



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

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FAQs for Parline Correspondents

The Parline database covers 192 countries and 270+ parliamentary chambers, thus applying a universal definition to certain concepts can be challenging, especially in light of the various working methods and terminologies applied by parliaments. Given this variation, questions used to collect data for Parline could be interpreted differently. Nevertheless, there are general principles and activities that are common to most parliaments. As the IPU attempts to present data that is consistent in definition, timing and methods, it's important to provide further guidance and examples on what is meant by the questions asked so that respondents can best determine how to answer based on their given context and users know how to interpret data provided. For example, where the term “emergency legislation” is used in one parliament, “urgent proceedings” may be used in another, but the meaning is the same.

There are bound to be some exceptions, so in most cases, explanatory notes can accompany data in Parline. When in doubt about how to answer a question – contact parline@ipu.org for clarification, and/or accompany your response with an explanatory note.

Below are a list of questions that Parline Correspondents sometimes have uncertainty about. Further explanations and examples are provided to assist you, by [questionnaire](#).

Annual Activities

How many laws were adopted by parliament?

Each parliament uses different statistics on the number of laws adopted and the definition of laws themselves vary from one country to the other. Some parliaments count only new laws while other parliaments include amendments to laws. The answer to this question may include Acts (‘primary legislation’, law made by Parliament) and secondary legislation (law created by ministers). In addition, what’s entailed in the law with the same name may be different. For instance, some parliaments adopt the State budget as a single full-fledged Budget Act while others adopt firstly the budget (money) and then related laws.

For these reasons, the number of laws adopted by parliament is not easily comparable across countries. For now, please refer to the past statistics that your parliament has provided for the continuity of the data and provide similar statistics. In the new year, we will ask you to briefly explain what types of laws have been included in the past responses. We endeavor to publish additional information on Parline to make the data in this field more comprehensive.

How many times did the Executive use a procedure to introduce emergency legislation into parliament?

This type of procedure does not exist and thus is not applicable in all parliaments. The procedure may also be referred to differently depending on the parliament, for e.g., urgent proceedings. In general, this is a formalized procedure that involves speeding up the passage of legislation by circumventing normal processes.

Examples:

CZECH REPUBLIC:

There are three procedures used that can qualify as emergency legislation. The first involves approving a laws upon the first reading, thus skipping discussion in parliamentary committees and the regular amendment procedure which would involve a second and third reading (§ 90/2 of Act No. 90/1995 Coll., Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies). Secondly, a state of legislative emergency can be declared in extraordinary circumstances when the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens or the security of the state are fundamentally endangered or when the state is in danger of significant economic damage (§ 99 of the Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies). In this case, the Speaker, at the request of the government, can refer a draft law directly to a relevant committee (without a first reading) including a non-exceedable deadline by which the committee must submit a resolution. After, a second reading takes place immediately with speaking time reduced to five minutes. General debate may be waived with a third reading taking place immediately after the second. Lastly, a third procedure may be implemented resulting in abbreviated proceedings based on UN Security Council decisions on actions needed to ensure international peace and security (§100 of the Rules of Procedure of Chamber of Deputies).

PORTUGAL:

The Government and parliamentary groups may request that priority be given to matters of national interest that require urgent resolution (Article 63, Rules of Procedure). The process of 'emergency procedure' is outlined Chapter VIII of the Rules of Procedure. The competence to exercise the initiative to move the adoption of an emergency procedure lies with any Member of the Assembly of the Republic, any parliamentary group, the Government and, with regard to any bill initiated by the Legislative Assembly of an autonomous region, the Legislative Assembly (Article 263).

NEW ZEALAND:

7 Bills introduced under urgency in 2020

"Urgency" can be used to speed up the normal process of legislation, by for example, skipping, interrupting or speeding up different stages, e.g. readings, committee consideration to pass a bill quicker.

What was the State budget?

Figures provided for this question can include the total budget initially passed and authorized by parliament for the given year OR total expenditures, with preference for the latter.

What was the parliament's budget?

For bicameral parliaments – a figure should be provided for both chambers individually AND the parliament's budget as a whole as it may not be the case that the parliamentary budget is a sum of the lower and upper chamber budgets combined. In absence of a figure being provided for a parliamentary budget for bicameral parliaments, a sum of figures provided for the lower and upper chamber will be input into Parline.

