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Parliamentary Committee Data Collection
A comparative analysis the data collection functions of parliamentary committees as it relates to scrutiny of government.

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Executive Summary

This report considers the ways in which parliamentary committees in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, and the United Kingdom collect data in their role as oversight bodies of the central government. Particular attention is paid to any ways in which functions related to this data collection may be centralized or standardized. Summaries are given of the authorities, procedures, and resources utilized in this activity. Specific information is given on the information systems utilized by these parliaments that may serve to enhance data collection activities.

Oversight committee data collection as a whole is not centralized or coordinated in any of the parliaments considered in this report. Each committee and its staff is generally responsible for independently identifying and requesting data from ministries and other sources. However, many individual stages of data collection in parliaments are either centralized or coordinated, particularly in terms of document management and publication, which may improve coordination between different committees.

State Audit Offices represent one important source of data available to committees in their oversight role which resides in one centralized body and has common characteristics across all of the nations considered. “Value-for-money” reports (impact evaluations) issued by SAO’s give parliaments important information on how programs and expenditures are being carried out by the executive. However, although SAOs are a resource for parliamentary committees, they are independent agencies which generally set their own agenda in terms of where they focus their investigative resources beyond the production of yearly audit statements.
Introduction

In this report I offer a comparative analysis of the data collection operations of parliamentary committees in five European nations: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, and the United Kingdom. This analysis begins with a brief overview of the legal authority vested in parliamentary committees in each nation. Brief mention is made of the role of independent State Auditing Offices in providing parliaments with information on government performance. I then proceed to a discussion of ways in which the concept of “data” can be conceptualized and how this affects the strategies parliaments adopt in order to manage data flows. I pay special attention to any cases in which aspects of data collection are centralized within the parliamentary organization or coordinated across subunits. Examples will be given of specific systems and technologies employed by the parliaments in question, with some discussion of staffing considerations.

Committee data collection as a whole is not centralized or coordinated in any of the parliaments considered in this report. That being said, there are elements of the data collection process that are either centralized or coordinated in each of the parliaments considered.

In order to approach a detailed discussion of the data collection operations of parliamentary committees, a clarification of the concept of “committee data collection” is necessary. In general, the main purpose of committees in the main house of each parliament considered in this report is to consider legislation related to a specific area of society or government and to deliver recommendations to plenary sessions of the parliament about what legislation ought to receive further attention. In addition, committees have some measure of authority to oversee the operations of the executive i.e.
the government. Since the division of committees generally corresponds closely to the divisions of ministries within the government, each committee has “its own” ministry to oversee, meaning that the ministry will be responsible for executing the same laws the committee deals with in its legislative role.¹ This may be one reason why each committee is responsible for its own data collection: given the separation of committees and ministries by subject area, overlapping interests between committees are an exception. In addition, committee members develop both expertise in the committee subject area and relationships with key ministry officials and civil servants.

In order to oversee the operations of a ministry, a committee needs information about those operations. This information may come from many sources, including government reports, minister/civil servant testimony, expert testimony, public testimony/petitions, investigative journalism, so-called insider “whistle-blowers”, and so forth. For the purposes of this report, I will focus on the first two sources, although all sources of information tend to be handled in similar fashion.

A typical request for information (data) from a government ministry can be characterized as follows:

- A committee identifies a need for information about a topic.
- The committee addresses an information request to the relevant ministry.
- The ministry responds to the request by delivering documents to the committee.

¹ The British system is unique, since it maintains two extensive committee systems. Standing committees deal with legislation and select committees deal with government scrutiny. Thus, while select committees are assigned to scrutinize particular departments, they are not directly involved in drafting legislation for those departments. As is mentioned later in this report, this type of structure results in UK select committees enjoying considerably less power than their counterparts in other countries which also have a legislative function.
• The committee receives the requested information and files the documents.

Another common scenario would result in a minister testifying to the committee:

• A committee identifies a need for information about a topic from a minister.
• The committee addresses an information request to the minister.
• The minister appears before the committee.
• Testimony is recorded in committee minutes.

These two scenarios will be elaborated further in the course of this report, but these examples illustrate the basic framework for what is meant by “data collection” throughout this report. Another important scenario which will not receive much attention is that in which a committee receives government reports on a regular schedule. Regular reports are handled in the same way as requested documents, but they tend not to reveal as many of the complications of the data collection process as do requested documents.

