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# Parliamentary oversight between institutional activation and political utilization: A bibliometric and systematic literature review

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## ABSTRACT

In an era of increasing demands for political accountability, the role of parliamentary oversight remains both essential and contested. While legislative bodies are tasked with scrutinizing the executive, the actual influence of their oversight tools is often unclear. This analysis explores global research on parliamentary oversight published between 2019 and 2024, employing a dual-method approach that combines bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review (SLR) under the PRISMA framework. A total of 519 studies were retrieved from the Scopus database and narrowed down through rigorous inclusion criteria to 13 articles forming the core of this review. The findings indicate that, although oversight mechanisms such as parliamentary questions and committee inquiries are widely used, their effectiveness varies significantly across different political systems. Factors such as legal enforceability, institutional independence, and political will are recurring elements that influence outcomes. Countries like Germany and Switzerland demonstrate relatively strong oversight practices, whereas transitional democracies often face challenges with symbolic or fragmented oversight. Methodologically, the field predominantly relies on agency theory and quantitative tools, with a growing interest in mixed-method approaches. This study offers a comprehensive mapping of the literature and proposes an integrated research model to guide future investigations into the evolving role of oversight in democratic governance. The increasing emphasis on oversight reflects heightened global concerns about democratic erosion and executive dominance, especially during crises such as COVID-19. Theoretically, most studies utilize agency theory to understand accountability dynamics, supplemented by institutionalism and emerging gender-based perspectives. Methodologically, there is a rising recognition of mixed-method approaches and digital tools, such as AI-assisted content analysis, which highlight new frontiers for parliamentary oversight research.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the literature by combining a PRISMA systematic review with bibliometric mapping of parliamentary oversight from 2019 to 2024, documenting global patterns, clarifying when tools work, and proposing an integrated framework linking enforceability, institutional autonomy, and political will, while identifying under-studied regions and digital oversight gaps.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary oversight serves as one of the fundamental checks within democratic systems, ensuring that the executive remains accountable to the public and subject to transparent scrutiny. Through tools such as parliamentary questions, committee investigations, interpellations, and motions of no confidence, legislatures are

expected to hold governments in check and protect the public interest. Yet, the effectiveness of these mechanisms varies widely across political systems. In some settings, oversight is a robust process that shapes policy outcomes and enhances institutional integrity. In others, it functions more as a symbolic gesture, constrained by political interference, weak enforcement, or limited parliamentary capacity.

Despite a growing body of research on the subject, there remains a significant gap in systematically understanding how parliamentary oversight operates in practice and why it succeeds in some jurisdictions but not in others. Much of the existing literature is fragmented either focused on normative theory or case-specific empirical findings without offering a cohesive global picture of trends, challenges, and methodological approaches.

This study addresses the gap by reviewing academic studies on parliamentary oversight published between 2019 and 2024. It provides a global mapping of contributors, theoretical frameworks, and oversight outcomes, offering insights into the institutional and political factors that shape accountability in modern governance. The study proceeds by examining existing research through a dual-method design, combining bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review. This paper examines *parliamentary oversight* as a mechanism of accountability situated between two poles: *Institutional activation* the intended function of scrutiny tools and *political utilization*, the strategic deployment of such tools for partisan gain. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is parliamentary oversight research distributed by year, country, and leading institutions?
2. Which theoretical frameworks are most prominent in parliamentary oversight research?
3. What methodologies are predominantly applied in empirical studies on oversight?
4. How effective are oversight mechanisms, and what barriers limit their impact across different political systems?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on parliamentary oversight has expanded in recent years, driven by growing concerns over democratic backsliding and executive dominance. Scholars broadly agree that legislative oversight mechanisms such as parliamentary questions, committee hearings, interpellations, and motions of censure are central to holding governments accountable. Yet, how these tools function in practice varies widely across countries and institutional frameworks. A significant portion of the literature adopts an agency theory perspective, treating the oversight relationship as a principal-agent dynamic between legislators and the executive. Studies such as Block (2025) and Bäck, Müller, Angelova, and Strobl (2022) explore how factors like party fragmentation, ministerial independence, and institutional design shape the effectiveness of oversight. While this framework has become dominant, it often overlooks deeper structural and cultural variables that influence how oversight plays out in real political systems.

