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## Democracy and Oversight

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# **Democracy and Oversight**

**Riccardo Pelizzo and Rick Stapenhurst**

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# Democracy and Oversight

By Riccardo Pelizzo and Rick Staphenurst

## Introduction

In the course of the past decade, political science has started paying increasing attention to the study of legislative oversight, which had been previously described as “an important but inadequately researched area of legislative activity” (Lees, 1977). Lees’ comment is particularly true with regard to comparative analyses of oversight tools and practices. Some studies have recently discussed the instruments of legislative oversight (Maffio, 2002), other studies have instead investigated how legislative oversight relates to both political variables (Pennings, 2000; Damgaard, 2000; Pelizzo and Staphenurst, 2004a) and socio-economic conditions (Pelizzo and Staphenurst, 2004b). In spite of this renewed interest in the study of oversight, our understanding of legislative oversight, as Rockman lamented more than two decades ago (1984), is asymmetric. The literature has discussed extensively what oversight is, why it is necessary in properly functioning democratic regimes, why it is good from a normative point of view and what conditions might favor effective oversight. Yet, less attention has been paid to whether legislative oversight has any impact on the functioning of a political system and, if so, what kind of impact it has.

The purpose of the present paper is to discuss whether and to what extent oversight affects the functioning or the nature of a political regime. Specifically we plan to test whether and to what extent the oversight potential, measured on the basis of the number of oversight

tools available to a parliament in a given country, affects the probability that a country is formally democratic as well as the probability that a country is liberal democratic.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the paper we proceed in the following way. In the first section we discuss the legislative oversight literature and how this literature has investigated the determinants, the mechanisms, the tools and the possible consequences of legislative oversight of government activities. In this part of the paper we further argue that since democracy does not depend exclusively on the government's ability to perform but also on the fact that the government action is subject to scrutiny and control, the probability that a country is democratic should be affected by the legislature's potential to oversee the government.<sup>2</sup> In the second part of the paper, we present the results of our statistical analyses. Our findings are consistent with our hypotheses: the results of logistic regressions reveal that the probability that a country is formally democratic increases as the number of oversight tools increases. We also find that the probability that a country is liberal democratic is also sensitive to the number of oversight tools available to the parliament but not as much as the

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between oversight potential and effective oversight is, as we will discuss in the course of the paper, of great importance. We speak of effective oversight, when legislatures actually oversee governments' actions and activities and when this oversight function has an impact on the political system and, more specifically, on the government behavior. We speak of oversight potential when legislatures to denote the set of formal powers and instruments that legislatures have to oversee government activities regardless of whether these powers and instruments are actually used.

<sup>2</sup> This view is obviously very different from Huntington (1991) argued several years ago. For Huntington (1991: 9-10) "elections, open, free and fair are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non. Governments produced by elections may be inefficient, corrupt, shortsighted, irresponsible, dominated by special interests, and incapable of adopting policies demanded by the public good. These qualities may make such governments undesirable but they do not make them undemocratic". Huntington's position is questionable for at least two reasons. First of all, if instead of conceiving democracy as a dichotomous variable (a regime is democratic or non democratic) we conceive it instead as a continuous variable (a regime can be more or less democratic), the fact that a government is corrupt, irresponsible, unable or unwilling to address citizens' demands certainly makes the political system less democratic than those systems in which governments are actually responsive, accountable and responsible. Second, it could also be argued that beyond a certain point, irresponsiveness, irresponsibility and non-accountability make governments non-democratic. Huntington's faith in elections as a sine qua non must be considered with some skepticism. With the emergence of illiberal democracies we now know that elections are a necessary but insufficient condition for a political regime to be democratic. See Diamond (1999) and, more recently Carothers (2002).

probability that a country is formally democratic.<sup>3</sup> In the third and final section of the paper we discuss the implications of our findings. In this respect we suggest that the results of our analyses are relevant for two basic reasons. First of all because they show that the oversight potential has a profound effect on the nature and the functioning of a political system. The probability that a country is formally democratic (and to a lesser extent the probability that a country is liberal democratic) is affected by the oversight potential. Second, the findings of our analyses are relevant because they show that international organizations were right in arguing that strengthening legislatures is actually beneficial to promote democracy and good governance. Our work shows however that while oversight potential is sufficient to promote (formal) democracy, the promotion of liberal democracy requires real and effective oversight instead and international organizations may have to find ways to promote effective oversight and not just oversight potential.