In order to see clearly the stages of the data collection process, it is helpful to think of each accumulation of data, whether it be a report, memo, audio recording of live testimony, or any other piece of data in any format (paper, electronic, audio tape), as a document with a specific life-cycle. The life-cycle of a document can be thought of as analogous to a biologic life-cycle. Each document is first conceived (requested), born (written, spoken, recorded), lives (is sent from person to person, read, filed, etc.), and dies (is archived or destroyed). The analogy is not perfect, since many (archived) documents continue to be reused, but the general idea of life-stages of a document is still helpful. Thought of in this way, some individual stages of data collection in parliaments are
either centralized or coordinated. In the case of centralization of operations, the motivation appears to be one of cost-savings or efficiency, while in the case of coordination or standardization, the motivation seems to be one of facilitating information-sharing and ensuring that important documents are retained for later use.

*Each committee is responsible for its own data collection;* however, the management of that data is facilitated by common parliamentary document distribution, registry, filing, and archiving systems, which are increasingly electronic and even Internet-based.

**Committee Authority, Rules, and Procedures**

Committee authority to request information was found in all cases considered to be derived from the country’s constitution and/or parliamentary rules of procedure. The following table summarizes the powers vested in committees in each country to request information from the government. A more complete enumeration of these powers is contained in the appendix for each country.

**Table 1 Summary of Committee Powers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Powers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td><em>Members of the Government and members of other central administrative agencies shall have a duty to attend in person a meeting of a committee in the event that the committee requests it, and to provide the information and explanations demanded.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Estonia       | *A committee of the Riigikogu has the right to:*
|               | 1. demand information necessary for the performance of its functions from the Government of the Republic and agencies of executive power; |
|               | 2. demand that a member of the Government of the Republic participate in a committee sitting in order to obtain information on matters within the powers of the member of the Government; |
|               | 3. invite officials of government agencies and other persons to participate in a committee sitting in order to inform and advise the committee. |
Finland

The Parliament has the right to receive from the Government the information it needs in the consideration of matters.

Germany

The Bundestag and its committees may require the appearance of any member of the Federal Government.

UK

Select committees appointed under this order shall have power to send for persons, papers and records.

There are differences in the wording of these powers in each nation; however, there is little difference in the practical application of each statute. Although Estonia’s Rules of Procedure were the only found to enumerate specific penalties for failure to respond to a committee (see Appendix B: Estonia—Supporting Laws and References), the delivery of information to parliamentary committees appears to be considered compulsory in each nation (Sear, Strickland et al. 2002; Noor 2006; Pechacek 2006; Vuorinen 2006).²

The formal sources of authority for committees to request information are each nation’s constitution or parliamentary rules of procedure. However, discussions with Czech, Estonian, and Finnish officials (Noor 2006; Pechacek 2006; Vuorinen 2006), and House of Commons Library reports (Sear, Strickland et al. 2002) indicate that political relationships and party loyalties play a significant role in terms of committees being able to acquire the information they need from the government. In all of the contexts studied, with the possible exception of Great Britain, there is simply no question as to whether or not a minister will turn over requested information. The potential repercussions of such behavior strike at the very core of a minister’s political longevity. In the most extreme case, non-cooperation with a committee may result in a vote of no-confidence in the government, although in practice this is unheard-of. The reality of the proportional

² At least in the Finnish system, although penalties are not enumerated specifically, failure of a civil servant to appear before a committee could be considered criminal negligence of duty, but “this does not occur” (Vuorinen, 2006).
representation parliamentary form is that governments are formed on principles of compromise and coalition. Failure to cooperate with a committee inquiry of whatever kind by a coalition partner would either mean disloyalty to his/her own party or a breach of trust with the other parties of the coalition, not to mention being a (possibly criminal) breach of public trust. A small number of cases have been noted in Great Britain in which ministry officials have failed to take select committee inquiries seriously (they still appeared, but were uncooperative when testifying), which has lead to a strengthening of the select committee mandate (Sear, Strickland et al. 2002). Nevertheless, even given occasional reluctance to appear before a committee, no minister has ever persisted in this when pressed. It should be noted that Great Britain is in practice a two-party system where government is not generally made up of a coalition of parties. Thus, it is possible for the opposition faction on a committee to request information from a member of the governing party.