Other scholars turn to institutional and legal approaches. Griglio and Lupo (2020) examine the different outcomes of post-legislative scrutiny in France, Italy, and Switzerland, showing how legal traditions and procedural enforcement determine whether oversight leads to real consequences. Reykers (2021), in his analysis of Belgium's defense procurement oversight, emphasizes the role of internal committee rules and access to information as key variables. Gender also features as an emerging area of interest. Mimica, Navia, and Cárcamo (2024) find that female legislators tend to prioritize policy effectiveness over confrontation, often using questions and committees to shape outcomes. De Vet and Devroe (2023) add that opposition MPs, particularly women, are more likely to engage in issue-based oversight when institutional space allows it.

Despite these contributions, gaps in the literature remain. Most studies are heavily concentrated in Western democratic contexts, particularly Europe and the Commonwealth, while fragile and transitional states receive limited attention. Methodologically, many articles rely on either descriptive statistics or qualitative interviews, with few combining both. There is also limited exploration of newer trends such as digital oversight tools, automated content analysis, and real-time monitoring platforms that could transform how oversight is practiced and studied. The current review builds on this landscape by offering a synthesis of recent scholarship, capturing both global

trends and regional differences in how parliaments attempt to exercise oversight. By combining bibliometric analysis with a systematic review of empirical studies, this paper aims to highlight what works, what fails, and where further research is needed.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed a dual-method approach that combined bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review (SLR). The goal was to map global academic trends on parliamentary oversight and critically assess the quality, scope, and findings of recent scholarship. This combination was chosen to address both the breadth and depth of research on the topic offering a macro-level overview of publication patterns and a micro-level analysis of individual studies. The design aligns with recent calls for integrative approaches in political science and public policy research.

### 3.2. Data Sources and Search Strategy

The data collection process was initiated on 15 April 2025, using the Scopus database. Scopus was selected due to its broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature in the social sciences and governance fields. The search strategy combined core keywords such as "parliamentary oversight," "accountability," "legislative scrutiny," and "governance." Only journal articles published between 2019 and 2024 were considered, and the scope was limited to publications categorized under Social Sciences and Business.

Boolean operators and keyword filters were applied to ensure the relevance of the results. The search yielded 519 articles. After applying additional inclusion criteria language (English), document type (Articles only), and topical relevance the dataset was narrowed to 91 articles. Full texts were retrieved for 46 of them. Of these, 13 met all eligibility standards for in-depth analysis. We followed the PRISMA framework to ensure a transparent and replicable review process. The selection process is visually summarized in the flow diagram below.

Figure 1 illustrates the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram showing the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies in the review.
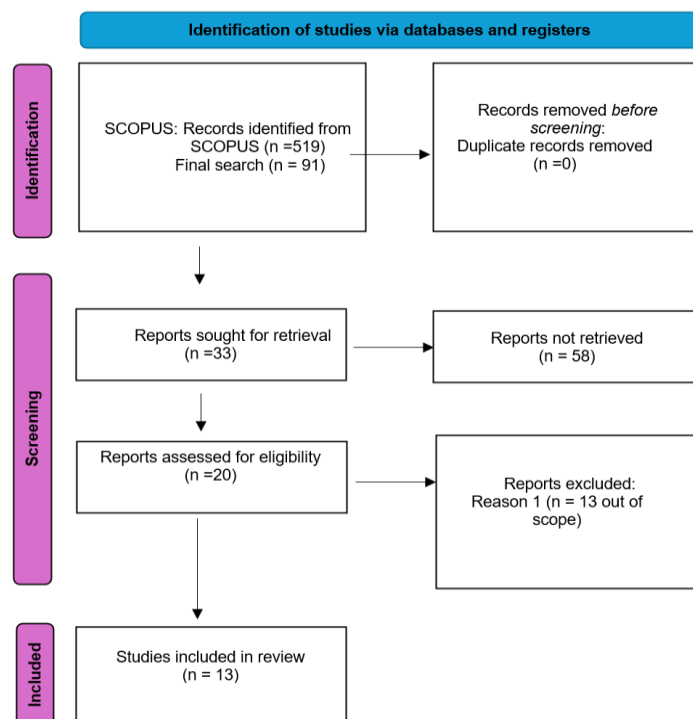