### Oversight in the Literature

The study of legislative oversight is focused on four basic questions: what is oversight? Why is it good for a political system? How can oversight be exercised? And what is the impact of oversight?

With regard to the first question, one could note that scholars have proposed fairly different definitions of what oversight is. Some scholars have, for example, suggested that

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<sup>3</sup> Formal democracies are political regimes characterized by vertical accountability through regular, free and fair election and by the lack of horizontal accountability. By contrast, liberal democracies are characterized by the fact that they are both vertically and horizontally accountable, that is by the fact that the power of the executive branch is constrained, checked and balanced by other branches of government and also by the fact that civil rights and political rights of individual and groups are protected. The Gastil index of Freedom, in spite of the fact that democracy and freedom are not exactly the same thing (Morlino, 1975; Katz, 1997), still provides a useful and usable measure of democracy or liberal democracy exactly because it estimates a country's level of freedom/democracy by assessing the extent to which civil and political rights are respected.

legislative oversight consists in the legislative supervision of the policies and the programs enacted by the government (Schick, 1976). Other scholars have noted instead that oversight is not just a supervision of what the executive branch of government has done but is also supervision of the executive's legislative proposals (Maffio, 2002). In parliamentary systems, where the executive branch of government has the power to introduce a bill, the process through which a bill becomes a law (the referral of that bill to specific committees, the discussion of the bill within such committees, the debates of a bill in the plenary and the fact that the parliament has ultimately the power to amend, approve or reject a government's legislative proposal) gives the legislative branch of government the power to oversee the government plans before they are actually enacted. This point has an obvious implication, namely that several of the activities and tasks that a legislature performs can be viewed as oversight activities.

Regardless of whether oversight is viewed as a sort of *ex post* review of the government policies and programs or whether it is viewed instead as a supervision of government activities that can be performed both *ex post* and *ex ante*, scholars have generally agreed on the fact that effective oversight is good for the proper functioning of a democratic political system. Effective oversight is beneficial for a political system for, at least, two basic reasons (West and Cooper, 1989): first, because the oversight activity can actually contribute to improving the quality of the policies/programs initiated by the government; second, because as the government policies are ratified by the legislative branch, such policies acquire greater legitimacy.

Scholars have also paid some attention to the tools that parliaments and legislatures can employ to oversee the government and the government's activities. These studies have

underlined that the legislatures may adopt several tools to oversee the actions of the executives such as hearings in committees, hearings in the plenary assembly, the creation of inquiry committees, parliamentary questions, question time, the interpellations and the ombudsman (Maffio, 2002; Pennings, 2000). Scholars have noted, however, that the presence of the oversight tool is a necessary but insufficient condition for effective oversight. Effective oversight, as was observed, depends not only on the availability of oversight tools, but depends also on additional conditions. Effective oversight may depend on the specific oversight powers given to the parliament, on whether the parliament has the ability to modify legislation (Loewenberg and Patterson, 1979), on whether parliaments and parliamentarians are given proper information to perform their oversight tasks adequately (Frantzich, 1979), on the role of individual MPs, on the role of committee chairs, on the saliency of issues and on how aggressively the opposition performs its role (Rockman, 1984).<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the wealth of information generated by the study of legislative oversight with regard to the virtues, the tools and the conditions of effective oversight, much less has been written with regard to the impact of oversight. Does oversight actually affect the functioning and possibly the nature of a political system? The question is interesting not only for scholars dealing with specific themes of the legislative studies literature, this question is important also from a practical point of view. In the course of the past decade, international organizations, agencies and NGOs have taken a much greater role in promoting democracy (Stapenhurst and Pelizzo, 2002; NDI, 2000). They have tried to promote democracy, among other things, by strengthening legislatures and they have tried to strengthen legislatures by

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<sup>4</sup> Though high partisanship and fierce opposition may be conducive to more effective oversight in general, studies on Public Accounts Committees, have argued instead that co-operation between the committee members across party lines is critical in promoting effective oversight of the public accounts (Stapenhurst et alii, 2005).

improving legislatures' ability to oversee government activities.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the question is: does oversight actually make a difference as international organizations have assumed?