*Standard Procedure for Request of Information*

The standard procedures for requesting information from a government ministry were found to be similar in each nation considered. Everyday requests for information are handled informally by committee secretaries or assistants. Such requests are sent by normal mail, courier, or email. As the request is being sent, the request itself will be recorded in the parliamentary document register (usually a computer program). In more serious matters, an official letter may be sent from the head of the committee. In theory, all requests for information come from the head of the committee, but only in serious cases will the committee head make the request personally (Noor 2006; Pechacek 2006; Vuorinen 2006). In some circumstances, the plenary session of parliament may make an
information request on a committee’s behalf, which will force the government to deliver
the information more quickly (Noor 2006). Normally, the time-frame in which the
ministry must reply is stipulated in the information request and depends on the committee
schedule. This is one area in which the daily communication and close relationship
between committees and their ministries should be kept in mind.

Once the requested documents are received from the ministry, they will first be
registered in the document register, regardless of whether the reply is in paper or email
form. In Estonian, the Czech Republic, and the UK, it is still common for most
documents to be sent in paper form, although advance unofficial versions may be sent via
email. In Finland and Germany, most documents are now sent in electronic form, from
which paper copies may be printed for committee member use. After registration, paper
documents will be kept in committee office files or, in the case of electronic documents,
on the committee’s network drive.

After a committee is done considering the matter to which requested documents
were related, they are then forwarded to the parliamentary archive along with the
committee minutes to be stored permanently. Each parliament has guidelines for which
types of documents must be archived and which can be destroyed.

In the case that a request for information requires that a minister or civil servant
appear before a committee, his or her testimony will be recorded in the committee
minutes, along with any documents presented.

**State Auditing Offices**

An area of reporting to parliament on government activities that deserves particular
attention is the role of state auditing offices. While much of the data contained in auditing
reports is obtained from ministry sources, which are accessible to parliamentary committees through ministry reports and individual information requests/minister testimony, auditing reports offer a more critical view of government activities than do the government’s own reports. They collect data from a wider range of sources than do internal ministry reports and may reveal important details that persons not trained in financial analysis may overlook. Impact studies (so-called value-for-money analyses) conducted by auditing offices offer a key check to ministry self-reporting. These studies on the effectiveness of specific government programs and policies are a critical source of information for parliament and the public.

The audit office in each of the nations considered in this study have the authority to audit virtually all expenditures of state funds and delivers regular reports to parliament, sometimes at the specific request of parliament. This may be seen as one institution that functions as a centralized means of data collection for parliaments, since public programs always involve public money. It must be noted, however, that in no case was the role of the state audit office directly tied to committee oversight of government performance other than the committee on public finance. In other words, while a committee may rely on state audit reports in the course of its oversight work, the two bodies do not usually work hand-in-hand.

Few variations exist in the general framework of the purposes of state auditing offices across the nations considered in this study. Generally, the auditing office is established by the constitution and while closely tied to the parliament, it stands as an independent body. The auditing office is expected to deliver yearly reports on the disposition of state funds to parliament as a whole and to work closely with the
parliamentary committee on public finance (the precise naming of this committee varies). Any relations between the audit office and other parliamentary committees are generally channeled through the committee on public finance. Generally, members of parliament (and thus parliamentary committees) may suggest topics for investigation to the audit office, but the audit office exercises discretion in this regard. The notable exception is Estonia, where the Auditor General is required to respond to individual MP requests for investigation within 20 parliamentary session days. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Germany, where the Audit Office (Bundesrechnungshof) has a cooperative relationship with the government and tends not to highlight mismanagement unless a ministry does not accept its recommendations.

Resources and Competencies

The publication *State Audit in the European Union* issued by the UK National Audit Office (SAO 2005; see bibliography) provides a summary of the operations of the audit office of each nation considered in this report, with specific reference to authority and relationships with parliament.

Czech Republic

Towards the end of 2004, the SAO had 485 staff of whom 342 were auditors with the remainder administrative, technical and clerical staff. The majority of the SAO’s staff (367) were graduates of universities or other tertiary level educational institutions, some 17 per cent having law degrees, 35 per cent being economists (including accountants and certified auditors), 28 per cent technicians and around 20 per cent having other degrees. Of the remaining SAO staff, 89 had secondary level qualifications and the rest had vocational qualifications needed for technical and support jobs (SAO 2005).