**Figure 1.** PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for search on 15 Apr 2025.

As shown in Table 1, the keyword query was carefully constructed to encompass terms related to both institutional design and democratic oversight.

**Table 1.** Keywords and query used in the Scopus search strategy.

| Query | Parliament |
|---|---|
| And ( Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Parliament" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Parliamentary Oversight" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Oversight" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Accountability" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Government" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Legislative Oversight" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Committees" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Parliamentary Scrutiny" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Parliamentary Control" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Governance" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Good Governance" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Legislature" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Legislatures" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Democratic Control" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "Parliamentary Questions" ) Or Limit-To ( Exact keyword , "National Parliaments" ) ) | Parliamentary oversight |
| | Oversight |
| | Accountability |
| | Government |
| | Legislative oversight |
| | Committees |
| | Parliamentary scrutiny |
| | Parliamentary control |
| | Governance |
| | Good governance |
| | Legislatures |
| | Democratic control |
| | Parliamentary questions |
| | National parliaments |

### 3.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Direct focus on parliamentary oversight mechanisms.
- Empirical analysis of oversight tools, their effectiveness, or institutional impact.
- Publication in a peer-reviewed journal between 2019 and 2024.
- Availability of full text.

### 3.4. Exclusion Criteria Included

- Studies unrelated to governance or legislative oversight.
- Articles without methodological transparency.
- Editorials, book reviews, or conference abstracts.

### 3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

Compared to many earlier studies that focused on one country or used just one research method, this paper aims to provide a broader perspective. The mixed-method design, which combines bibliometric mapping with a systematic literature review, offers both a comprehensive overview and deeper insights. This approach distinguishes the study from previous works and enhances understanding of how parliamentary oversight is examined across different regions of the world.

The first stage of analysis was bibliometric. This involved quantifying patterns in publication volume, country distribution, and institutional affiliation. Bibliometric software was used to visualize trends and identify leading contributors.

Figure 2 illustrates the annual distribution of publications on parliamentary oversight between 2019 and 2024, highlighting the growing academic interest in the subject.
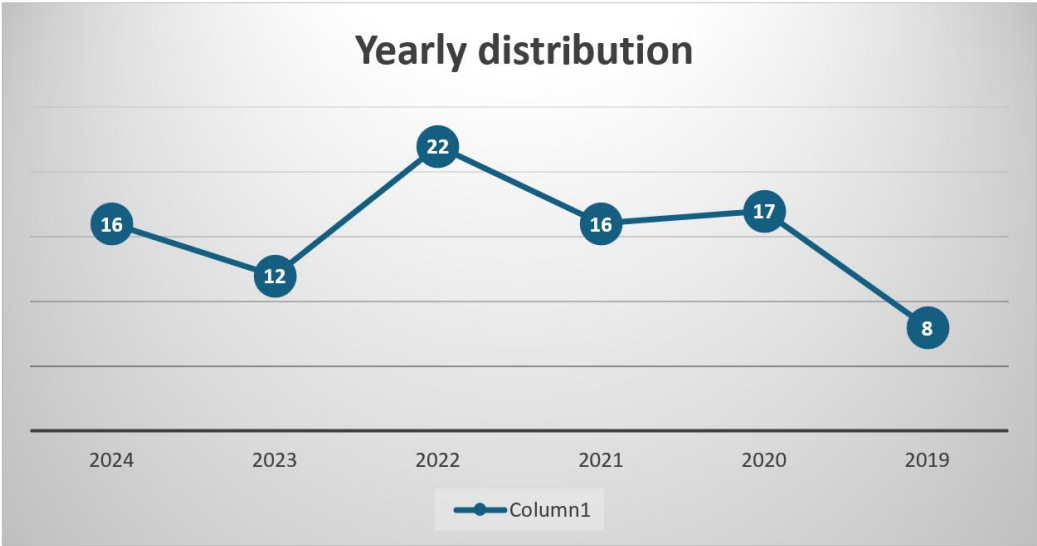
**Yearly distribution**