Examples:

	Parliament	Lower chamber	Upper chamber
AUSTRIA	340,778,000 EUR	57,943,000 EUR	7,620,000 EUR
BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA	16,279,000 KM <i>Note: There is not a separate budget for each chamber.</i>	--	--
CANADA	628,900,000 CAD	505,700,000 CAD	123,200,000 CAD

How many staff were employed by parliament?

This question aims to understand the human resources available to a parliament (i.e. total secretariat) thus should be an overall figure for the parliament, not including MPs or personal staff employed by the MP. The total should reflect full-time staff, thus any part-time staff should be included based on the time they work (e.g. calculated as 50% = .5, 80% = .75, full-time = 1). Both permanent and contracted staff may be included.

How many written questions were submitted to and answered by the Executive?

Depending on a parliament's system – both written and oral questions may be registered. In this case – both may be reported as a total sum with a note indicating this. It is not always the case that the number of questions submitted and answered are equivalent. This may be due to some questions going unanswered, questions posed in one year being answered in another, or more than one government body responding to one question, resulting in multiple answers. It is enough to report total original interpellations in the case where sub-questions occur. In the case that total questions submitted and answered cannot be separated by chamber for bicameral parliaments – a note should be provided to indicate this.

Examples:

AUSTRALIA:

Number of written questions asked, per year: 203 (2020)

Number of written questions answered by the government, per year: 240 (2020)

Note: 2013-2017 totals combine written questions answered for both chambers of parliament

NEW ZEALAND:

Number of written questions asked, per year: 19,733 (2020)

Number of written questions answered by the government, per year: 17,598 (2020)

Note: Figures include both oral and written questions. Under the Standing Orders, Ministers must lodge a reply to a written question no more than 6 working days after the question was lodged. A small number of oral questions are not answered each year, this is either because the member asking the question withdrew it, or, in an election year because answers were outstanding when the House dissolved.

UNITED KINGDOM (House of Commons):

Number of written questions asked, per year: 48,351 (2020)

Number of written questions answered by the government, per year: 48,193 (2020)

Note: The House of Commons maintains statistics on written questions by parliamentary session rather than by year (e.g. 2012-2013, 2013-2014 etc.).

UNITED STATES

Note: There is no formal procedure for sending written questions to the Executive branch.

How many parliamentary inquiries were carried out ?

The total number of inquiries/investigations can include those carried out by any committee (permanent or ad-hoc) or specialized body within parliament. In the case an inquiry/investigation spans more than one year it should be counted once in the year it was initiated. The power of a parliament to carry out inquiries and the way in which they are done varies across parliaments.

The aims and objectives of parliamentary inquiries cover a large spectrum: from a general examination of an issue of public interest to an investigative inquiry into a specific topic, the results of which may have penal implications.

In lieu of a specific definition, please see an excerpt from an IPU publication on "[Tools for Parliamentary Oversight](#)" which covers parliamentary inquiries/investigations.

"Committees of inquiry can be established to examine the positive and negative aspects of particular policies and to pursue the responsibility of the officials in charge....Committees of inquiry are usually equipped with more powers than ordinary permanent committees. In addition to overseeing government departments through permanent committees, parliament can launch inquiries about specific issues. It can choose to refer inquiries to existing committees or establish ad hoc committees of inquiry. Committees of inquiry collect information about specific events and their causes; they can also examine the financial and technical administration of public services. The work of committees of inquiry is supplementary to the oversight work performed by permanent committees."

Page 39 of the publication, which can be found [here](#), provides more detailed information and examples of parliamentary inquiries/investigations.

Examples:

DENMARK: 66 (2019), 43 (2018), 58 (2017) etc.

According to the Constitutional Act of Denmark, the Parliament may set up parliamentary commissions consisting of MPs to investigate important issues. However, this option is rarely used. Instead, when a matter needs to be investigated, the Government and the Parliament frequently set up a commission of inquiry headed by a judge.

NETHERLANDS: 5 (2020), 1 (2015), 2 (2013) etc.

Note: Inquiries usually take more than one year and data reflects the starting year of an inquiry which may go on for several years, e.g. an inquiry on housing prices took place between 2012-2014 and the Breed welvaartsbegrip inquiry took place between 2015-2016

How many parliamentary groups were there?