Given the nature of the data at our disposal, we are not able to test whether and to what extent effective oversight affects the functioning of a political regime, the democratic quality of that regime or that regime's chances to be democratic. We cannot produce this kind of analysis because our data (concerning the number of oversight tools available to a given legislature) provide a (more or less) clear indication of a parliament's oversight potential, but they provide no indication of whether oversight is performed and performed effectively. Hence, given the impossibility of testing what is the impact of effective oversight on the basis of the data at our disposal, we will test instead whether oversight potential has any impact on a political system.

In this respect we argue that as the oversight potential increases, it becomes easier to scrutinize and control the government and its activities, and since controlling the government is a key component of democratic government, the more a government is subject to potential control, the more likely it is for the political system to be democratic. In other words,

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<sup>5</sup> Given the interest in legislative strengthening and in improving parliaments' oversight capabilities, international organizations have done some studies to see whether oversight is beneficial to the functioning of a given political regime. The studies found that most countries have some instruments to oversee the actions of the government and that legislature in parliamentary regimes have on average a greater number of oversight tools than legislatures in presidential and semi-presidential regimes (Pelizzo and Staphenurst, 2004a; Pelizzo and Staphenurst, 2004b). Pelizzo and Staphenurst (2004b) have however emphasized that the number of oversight tools that a legislature can employ to oversee the executive provides an indication of the oversight potential of that legislature, but it does not provide any indication as to whether that oversight potential is then translated in effective oversight. This is why, Pelizzo and Staphenurst (2004b) argued, some countries may have a great oversight potential and yet be non-democratic. In these countries, legislatures have several oversight tools at their disposal but they are either unwilling or unable to use them effectively or to use them at all. This is why in some countries like Gabon, Indonesia and Zambia, the oversight potential does not seem to have any effect on the democratic quality of the regime. However, the evidence presented in these international organizations' publications was at best suggestive. It showed that, on average, liberal-democratic regime had more oversight tools and oversight potential than formally or quasi-democratic regimes and that these, in their turn, had a greater oversight potential than non-democratic regimes. But the fact that more democratic regime tend to have, on average, more oversight tool than less democratic regime does not tell us the adoption of a larger number of oversight tools is a consequence or a cause of the higher democratic quality in a given country.



oversight potential is a cause and not a consequence of democratic quality. Having hypothesized this possible causal relationship, we need to test whether there is any empirical, or rather statistical, evidence sustaining the claim that the probability that a country is democratic increases as the oversight potential increases. The purpose of the next section is to perform some statistical analyses to show whether and to what extent the causal relationship between democratic quality and oversight potential is actually corroborated by the results of statistical analyses.

### Data and findings

The data concerning the oversight tools were collected by a survey conducted by World Bank Institute (WBI) in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and have previously been presented in some working papers by the World Bank Institute (Pelizzo and Stapenhurst, 2004b; Pelizzo, Stapenhurst and Olson, 2004). Responses to the WBI-IPU questionnaire were provided by the parliaments of 82 countries and by the European Parliament. The information provided by the respondents is presented both in table 1 and, in greater detail, in the appendix. The responses indicate that, with the exception of Lesotho, which did not provide any information whatsoever as to whether and how many oversight tools are available to the parliament, most parliaments have several oversight tools at their disposal. If we consider that some respondents did not indicate whether specific oversight tools are used by the parliament, it is safe to conclude that the average number of oversight

tools available to parliaments and legislatures worldwide is actually greater than what the responses collected by the WBI-IPU survey suggests.

[table 1 about here]

Be that as it may, 49 of the 83 parliaments that responded to the survey, provided complete information as to the presence/absence of the seven oversight tools mentioned in the survey conducted by the WBI and IPU. The seven oversight tools are committee hearings, hearings in plenary sittings, inquiry commissions, questions, question time, interpellations and the ombudsman. The countries included in this 49-country sample differ with regard to the level of democracy (as measured by the Gastil index), the income level (low income, middle income, and high income) and form of government (presidential, semi-presidential, parliamentary).