**Figure 2.** Annual distribution of publications (2019–2024).

The second stage applied the PRISMA framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), which guided the screening, selection, and evaluation of articles. For the selected studies, content analysis was conducted to extract information on theoretical frameworks, research methods, sample characteristics, and key findings. Figure 3 visualizes the top 10 countries contributing to the scholarly discourse on parliamentary oversight. Emphasis was placed on identifying patterns in oversight effectiveness and the barriers that limit impact.
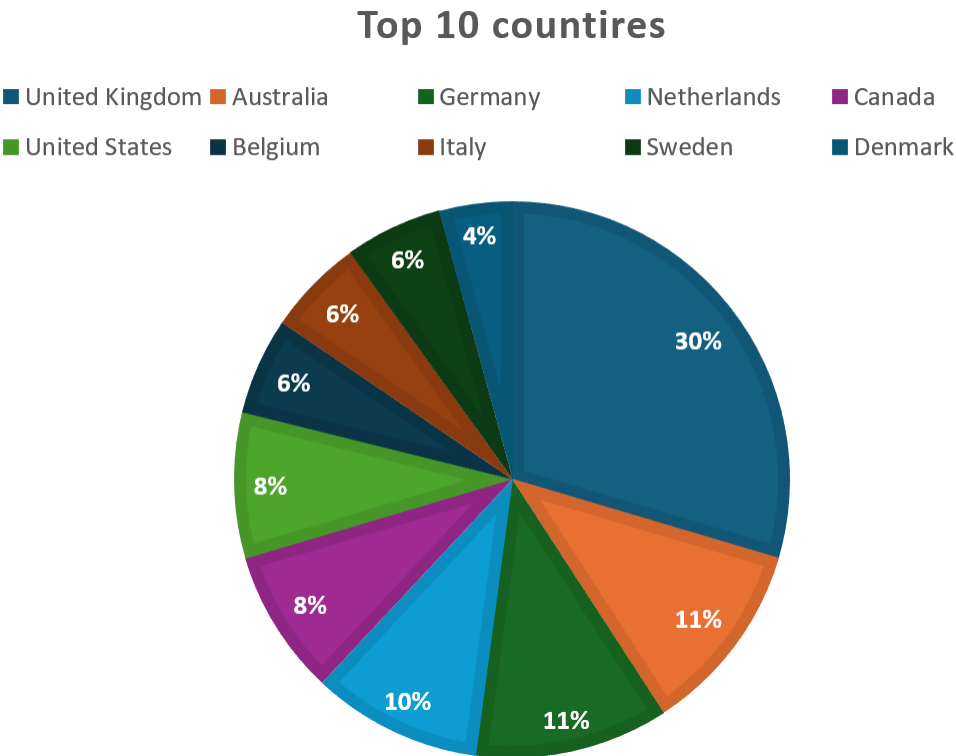
**Top 10 countires**