Estonia

By the end of the first half year of 2005 there were 83 employees, 65 per cent of them directly involved in auditing. 90 per cent of the employees are university graduates; among the auditors this percentage is 100. About 40 per cent of the
employees have a degree in economics, business, accounting or related areas, 10 per cent in law, seven per cent are public administration graduates and the rest have various different degrees such as sociology, biology etc. When special skills are needed to carry out an audit, the SAO can contract external experts (SAO 2005).

Finland

The complement of the State Audit Office at the end of 2004 was around 145, of whom 120 were auditors. There were sixty auditors in both performance audit and financial audit. 16 people worked in internal services...

All audit staff at the State Audit Office have university degrees. Most have a master's degree in accounting or business and they are followed by postgraduates in areas such as public administration, political science, economics and sociology (SAO 2005).

Germany

The Bundesrechnungshof has 63 Members, namely the President, the Vice President, nine Senior Audit Directors and 52 Audit Directors. They enjoy judicial independence and a constitutional status similar to that of judges. They cannot be dismissed and are subject only to the law.

The members of the Court are supported by auditors. Staff are recruited from other government departments, and are generally placed in the audit division responsible for that ministry. There is a regular rotation of audit staff, especially of those staff holding university degrees. The Bundesrechnungshof's staff are part of the civil service and are subject to the same pay and grading structures.

UK

The National Audit Office employs over 800 staff. Of these, around 620 are professional audit staff, with some 180 support staff. National Audit Office employees have a wide range of skills and knowledge. Audit staff are recruited mainly as university graduates and trained to acquire professional accountancy qualifications. The Office also draws on a wider pool of skills, particularly for value for money work, and employs economists, operational researchers, social scientists and other specialists. External expertise is drawn in from the private sector and universities. The National Audit Office subcontracts around a quarter of its financial audit work to private sector audit firms. A small number of value for money studies, and parts of studies, have also been contracted out. The use of specialists and contractors allows the National Audit Office to draw on new approaches and methods from outside.
Elements of Data Collection

In order to describe the elements or stages of parliamentary committees’ independent data collection which may be centralized in some way, it is first necessary to break this process down into discrete steps. The life cycle of any piece of data may be extremely complex. For the purposes of this report, the simplified scheme described previously will serve as the model.

Types of Data

In considering how data is collected and stored, it is important to consider the many forms data may appear in. This gives insights into the difficulties that necessarily arise in designing common systems and standards for data management. Consider some of the types of documents a parliamentary committee might accumulate in the course of reviewing a public program:

- audit office reports
- ministry reports
- meeting minutes
- public petitions
- private industry reports
- expert testimony
- ministry testimony
- news reports
- academic research papers
- party memos
- internal committee memos

And then consider some of the forms (formats) these documents may appear in:

- books
- binders of loose pages
- individual printed documents
- electronic word processing documents
- electronic spreadsheets
- raw data files
• pictures, both printed and electronic
• emails
• voice recordings
• video recordings
• newspaper clippings

When considering a unified document management system to handle parliamentary committee data, all of these sources must be considered, with a high degree of likelihood that some or all of these types of data must be archived indefinitely.

Methods for Indexing Data

Two primary approaches to cataloguing (indexing, categorizing, labeling) documents were found in the course of this study. The first, demonstrated by recent innovations in the British Parliament, is the adoption of a conceptual system for cataloguing which is then applied to existing (mostly) paper documents. This conceptual system works with or without the use of computers and basically boils down to a highly refined filing system. The second approach is what I would refer to as a true document management system. This approach is in fact what each parliament studied is moving towards, but each at its own pace. This is best exemplified by the German DOMEA concept, in which underlying conceptual cataloguing schemata are built into a unified database-driven software system which is capable of handling all kinds of documents in electronic format. The initial stage of a document management system can be, as was the case in Germany, a cataloguing and registry system similar to that used in the UK, but it quickly becomes a central repository and communication system for all data. In this system, data which is not already in electronic format is scanned or otherwise digitized. The remaining small amount of data that cannot be digitized is catalogued in the system and stored physically.
It may be somewhat artificial to draw a distinction between these two approaches, since the first is a necessary precursor to the second. In fact, the German adoption of a unified document management system explicitly called for an initial step in which the software would only serve as a registry for existing paper documents. However, there is a clear difference between Germany, where a document now need never be printed to be passed from a ministry in Bonn to a member of parliament working from home in Düsseldorf and then used in committee in Berlin, and the UK, where documents appear to almost always still be handled in paper form and kept in committee office paper files in an appropriately colored and labeled file folder. This does not necessarily mean that German early adoption has necessarily made Bundestag operations more efficient than House of Commons operations, however. Impact studies of the efficiency gains made by adoption of any of these initiatives are lacking.