[table 2 about here]

Only 47 of the 49 countries that provided complete information as to the number of oversight tools available to parliament, also provided information as their form of government. The results, presented in table 2, show that slightly less than 30 percent of the countries included in our 47-country sample adopt either a presidential or semi-presidential form of government, 42.5 percent of the countries adopt a parliamentary form of government. The data reported in table 3 also indicate that the number of oversight tools available to legislatures in parliamentary systems is on average higher than the number of oversight tools available to legislatures in either presidential or semi-presidential systems.

[table 3 about here]

Information concerning the income level was available for all the countries included in our 49 countries sample. We measure income level on the basis of the criteria used by the World

Bank. In the 2002 World Development Indicators published by the World Bank countries are divided in three groups: “High Income Economies”, in which the gross national income (GNI) per capita was \$ 9,266 or more; “Middle Income Economies”, which have a GNI per capita of between \$ 755 to 9,265; and “Low Income Economies”, in which the GNI per capita is below \$ 755.<sup>6</sup> We find that our sample is fairly balanced: 30.6 percent of the countries in our sample are high-income countries, 32.6 percent of them belongs to the middle income category, while 36.7 percent of the countries falls in the low-income category. The data in table 4 further suggest that the number of oversight tools available to middle- and high-income countries is substantially higher than the number of oversight tools available to parliaments in low-income countries.

[table 4 about here]

Political scientists and sociologists have developed over the years several measures of democracy (Morlino, 1974; Bollen, 1980; Bollen, 1993). The most common and most widely adopted in spite of some of its possible shortcomings is the Gastil Index of Freedom. Diamond (1999), for example, categorizes the world’s countries as liberal-democratic, formally democratic and non-democratic depending on whether these countries are ranked as free, partially free or non-free on the basis of the scores assigned by Freedom House. The Freedom House computes an annual index of freedom for all the countries in the world. This index is computed in the following way. The Freedom House assigns to each country a political rights and a civil rights score. Both scores are 7-point scales. The Gastil index is measured by adding the political rights score to the civil rights score and by dividing their sum by two. This means that if a country has a political rights score of 3 and a civil rights

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<sup>6</sup> We transformed this information into a quantitative variable to be used in our statistical analyses, by assigning value 1 to countries in the Low Income group, value 2 to countries in the Middle Income group and value 3 to countries that belong to the High Income group.

score of 4, the freedom score for this country is  $(3+4)/2=3.5$ . Countries that score from 1 to 2.5 points on this scale are considered free; countries scoring from 3 to 5.5 are considered as partially free and countries with a score of 5.5 or higher belong to the group of non-free countries.<sup>7</sup> Data presented in table 5 reveal that 55.1 percent of the countries included in our sample are liberal democratic, 28.6 percent of them are formally democratic and 16.3 percent of them are non-democratic.

The nature of the countries included in our sample allows the analyst to test whether and to what extent the probability that a country is formally democratic and the probability that a country is liberal democratic are affected by the number of oversight tools available to the parliament controlling for the effects of the form of government and the income level.<sup>8</sup>

To test whether the probability that a country is at least formally democratic is affected by the number of oversight tools, we run the following model:

$$\text{Logit (democracy)} = a + b_1 \text{ Tools} + b_2 \text{ gofor} + b_3 \text{ incomelevel} \quad (1)$$

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<sup>7</sup> We constructed a tri-chotomus variable by assigning values 1, 2 and 3 to countries that were ranked respectively as non-free, partially free and free. Though we are aware of the fact that freedom and democracy are not exactly the same thing, we adopt, as is often done in the literature, the Gastil index of freedom as our measure of democracy, so that non-free, partially free, and free countries are treated respectively as non-democratic, formally democratic (or quasi democratic), and liberal democratic.

<sup>8</sup> We control for the effects of income level, as a proxy for development, as scholars have long acknowledged that democratic countries are generally better off in material terms than non-democratic ones (Lipset, 1959). Lipset's statement concerning the relationship between democracy and development received two different, though not mutually exclusive. For some scholars (Rueschenmeyer, Huber and Stephens, 1992) Lipset was arguing, as scholars working within the modernization theory framework later argued, that development creates the condition for democratic transition (Huntington, 1991). Other scholars gave a different interpretation of Lipset's words as they thought that Lipset was positing a relationship between development and democratic consolidation. Recent research carried out by Przeworski et alii tested both theoretical claims. Przeworski's work showed that the relationship between democracy and development is still strong (Przeworski et alii, 2000:79), that the level of development is not particularly good predictor of transitions to democracy (Przeworski et alii, 2000:92-98), and that development is a strong predictor of democratic consolidation (Przeworski et alii, 2000:98). We also control for the effects of the form of government as a fairly large body of literature has argued (and often demonstrated) that democratic regimes are less likely to consolidate in presidential democracies than they are in parliamentary systems (Linz, 1994; Mainwaring, 1993; Sartori, 1994a; Sartori, 1994b; Stepan and Skach, 1994; Przeworski et alii, 2000: 128-137). Hence there is some reason to believe that the probability that a country is democratic may be influenced by the form of government adopted in that country.