**Figure 3.** Top 10 countries by number of publications.

Figure 4 showcases the most active academic institutions producing oversight-related research.
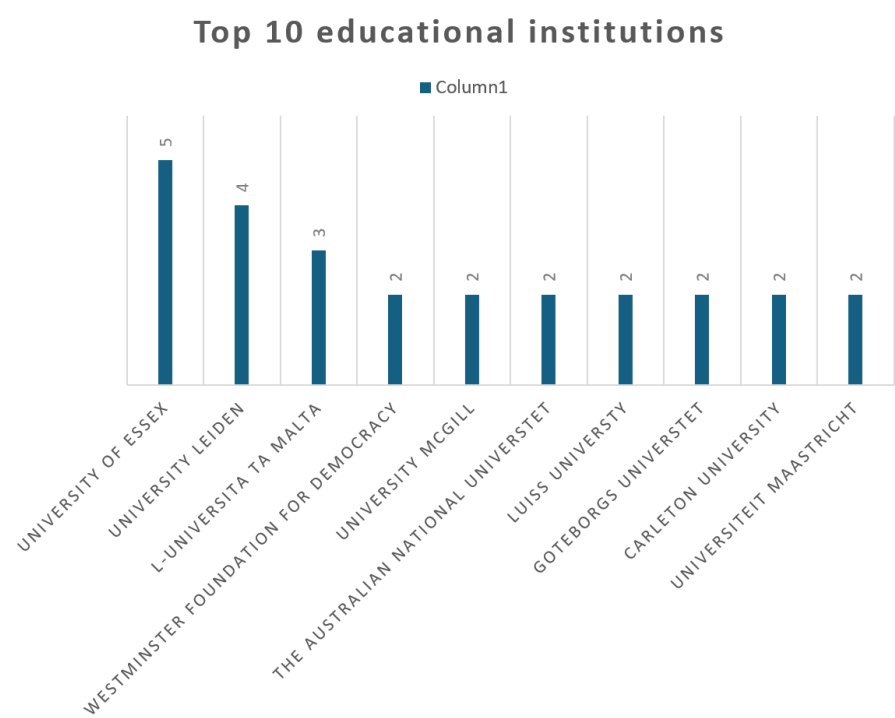
## Top 10 educational institutions



**Figure 4.** Leading academic institutions in oversight research.

### 3.6. Contribution to the Field

This methodology differs from earlier reviews by combining systematic content analysis with quantitative mapping. While many prior studies rely on either bibliometric summaries or narrative reviews, this paper integrates both in a structured and replicable way. The result is a more comprehensive understanding of how parliamentary oversight is being studied across jurisdictions and what future research might address.

## 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The findings of this study emerge from two interlinked phases: a bibliometric mapping of academic output and a systematic review of selected studies on parliamentary oversight. Together, these results offer a panoramic view of how oversight is researched, where the emphasis lies, and what structural or contextual factors shape its real-world effectiveness.

The bibliometric analysis revealed a steady increase in publications on parliamentary oversight between 2019 and 2024, with a notable peak in 2022. This surge appears to reflect heightened global attention to governance and accountability in the wake of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Scholarly contributions came predominantly from the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany, while institutions like the University of Essex and the University of Leiden stood out as key academic hubs. These institutions often anchored research programs focused on democratic accountability, institutional performance, or comparative governance.

A geographic imbalance was also observed. Most contributions originated from stable, well-established democracies, while fragile or post-conflict states remained significantly underrepresented. This suggests a persistent research bias that overlooks contexts where oversight mechanisms may be most urgently needed yet least functional.

The systematic review of thirteen carefully selected articles provided deeper insight into the substance of the literature. Agency theory emerged as the most common theoretical lens, particularly in studies analyzing parliamentary questions and committee reports. Other frameworks, including institutionalism, civil-military relations theory, and gender behavior theory, were also present but less frequently applied. The dominance of

agency theory suggests a preference for measurable accountability dynamics, though it may narrow the conceptual scope of oversight research.

Methodologically, most studies relied on descriptive statistics, regression models, and content analysis of legislative records. A smaller number incorporated qualitative interviews with members of parliament, staffers, or subject-matter experts. Samples ranged from thousands of parliamentary questions to internal transcripts and committee findings. Despite this diversity, many studies remained confined to single-country case studies, limiting the generalizability of findings.

Across contexts, oversight was found to be heavily dependent on institutional autonomy, technical expertise, and legal enforceability. While countries like Switzerland and Germany exhibited relatively strong parliamentary control, others such as South Africa, Belgium, and Italy struggled with fragmented oversight due to weak enforcement, politicization, or poor inter-branch coordination. In several cases, oversight mechanisms existed on paper but lacked substantive impact.

