



Committee Oversight of Government

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This paper examines the work of parliamentary committees in Israel as a central mechanism for government oversight, explains the failings of the current arrangement, and outlines recommendations for the future.

The **first chapter** lays out the general background, describing the relations between parliament and the government with the committees as a central parliamentary institution.

The **second chapter** reviews parliamentary committees in Israel, starting with their legal basis, through their historical development, to their central structural weakness and the challenge of specialization.

The **third chapter** delves into the State Control Committee, its relation to the State Comptroller Office, and the committee discussions of the State Comptroller reports.

The **fourth chapter** looks to the future and gives recommendations.

Summary:

Parliamentary committees are one of Parliament's most important tools for fulfilling their role of substantive, day to day oversight of the executive branch of government. They contribute to mediating government action to the citizens, constitute a space for the exchange of ideas and for representation of public opinions and enable multifaceted discussions of experts, professionals, representatives of various interests and public officials. In practice, the committees are the main organizational mechanism providing information to Knesset Members - the democratically elected public representatives. However, the conditions under which committees operate in Israel thwart their ability to conduct effective and substantial oversight of the government. As a result, the Knesset's status as a whole suffers – both in regard to the government and to the public.

The primary challenge addressed in this paper is the MKs specialization capability, considering the current committee apparatus structure. Due to the relatively small number of MKs and the subsequent permissibility of each MK to sit on multiple committees, MKs lack availability for substantial, thorough parliamentary work. The lack of a quorum for holding hearings and for voting, on top of the absence of concordance between ministerial areas of responsibility and the committees' subjects further increase the public representatives' dependence on information presented by the government, in a way that places the Knesset at a disadvantage when it seeks to review and supervise government action.

Furthermore, the State Control Committee, meant to be a parliamentary oversight mechanism based on the professional knowledge of the State Comptroller Office, lacks follow up mechanisms and the authority to compel reportage.

Recommendations:

Reorganize the committees so that they correspond to ministerial areas of responsibility, with each committee mapped onto one or more ministries and not onto subject material. **Every ministry should be answerable to one committee.**

Establish a **quorum**, stipulating a threshold attendance requirement for a committee hearing to take place.

Strengthen all Knesset committees by granting them **authority to summon government workers** and enforce their attendance, as well as grant greater power to obtain reports from the ministries or craft other duty mechanisms to the State Control Committee, considering its central supervisory role, making the ministries answerable in some way to the committee. The committee's deliberations should be elevated from political statements to **continuous oversight of government operations.**

Maintain **follow up and supervision of ministerial budgets** in designated, corresponding committees.

Establish a mechanism for **obligating ministries** and other government agencies to **comply with** the Knesset Research and Information Center's **requests for information.**

[Full Paper in Hebrew](#)