Where the democracy variable takes value 1 for countries that are at least formally democratic. The number of oversight tools variables ranges, as we mentioned above, from 2 to 7. The gofor variable refers to the form of government. This variable takes value 1 for presidential systems, value 2 for semi-presidential systems and value 3 for parliamentary systems. The incomelevel variable takes respectively values 1, 2 and 3 for low income, middle income and high income countries.

By performing this analysis we find that our model takes the following values:

$$\text{Logit}(\text{democracy}) = -4.915 + .713 \text{ Tools} + .053 \text{ gofor} + 1.487 \text{ incomelevel} \quad (2)$$

$$(.008) \quad (.010) \quad (.913) \quad (.018)$$

The form of government variable, as we can see from the p-values reported in parenthesis, is entirely insignificant and it is legitimate to exclude it from the model. By dropping the gofor variable, our model takes the following values:

$$\text{Logit}(\text{democracy}) = -4.958 + .775 \text{ tools} + 1.262 \text{ incomelevel} \quad (3)$$

$$(.002) \quad (.005) \quad (.023)$$

The meaning of this findings is quite clear. Even when we control for the effects of the income level, we find that the coefficient for the number of oversight tools is strong and statistically significant. In a middle income country with seven oversight tools, the equation gives the following result:

$$\text{Logit}(\text{democracy}) = -4.958 + .775(7) + 1.262 (2) =$$

$$\text{Logit}(\text{democracy}) = -4.958 + 5.425 + 2.524 = 2.991$$

In this case, the probability that the political system of that country is democratic is

$$e^{2.99} / (1 + e^{2.99}) = .952 \text{ or } 95.2 \text{ per cent.}$$

This means that a middle income country has a phenomenally high chance of being at least formally democratic when all seven oversight tools are available to the parliament. The data presented in table 6 provide a clear indication of how (and how much) the probability that a country is at least formally democratic increases varies as the number of oversight tools available to the parliament changes.

[table 6 about here]

Diamond (1999) noted that formal democracies are effectively quasi democracies. They have the forms, the mechanisms, and the institutions that can be found in properly democratic regimes, but they do not really function like real democracies. Hence, we might want to shift the focus of our analysis and investigate whether the probability that a country is liberal democratic changes as the number of oversight tools available to that country's parliament increases. In order to test whether the probability that a country is liberal democratic is affected by the number of oversight tools, we run the following logistic regression model:

$$\text{Logit}(\text{liberaldemocracy}) = a + b_1\text{Tools} + b_2 \text{Incomelevel} \quad (4)$$

Where the liberaldemocracy variable takes value 1 for countries that are ranked as free by the Gastil index of freedom, while it takes a value of 0 (zero) otherwise. Both the tools variable and the incomelevel variable take the values specified above. With these considerations in mind, when we run our model we find that it takes the following values:

$$\text{Logit}(\text{liberaldemocracy}) = -7.193 + .576 \text{tools} + 2.162 \text{incomelevel} \quad (5)$$

(.000)    (.036)    (.000)

The coefficient for our tools variable is still positive, is still fairly strong, but is not as statistically significant as the incomelevel variable. It should also be noted that the tools variable in equation (5) is weaker and much less significant than in the equation model (3). Be as it may, the number of oversight tools in a middle income country still increases the probability that a country is liberal democratic. This conclusion if we compare the probability that a middle income country is liberal democratic when it has only two oversight tools with the probability that a middle income country is liberal democratic when it has seven oversight tools.

When a middle income country has only two oversight tools, our equation (5) takes the following values:

$$\text{Logit(liberaldemocracy)} = -7.193 + .576 (2) + 2.162 (2) = -1.72 (6)$$

This means that the probability that such a country is liberal democratic is:  $e^{-1.72} / (1 + e^{-1.72}) = .152$  or 15.2 per cent.