The review also identified growing interest in digital oversight tools and the use of AI-assisted content analysis. However, these innovations remain marginal and underutilized in most empirical research. Their future integration may offer new opportunities for real-time monitoring and performance assessment.

In sum, the results underscore that effective oversight cannot be measured solely by the presence of tools or procedures. Rather, it is a function of political will, legal frameworks, institutional culture, and the broader ecosystem in which parliaments operate. The evidence points to a complex interplay of formal and informal variables, demanding both conceptual breadth and methodological depth in future studies.

Table 2 presents selected empirical studies that illustrate recurring themes and contextual variations in the practice of parliamentary oversight.

**Table 2.** Key Themes and contextual findings in parliamentary oversight research.

| Author(s) and Year | Title of the Study | Study Context | Platforms | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Okpe and Othman (2021) | Legislature-Executive Crisis under APC Governance in Nigeria (2015–2019) | Nigeria The Fourth Republic | Secondary data: books, articles, 1999 Constitution, parliamentary records | Legislative decline, budget delays, institutional breakdown, lack of transparency |
| Van Rensburg, Vreÿ, and Neethling (2020) | Parliamentary Oversight Tools in South Africa | South Africa | Parliamentary reports, unstructured interviews | Low committee activity; weak actual accountability |
| Wickberg and Phélippeau (2022) | Parliamentary Ethics Institutionalization in France | (1994-2014) | Parliamentary archives, official reports, interviews | Institutional complexity and role conflict |
| De Vet and Devroe (2023) | Strategic Opposition Behavior in Belgium | France (1980–2020) | Oral question data | Oversight tools shaped by party context |
| Block (2025) | Oversight of Independent vs Partisan Portfolios in Germany | Belgium (2007–2019) | Parliamentary question database | Oversight depends on political independence status |
| Bäck et al. (2022) | Ministerial Autonomy and Parliamentary Scrutiny | Germany (2011–2020) | Analysis of 1,200+ reports | Strong oversight limits ministerial influence |
| Griglio and Lupo (2020) | Post-legislative Scrutiny in France, Italy & Switzerland | 9 European countries 2005): | Constitutional rules, parliamentary reports | Effectiveness tied to constitution and autonomy: Swiss (strong), French (formal), Italian (weak) |
| Mimica et al. (2024) | Parliamentary Questions in Chile's Presidential System | France, Italy, Switzerland | Parliamentary question database | Opposition MPs submit more questions than government MPs |
| Jayathilake and Tennakoon (2021) | Evaluation and Oversight by Sri Lankan Parliament | Chile (2006–2018) | Session transcripts, committee reports | Committees evaluated policies; effectiveness hindered by weak enforcement. |
| Reykers (2021) | Parliamentary oversight of defence procurement – Belgium | Sri Lanka (2015–2020) | Transcripts and interviews with MPs | Secrecy used to withhold information |

| Author(s) and Year | Title of the Study | Study Context | Platforms | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tacea and Trauner (2021) | Interparliamentary Oversight in EU AFSJ | Belgium (2015–2018) | Meeting transcripts and interviews | There is no effective joint parliamentary oversight. |
| Winzen (2021) | Parliamentary Oversight in the EU's European Semester | European Union, European Parliament | National constitutions and laws. | Lack of reform in some countries. |
| Akbik and Migliorati (2024) | Oversight via PQs in the European Parliament | European Union, period: 2011–2020 | Parliamentary question database | Question types reflect oversight level. |

Summary of key results, data sources, and country-specific contexts drawn from selected empirical studies.

Table 2 highlights that thematic comparisons across diverse political systems reveal that while parliamentary oversight mechanisms are structurally embedded in most democratic systems, their functional effectiveness remains limited due to contextual and systemic challenges. These include political interference, institutional opacity, legislative stagnation, weak committee performance, politicization, and lack of transparency. Although countries like Switzerland and Germany exhibit relatively robust oversight practices, transitional democracies often face significant struggles with legislative decline and minimal accountability.