Parliamentary groups are the primary means by which political parties organize themselves in parliament. They may also be known as "party groups", "coalitions", "caucuses" or "factions". They are different from all-party groups on specific issues, or inter-parliamentary friendship groups (which should not be included in the total). Only recognized groups and those that meet parliamentary rules should be included.

Examples:

UNITED STATES:

2 - Democratic caucus, Republican Caucus

BELARUS:

Not Applicable – parliamentary groups are not recognized in the parliamentary rules.

Post-election updates

Number of laws adopted in the past legislature?

“Legislature” refers to the full period between the first session of a new legislature until it’s dissolution. Duration is typically the length of a parliamentary term (but may differ, for e.g. if a regular parliamentary term is interrupted by early dissolution and snap elections). If the start and end dates of the two chambers of a bicameral legislature differ, the start and end data of the lower chamber should be reported and will be included in Parline by default.

Examples:

ANDORRA

23.03.2015 to 19.02.2019

28.04.2011 to 16.01.2015

19.05.2009 to 16.02.2011

MEXICO

01.09.2015 to 31.08.2018

01.09.2009 to 31.08.2012

NETHERLANDS

29.03.2017 to 30.03.2021

20.09.2012 to 23.03.2017

Number of laws initiated by parliament and the executive?

In some cases other entities have the right to initiate legislation in national parliaments – such as citizens, autonomous regions, and other high-level government institutions. As such, the sum of laws initiated by the parliament and the executive may be less than the total number of laws adopted in a given legislature. If this is the case – a note indicating the other entities with the right to initiate legislation should be included.

Examples:

AUSTRIA

Two of the 207 laws passed in the 2017-2019 legislature were initiated by the Court of Audit.

BELARUS

In addition to Parliament and the Executive, 23 laws were initiated by the President of the Republic of Belarus. Article 99 of the Constitution enshrines the right of legislative initiative to belong to "the President, deputies of the House of Representatives, the Council of the Republic, the Government as well as to citizens eligible to vote, in a number of no less than 50 thousand."

LEBANON

Legislative authority is vested in a single body – the Parliament – but the Council of Ministers has the procedural authority to propose laws (Constitution, Art. 17).

POLAND

In the 2015-2019 legislature, 2 laws were initiated by a group of at least 100,000 citizens.

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The right to legislative initiative is attributed to the members of Parliament, the President of the Republic of Moldova, and the Government and the People's Assembly of the autonomous territorial-unit of Găgăuzia

THAILAND

Laws may also be initiated by Thai Citizens. In the 2014-2019 legislature, one of the 464 laws adopted was initiated by citizens.

First-term parliamentarians

First-time parliamentarians are members who have never served in a national parliament before, regardless of their mode of designation. For e.g., those who have served in parliament in any capacity (e.g. as a substitute), whether elected as titular members or not, should be excluded. Similarly, members who have already served in another chamber of a national bicameral parliament should not be counted as first-term (e.g. a member formerly elected to the lower chamber who is then elected to the Senate should be excluded). This data field focuses on the *experience* of MPs rather than their mode of designation.

Specialized bodies

What constitutes a human rights body?

The parline module on parliamentary human rights committees focuses on those structures in parliament that explicitly address domestic human rights issues either permanently or adhoc. So the aim is not to include foreign affairs committees, unless there is an explicit human rights mandate in the committee's terms of reference. In this regard, the IPU module is not meant to convey the message that only the parliaments that are listed therein deal with (or "care about") human rights. We are aware that all parliaments, through one or more committees, deal with human rights. However, the IPU module really limits itself to those examples where the link between a given parliamentary committee and human rights is sufficiently direct and strong.

What constitutes a women's caucus?

Women's caucuses or parliamentary groups/networks are mechanisms that have been created within the parliaments of many countries to strengthen cooperation among women engaged in political life. Such caucuses can bring women parliamentarians together across party lines in effective alliances around a common goal.¹

¹ *Women's Caucuses*, (Joint AGORA – iKNOW Politics Virtual Discussion, 9-20 May 2011), p.2.

Women's parliamentary caucuses can be formal or informal.

Formal caucuses, by definition, have a formal relationship with the parliament: they may have been formed by a parliamentary resolution and their specific roles and responsibilities may have been outlined in the parliament's internal rules.

Informal caucuses, again by definition, are not formal structures of parliament. Nor are they situated within the structure of a parliament. While composed of MPs they operate outside the legislative body.

[IPU Guidelines for women's caucuses, 2013]



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