When a middle income country has instead seven oversight tools, our equation (5) takes the following values:

$$\text{Logit(liberaldemocracy)} = -7.193 + .576 (7) + 2.162 (2) = 1.16 (7)$$

This means that the probability that such a country is liberal democratic is:

$$e^{1.16} / (1 + e^{1.16}) = .762 \text{ or } 76.2 \text{ per cent.}$$

As we can see from the data presented in table 7, as the number of oversight tools increases, the probability that a country is liberal democratic also increases, but this increase is not as marked as the probability that a country is only formally democratic. In fact, while there is about a 95 percent probability that a middle income country with seven oversight tools is formally democratic, the probability that this country is liberal democratic is just 76.2 percent

[table 7 about here]

The meaning of these findings is fairly clear: a parliament's oversight potential, as measured by the number of oversight tools, makes a difference as to whether that country is liberal democratic. Our data also reveal that the oversight potential exercises greater influence on the probability that a country is democratic than on the probability that a country is liberal democratic. Why? The data at our disposal do not allow one to answer this question conclusively, but one can nonetheless formulate some educated guesses as to why the relationship between oversight potential and the probability that a country is liberal democratic is so tenuous.

Our answer in this respect is that what liberal democracy needs is not just potential oversight or oversight potential, but real and effective oversight. This is the major difference between formally democratic and liberal democratic regimes. In formally democratic regimes democratic institutions have only a cosmetic function. They are present and they are not effectively used. This is the case for other types of democratic institutions, and, we suspect, is also the case with regard to oversight tools. Parliaments in formally democratic regimes do adopt oversight tools, as if they were to effectively oversee the government actions, but these tools are not used or, at least, are not used effectively. Hence, in the case of formal democracies, the form of democratic government is respected but not its substance.

By contrast, liberal democracies are concerned with the substance of democracy and not just its form. The presence of oversight tools, of oversight potential, is not enough. What is peculiar to the liberal democratic regimes is the fact that the governments are not only empowered to perform their duties and tasks but that they are subject to control. Governments



have the power to govern, but this power is constrained and governments are, or at least may be asked, to provide justifications for their actions or inactions. And, at least in parliamentary systems, if they fail to justify their course of actions to the legislatures, they may be voted out of office. Hence, while the presence of oversight tools is a necessary condition for effective oversight, it is not, by itself, sufficient. In addition to parliaments' oversight potential, there must also be some political will to actually oversee government activities—a will that may sometimes be lacking. In his study of Public Accounts Committees, McGee (2002) showed that one of the major obstacles that Public Accounts Committee encounter in their attempt to oversee governments accounts is that parliamentarians often are unwilling to engage in serious oversight of the government accounts.<sup>9</sup> Scrutinizing the government accounts is considered to be a job that gives little visibility to MPs, and that does not help members to be re-elected. Worse, MPs belonging to the government party (or coalition) fear that by scrutinizing governments accounts they may be forced to chose between performing their oversight functions effectively (and possibly straining their relationship between an MP and its party) and preserving a strong tie to their party.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, while some parliaments may have Public Accounts Committees, the presence of these committees is a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective scrutiny of government accounts. If this conclusion could be extended from the particular case of the Public Account Committees to the oversight tools in general, we could then explain why the presence of oversight tools does not necessarily amount to effective oversight—which is what is actually needed for a country to be (and be considered) liberal democratic.

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<sup>9</sup> In spite of the fact that Public Accounts Committees are proper oversight committees, that is committees established to oversee government accounts, the list of oversight tools considered by the WBI-IPU survey did not include the Public Accounts Committees. On Public Accounts Committees see also Wehner (2003; 2005).

<sup>10</sup> The reasons why partisanship may represent a major obstacle to the proper functioning of Public Accounts Committees are discussed by Stapenhurst et alii (2005).