Centralized and Standardized Operations

In the course of this study the following functions related to committee data collection were found to be commonly handled by a central office or (computer) system in parliament: printing, copying, email/scheduling, posting of information on websites, and cataloguing of documents. For example, the British parliament has contracted with a company by the name of The Stationary Office (TSO) to copy and publish all major parliamentary documents, including web publications; the Czech parliament utilizes IBM Lotus Notes software for emailing and scheduling; and the Library and Archives of the Finnish Parliament catalogue and store all important documents in a central location, thus giving each committee access to the past documents of other committees. The only truly unique solution observed in this category of centralized operations is the outsourcing of
document duplication in the British Parliament. In the other nations considered, these operations are handled by an internal bureau (e.g. the Document Office and Information Management Office in the Office of Parliament in Finland; see Figure 2 on p. 32).

Since the object of this study is to investigate how data is collected by committees for scrutiny of government, the potential importance of the centralization of these functions may not be apparent. Indeed, at this level the main gains from centralization may be simply that one committee can gain access to another committee’s information via archives or website postings of minutes.

A more important area may be the standardization of data management. Some of the elements of this area have already been discussed. Adoption of a common document registry and file folder system in the UK parliament represents such standardization. Movements towards standardization were observed in all nations considered in this study; however, I will concentrate on the example of the German DOMEA concept because it offers the most developed and extensive example. How DOMEA goes beyond what has been done in the UK, or in most of the other nations studied, is that it represents not just a standard way of filing documents, but rather a standardized definition of what a document is. This has implications for both committee data sharing and the ability of committees to easily obtain data from ministries.

Data Management Systems

DOMEA

DOMEA stands for “Document Management and Electronic Archiving in Electronic Business” (Dokumentenmanagement und elektronische Archivierung im IT-gestützten Geschäftsgang) and was established by the Co-ordination and Advising
Agency of the Federal Government for Information Technology in the Federal Administration (KBSt)\(^3\) within the Federal Ministry of the Interior. In its most basic form, DOMEA is a specification for electronic records, i.e. a schema for attaching descriptive information (meta-information) to electronic documents. In theory, this could enable the implementation of a “paperless office.”\(^4\) Without going into too much detail, DOMEA describes the requirements for electronic documents to have the same legal status and portability as paper documents. For example, it must be possible to sign electronic documents in some way and to keep an unchangeable record of who has accessed the document. On the portability front, there must be no obstacles to transferring a document from the computers of one government office to another without any loss of meta-information. Scanned documents must be stored in a common format (TIFF\(^5\) in this case) and electronic information must be stored using a universal scheme (XML\(^6\)) (Engel and Wettengel 2003; Wettmann 2005). Note that this is not a specification for a particular software package, but rather a standard which any software to be used in government must meet. Products that meet the German DOMEA requirements include Open Text DOMEA,\(^7\) FileNet ECM, \(^8\) COSA Government,\(^9\) and others.

Implementation of DOMEA was to proceed in three steps. In the first step, the DOMEA-compliant software package would be used to register documents regardless of

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\(^3\) "KBSt Website." from http://www.kbst.bund.de/cln_006/nn_836802/Content/Service/English/english__dokuments.html__nn=true.