### 4.1. Phase Two: Systematic Literature Review (SLR) Results

The methodological and theoretical diversity within recent parliamentary oversight studies is summarized clearly in Table 3. It provides an overview of the analytical methods, theoretical approaches, and samples used, illustrating the varying lenses researchers employ to study oversight mechanisms.

**Table 3.** Theoretical frameworks, analytical methods, and samples of the studies included in the SLR (2019–2024).

| Author(s) and Year | Theory Used | Type of Analysis | Sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| Okpe and Othman (2021) | Civil-Military Relations Theory | Descriptive-analytical analysis of texts and data | N/A |
| Van Rensburg et al. (2020) | Civil-Military Relations Theory | Exploratory descriptive analysis via interviews. | Interviews |
| Wickberg and Phélippeau (2022) | Historical Institutionalism | Historical-political analysis | Interviews with MPs and officials |
| De Vet and Devroe (2023) | Gender Role Theory | Statistical analysis | 194 opposition MPs |
| Block (2025) | Agency Theory | Multilevel models | 13,670 parliamentary questions |
| Bäck et al. (2022) | Agency Theory | Regression analysis | 150 governments |
| Griglio and Lupo (2020) | None; based on inter-branch relations analysis | Comparative institutional analysis | Institutional study of the three parliaments |
| Mimica et al. (2024) | Agency Theory | Generalized Least Squares (GLS) Negative Binomial Regression | 367 MPs |
| Jayathilake and Tennakoon (2021) | No explicit theory; based on governance principles | Descriptive-analytical of parliamentary documents | Performance analysis |
| Reykers (2021) | Agency Theory | Descriptive-analytical analysis of transcripts | Parliamentary Defense Committee |
| Tacea and Trauner (2021) | Based on individual oversight concepts | Comparative institutional/procedural analysis | Legislation review |
| Winzen (2021) | It relies on concepts of institutional oversight. | Bivariate analysis | All parliaments of the European Union. |
| Akbik and Migliorati (2024) | Agency Theory | Content analysis. | 1,393 questions |

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this review reaffirm that parliamentary oversight, while widely acknowledged as essential to democratic governance, often remains more aspirational than functional. Across jurisdictions, the presence of formal tools such as questions, motions, and committees does not necessarily translate into meaningful accountability. This echoes earlier conclusions drawn by Griglio and Lupo (2020), who argue that oversight is too often treated as a procedural formality rather than a mechanism for real executive constraint.

What emerges clearly is that oversight outcomes are shaped less by the tools themselves and more by the institutional and political environment in which they operate. Countries like Switzerland and Germany show that legal enforceability and institutional independence can create conditions where oversight mechanisms influence policymaking. On the other hand, studies from places like South Africa (Van Rensburg et al., 2020) and Nigeria (Okpe & Othman, 2021) show that oversight still faces serious problems. These problems include issues such as weak skills among lawmakers, poor cooperation between branches of government, and a general lack of technical resources. These issues are not only found in developing countries. Even in more advanced democracies such as France and Italy, there is often a significant gap between what the rules state and what actually occurs in practice (Wickberg & Phélippeau, 2022).

Some researchers focus on the importance of legal frameworks and well-designed institutions (Block, 2025; Griglio & Lupo, 2020). However, others like Winzen (2021) and Reykers (2021) argue that even strong institutions may not work if there is no political support or proper independence. These different views show that oversight is not simple. To really understand how it works, we need to look beyond official laws and study everyday practices and local political culture.

Agency theory is used often in the literature because it helps to study clear and countable relationships. But as Reykers (2021) explains, this theory can miss many important things, like informal rules or political habits inside parliaments. Our review shows that new types of thinking are slowly being used, such as gender studies and institutional conflict, but these are still rare. For example, Mimica et al. (2024) give useful ideas on how gender affects oversight behavior, but there are not many follow-up studies.