## Conclusions

The purpose of the present paper was to investigate the relationship between the number of oversight tools available to a parliament on the one hand and the probability that a country is formally democratic and/or liberal democratic on the other hand. By analyzing the survey data collected by the WBI in collaboration with the IPU, we have found that the number of oversight tools is a strong predictor of whether a country is at least formally democratic. In fact, we found that the probability that a country is formally democratic increases as the number of oversight tools increases. In this respect we found that when a middle income country has all the even oversight tools for which the WBI-IPU sought information are available to a parliament, there is a 95 percent probability that such a country is formally democratic. We also found that while the probability that a country is liberal democratic increases as the number of oversight tools available to the parliament increases, but we observed that the relationship between oversight potential and liberal democracy is neither as strong nor as significant as the relationship between formal democracy and oversight potential. In this respect, we suggested that this difference may be explained by the fact that liberal democratic regimes are concerned not only with the formal aspects of democracy such as the presence of democratic mechanisms and institutions, but that they are concerned with the substance of democracy. Liberal democracies do not simply need oversight potential, they need effective oversight. We further noted that parliaments, in order to exercise oversight effectively, do not simply need the tools with which they can oversee the government actions but they also need the political will to do so.

These findings suggest two additional considerations. First of all, our analyses, by showing that legislative oversight is good for democracy, confirm what several international organizations have often assumed, namely that strengthening legislatures (and legislature's oversight potential) is good for democracy. Our findings also show not only that legislatures (and strong legislatures) are good for democracy as recent studies have underlined (Fish, 2006) but also why legislatures make such a significant contribution to democratic governance. By performing their oversight function, parliaments play a major role in keeping governments responsive and accountable for their actions, and, by doing so, are instrumental in preventing possible abuses of power. Second, our analyses further suggest that while international organizations were correct in arguing that strengthening legislatures was critical for the promotion and consolidation of democracy, they probably need to reconsider their legislature-strengthening strategies (NDI 2000; NDI, 2001; Pelizzo and Stapenhurst, 2004b). In the past it was believed that legislatures could simply be strengthened by increasing their oversight potential. Our analyses support a slightly different view. Parliaments must have not only the tools but also the political will to oversee the government, because what liberal democracy needs is effective oversight and not just oversight potential. Hence, the major challenge for the international organizations concerned with the promotion and the consolidation of democracy is to identify and promote the conditions under which parliaments and parliamentarians are more likely to engage in effective oversight of the government activities.

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**Table 1. Countries and the Number of Parliamentary Oversight Tools**

0	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Lesotho</i>	<i>Azerbaijan</i>	<i>Congo</i>	Angola	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Andorra</i>	Austria
	<i>Russia</i>	<i>Macedonia</i>	Armenia	<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>Belarus</i>	Belgium
		<i>Tajikistan</i>	<i>China</i>	Cameroon	Benin	Costa Rica
		<i>Zimbabwe</i>	Ivory Coast	<i>Iran</i>	Brazil	Croatia
			Kazakhstan	<i>Jordan</i>	Canada	Czech Republic
			Liechtenstein	<i>Mexico</i>	Cyprus	Estonia
			Rwanda	<i>Mongolia</i>	EU	France
			<i>Uruguay</i>	Nicaragua	Germany	Gabon
				Palau	<i>Guatemala</i>	Greece
				<i>Philippines</i>	Guinea Bissau	Hungary
				<i>Samoa</i>	Guinea	Indonesia
				Senegal	<i>Iceland</i>	Japan
				<i>Singapore</i>	<i>Ireland</i>	Lithuania
				<i>South Africa</i>	Korea	Madagascar
				<i>Sudan</i>	Jamaica	Mali
				Turkey	<i>Latvia</i>	Romania
				<i>Ukraine</i>	Luxembourg	Spain
				Yemen	<i>Namibia</i>	Sweden
					<i>Netherlands</i>	Switzerland
					Niger	Zambia
					<i>Poland</i>	
					<i>Slovakia</i>	
					<i>Slovenia</i>	
					Tchad	
					<i>Thailand</i>	
					Togo	
					Tunisia	
					<i>Uganda</i>	
					U.K.	

Note: The score of the countries in Italics indicates that information concerning the presence/absence of some tools of parliamentary information was not available as indicated in Appendix.