\(^7\) "OpenText DOMEA Product Website." from http://www.domea.com/

\(^8\) "Filenet Corporate Website." from http://www.filenet.com/

whether they were in paper or electronic format. This would both create compliance to a standard cataloguing system and make all document registers accessible across departments. Also, this initial phase was intended to allow staff to become familiar with the software and for bugs to be worked out. The second step was to move to electronic records. The meta-information (registry information) created in the first step would be married to the primary document in electronic format. Thus, each record is comprised of the primary document (word processing file, spreadsheet file, image file) and a meta-record with the document’s registry information, electronic signatures, and evidence of changes to the record. The final step is movement to workflow management. In this step, as records (documents) move from person to person, all relevant notes, instructions, and comments are automatically incorporated into the record. In addition, the business process may define the route each record will automatically travel through the organization as it is created, reviewed, approved, and delivered on.

To bring the discussion back to committee data collection, consider the basic process for a committee to request information from a ministry. Under the DOMEA concept, the entire process could be handled automatically. When a committee finds that it needs a piece of information from a ministry, a committee staff member would go to the computer system and enter a request for information, which would then be sent as an official email or task request to the committee’s main point of contact in the ministry. The ministry would then reply by forwarding the relevant document back to the committee. Since the electronic record would be in a common format, the parliament computer system would easily be able to accept the record and deliver it to the requesting committee. This document would then be made available to each committee member via
the same workflow software. Paper copies could then be produced as desired. Another committee that needs the same information could easily have it forwarded.

**Document Registration in the UK**

In the early 1990’s, government reports revealed that document management in the UK parliament was inadequate, with at least 225 different filing systems operating. Since then, the main thrust of the UK parliament’s internal data management modernization has revolved around the establishment of a corporate system for document registry and guidelines for disposal (HOL 2003; HOL 2006). A Records Management Team of four staff supports each house of parliament and each office in parliament in adhering to general procedures and developing their own policies. Each office, for example each parliamentary Select Committee has a designated Record Officer who is responsible for coordinating intraoffice document registry and filing. This is a normal staff member with other responsibilities who is assigned to attend Records Office training and coordination meetings and is responsible to make sure that documents are handled properly in his/her own office.

The new document registry system consists of two components. First, a modified version of the product Keyword AAA has been adopted for use in labeling documents. This is what is known as a “functional thesaurus”. At its most basic level, it is a system for making the coding and titling of documents uniform across an organization. Along with the introduction of this classification system came the adoption of new color-coded file folders. This simple innovation suggests the lack of coordination present previously. These two new practices now make it easier for parliamentary committee offices to keep track of documents as they come and go (Gibbons and Shenton 2003).
As noted previously, all major document distribution has been outsourced to The Stationary Office. This includes upkeep of parliamentary websites, including committee websites which feature important committee reports. Parliament employees have access to Parliamentary Library digital holdings (including laws, minutes, and committee reports) via the Parliamentary Information Management Services (PIMS)\textsuperscript{10} based on Autonomy.\textsuperscript{11} PIMS is designed to facilitate legislative research by linking related documents such as laws and deliberations about those laws and allowing full-text search (Key 2004). It does not facilitate active communication between parliamentary units or parliament and ministries. This system has recently been criticized as “cumbersome and slow and wasteful of the time of staff of the House” (Main 2006). The public can access electronic documents (again, mostly in the forms of minutes and legislative notes) using \url{www.parliament.uk} and browse the index of Parliamentary Library holdings using the Portcullis database.\textsuperscript{12} Access to Select Committee proceedings is available on the publicly-accessible committee websites, which are maintained by The Stationary Office, which in principle prints and posts all proceedings online by the morning after a meeting.

Document Management Elsewhere

The Estonian Riigikogu currently utilizes a program named Kirjatüdruk (“Letter girl”) for document registry and tracking (Noor 2006). Kirjatüdruk was written for the parliament by the Estonian branch of the Finnish firm Tietoenator.\textsuperscript{13} Kirjatüdruk utilizes Oracle PL/SQL (WebDB).\textsuperscript{14} Kirjatüdruk is only a registry and tracking system, not a full

\textsuperscript{10} "Parliamentary Information Management System (PIMS)." from http://deposits.parliament.uk/.
\textsuperscript{12} "Portcullis database." from http://www.portcullis.parliament.uk/DserveA/.
\textsuperscript{13} "Tietoenator Estonia Corporate Website." from http://www.tietoenator.ee/.
document management program, in which actual documents could be stored. The Chancellery of the Riigikogu will soon begin using a document management system named Webdesktop written by the Estonian firm Webware. