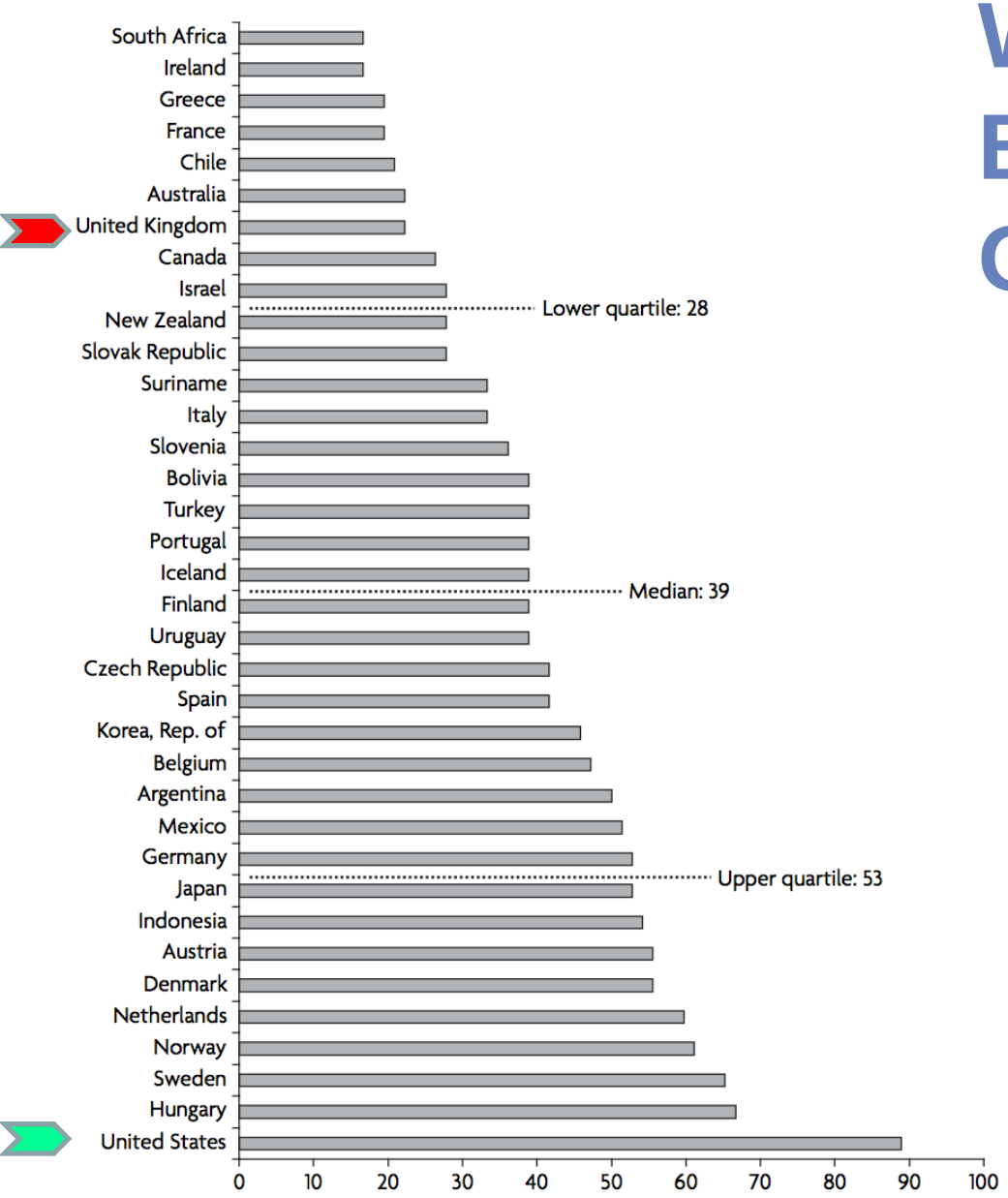
Westminster and Budget Oversight

Figure 5.1. Index of Legislative Budget Institutions



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A Strange Way of Handling the Budget

Weeks of silence, then unveiled with a flourish

Ritually denounced by an Opposition leader who will have had minimal opportunity to think about its contents

A four day debate, during which the chamber is largely empty, then follows.