However, not all studies agree on the usefulness of oversight tools. For example, Okpe and Othman (2021) Argue that in Nigeria, oversight is mostly symbolic and has little real effect due to weak institutions. But Bäck et al. (2022) show that in some parliamentary systems, even simple tools like questions can lead to real changes if used regularly and backed by public interest. These differences show that the political and institutional context really matters, and that similar tools can work differently in each country.

Even though agency theory helps to explain oversight in a clear way, real-life politics is much more complex. In reality, oversight includes things like behind-the-scenes talks, alliances between parties, and cultural traditions. These cannot be fully understood with only numbers or formulas. That's why future research should also use interviews and other personal methods to study what really happens.

From a research perspective, it appears that not many scholars utilize mixed methods. Most still prefer content analysis or basic statistics. Only a few attempt to combine interviews, direct observation, or new digital techniques. However, as more parliaments make their records available online, future researchers should consider using technologies such as AI or text analysis to study the language and tone of debates. Akbik and Migliorati (2024) already used this idea in the European Parliament and found it useful.

A lot of the research about oversight comes from developed democracies. This makes it hard to understand how things work in fragile or less stable countries. Oversight in places with weak institutions or authoritarian rule is still not studied enough. But it is exactly in these countries where oversight however small might show signs of resistance or local efforts to improve. Without more studies in such places, we cannot build a full picture.

Overall, this study shows that good parliamentary oversight is not just about how the system is built. It also depends on whether the laws are followed, how politics work in practice, and if the institutions have the strength to act. The paper suggests that future research needs to reflect how complicated modern governance really is. Scholars should use different theories and explore more types of data. By combining a review of recent studies with patterns in publishing, this paper hopes to help both researchers and decision-makers understand better ways for parliaments to keep the government in check.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper aimed to look at research on parliamentary oversight published between 2019 and 2024. It used two main methods: bibliometric mapping and a systematic review. By doing this, the study helped to understand how oversight is studied and practiced in different parts of the world. The findings show that having oversight tools is not enough. What really matters is how these tools are used, and this depends on laws, politics, and whether institutions are strong.One important thing this paper found is that most studies use agency theory and often focus on just one country, usually a rich democracy. It also found that there are few studies about oversight in fragile states, and that many researchers are not yet using modern tools like digital analysis. These problems show that even though oversight is talked about a lot, it is still not well understood in many parts of the world. Events like COVID-19 and political crises remind us how important it is to improve oversight. Future studies should focus on comparing countries and linking oversight to real policy changes.

## 7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

People working in policy or parliament reform can learn several things from this paper. First, just having oversight laws does not mean they will be used well. There must be ways to make sure they are followed. Second, parliaments need staff who are trained and free from outside pressure. Third, using digital tools and giving the public access to data will help make the process more open. Also, it is important to create a culture of cooperation instead of conflict, especially in divided societies. For example, governments can create rules that require the executive to respond to parliament. They can also provide more training to staff and members of parliament to enhance their preparedness. Investing in open digital systems can help people follow developments in real time. This will make oversight more effective and increase public trust.

## 8. LIMITATIONS

Like all reviews, this paper has its limits. It only looked at articles written in English and published in Scopus. This means some useful studies in other languages or from other sources may have been missed. Also, even though we tried to include different countries, most of the studies still came from more stable democracies. We also didn't do a meta-analysis because the studies were too different in their methods.

### 8.1. Directions for Future Research

Future studies should extend their empirical scope to include underrepresented regions such as the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia. Scholars should also explore mixed-method and interdisciplinary approaches that can capture both the formal structure and lived realities of oversight. Finally, there is a pressing need to integrate computational tools such as natural language processing and AI-driven content analysis to study oversight performance at scale. As parliamentary behavior becomes increasingly digitized, research methods must evolve accordingly.

In conclusion, this review provides a foundation for more inclusive and critical oversight scholarship. It calls for a shift from procedural formalism to outcome-driven accountability, urging both researchers and practitioners to rethink how we assess the role of parliaments in democratic governance. Future work should not only map oversight tools but also test their democratic weight in contested political terrains.

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