Table 2. **Form of Government and Number of Parliamentary Oversight Tools.**

Form of Government	4	5	6	7
Presidential	Ivory Coast	Nicaragua	Benin	Costa Rica
	Kazakhstan	Palau	Brazil	Indonesia
			Cyprus	
			Guinea	
			Korea	
			Tchad	
			Tunisia	
	Liechtenstein	Australia	Canada	Austria
		Turkey	Germany	Belgium
	Parliamentary			Guinea Bissau
			Jamaica	Czech Republic
			Luxembourg	Estonia
			United Kingdom	Greece
				Hungary
				Japan
				Lithuania
				Spain
				Sweden
Angola		Cameroon	Niger	France
Armenia		Senegal	Togo	Gabon
Rwanda		Yemen	Yugoslavia	Madagascar
				Mali
				Romania

Table 3. Number of Oversight Tools by Form of Government

Form of Government	Number of Oversight Tools				Tot	Mean
	4	5	6	7		
Presidential	2	2	7	2	13	5.69
Semi-Presidential	3	3	3	5	14	5.71
Parliamentary	1	2	6	11	20	6.35
Total	6	7	16	18	47	

Table 4. Number of Oversight Tools by Income Level

Income Level	Number of Oversight Tools				Total	Mean
	4	5	6	7		
Low	4	4	7	3	18	5.50
Middle	1	2	5	8	16	6.25
High	1	1	6	7	15	6.27
Total					49	



Table 5. Number of Oversight Tools by Level of Democracy

Level of Democracy	Number of Oversight Tools				Total	Mean
	4	5	6	7		
Democracy	1	2	9	15	27	6.41
Quasi Democracy	2	3	6	3	14	5.71
Non Democracy	3	2	3		8	5.0
Total	6	7	18	18	49	

Table 6. Number of Oversight Tools and the probability that a country is formally democratic

If in a middle income country the number of oversight tools is	The probability that a country is formally democratic is:
0	.08
1	.16
2	.29
3	.47
4	.66
5	.81
6	.90
7	.95

Table 7. Number of Oversight Tools and the probability that a country is liberal democratic

If in a middle income country the number of oversight tools is	The probability that a country is liberal-democratic is:
0	.05
1	.09
2	.15
3	.24
4	.36
5	.50
6	.64
7	.76

Appendix. **The Tools of Parliamentary Oversight.**

Country	Committee Hearing	Hearing in plenary sitting	Commission of enquiry	Questions	Question time	Interpellations	Ombudsman
Andorra	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Angola	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Armenia	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no
Austria	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Australia	yes	no	Yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Azerbaijan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	no	n.a.	yes	yes
Belarus	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.
Belgium	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Benin	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Brazil	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Bulgaria	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	no
Cameroon	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Canada	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
China	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	no	n.a.
Congo	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	yes	no	yes	yes
Costa Rica	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Croatia	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Czech Republic	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Cyprus	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Estonia	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
EU	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes	yes
France	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Gabon	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Germany	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Greece	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Guatemala	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.
Guinea Bissau	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Guinea	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Hungary	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Iceland	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Indonesia	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Iran	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	n.a.
Ireland	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Ivory Coast	no	no	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Kazakhstan	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Korea	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Jamaica	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Japan	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Jordan	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	n.a.	yes
Latvia	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes	yes
Lesotho	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Liechtenstein	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
Lithuania	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Luxembourg	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Macedonia	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	yes	no	yes	yes
Madagascar	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Mali	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Mexico	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	n.a.	yes

Mongolia	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	no
Namibia	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Netherlands	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Nicaragua	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes
Niger	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Palau	yes	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Philippines	n.a.	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Poland	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Romania	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Russia	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	yes	n.a.	n.a.	yes
Rwanda	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Samoa	n.a.	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Senegal	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	yes
Singapore	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	no
Spain	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Slovak Republic	yes	yes	n.a.	yes	yes	yes	yes
Slovenia	yes	yes	n.a.	yes	yes	yes	yes
South Africa	yes	yes	n.a.	yes	yes	no	yes
Sudan	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	no
Sweden	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Switzerland	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Tajikistan	n.a.	n.a.	yes	yes	n.a.	yes	n.a.
Tchad	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Thailand	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Togo	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Tunisia	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Turkey	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Uganda	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Ukraine	n.a.	yes	n.a.	yes	yes	yes	yes
United Kingdom	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Uruguay	yes	no	yes	yes	n.a.	yes	no
Zambia	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Zimbabwe	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	yes	yes	n.a.	yes
Yemen	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Yugoslavia	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no