Confusion on committee corridor between Treasury and Bill Committee

Once, every thousand years or so, this process r some change to the Budget

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Repeated Calls for Reform

- Pre-legislative scrutiny of draft budget
- Additional committees to the Treasury Committee to deal with tax and HMRC matters
- Replacing ‘estimates’ with Committee reviews of departmental annual reviews
- Better, more co-ordinated follow up of PAC/NAO reports
- Each committee to have finance sub-committee/rapporteur

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More resources for Oversight

- Procedure Committee Report (1999)
  - need for a specialist unit for financial scrutiny in its report on *Procedure for Debate on the Government's Expenditure Plans*.
- Liaison Committee (2000)
  - "committee office should establish a unit specialising in public expenditure and pre-legislative scrutiny"
- Hansard Society "Challenge for Parliament" (2001)
  - need for all committees to improve financial oversight, recommending 'core tasks' and additional resources including a scrutiny unit.
- Modernisation Committee (2002)
  - the House of Commons Commission should make available the necessary funds for a central unit of specialist support staff

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The Scrutiny Unit

- 18 staff.
- 2 legal specialists,
- Statistician from Commons Library
- 4 financial analysts (two from NAO)
- 1 economist
- Home Affairs/Public Policy Specialist.
- Core team of the Head of Unit, two Deputy Heads (Finance and Legislation) and support staff

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Core Tasks for Committees

OBJECTIVE A: TO EXAMINE AND COMMENT ON THE POLICY OF THE DEPARTMENT

Task 1: To examine policy proposals from the UK Government and EU in Green papers, White papers, draft Guidance, and inquire further where the Committee considers it appropriate.

Task 2: To identify and examine areas of emerging policy, or where existing policy is deficient, and make proposals.

Task 3: To conduct scrutiny of any published draft bill within the Committee's responsibilities.

Task 4: To examine specific output from the department in documents or other decisions.

OBJECTIVE B: TO EXAMINE THE EXPENDITURE OF THE DEPARTMENT

Task 5: To examine expenditure plans and out-turn of department, agencies and NDPBs.

OBJECTIVE C: TO EXAMINE THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT

Task 6: To examine the department's Public Service Agreements, the associated targets and the statistical measurements employed, and report if appropriate.

Task 7: To monitor the work of the department's Executive Agencies, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, regulators and other associated public bodies.

Task 8: To scrutinise major appointments made by the department.
Task 9: To examine the implementation of legislation and major policy initiatives.

OBJECTIVE D: TO ASSIST THE HOUSE IN DEBATE AND DECISION

Task 10: To produce reports which are suitable for debate in the House, includin
Hall, or debating committees.

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Central Tensions in the Reform Process

- Government vs parliament.

Government wants to get its way, parliament's job is to hold it to account

- Personal preference and political interests.

Every MP has an opinion about reform.

- Administration and political business.

Politicians and staff do not necessarily want the same things.

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Individual Interests and Reform

- Personal Interests
  - What do MPs hope to achieve – personally and professionally?
  - What are public pressures and policy priorities?
- Political Interests
  - What is the role of the political party?
  - What is the attitude of fellow MPs?
- Institutional Interests
  - What opportunities does the structure of the institution offer to MPs?
  - How can these be aligned?

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Parliament at the Apex

- Parliaments do not ‘implement’, they monitor
- Parliaments do not have the same capacity or resources as ministries
- Politicians do not have the same policy expertise as government departments
- The role of parliaments is to draw out the political, economic and social significance from issues for the public

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Formal and informal power

- Extending formal and constitutional power
  - Seeking rules-based solutions
  - Frame in terms of purpose (what will be achieved) not balance of power
  - Ensure provisions then used

- Extending informal influence
  - Using existing rules to increase impact
  - Generating additional resources to identified need
  - Shaping behaviour- "the way we do things ar here"
  - Formalising practice in the rules

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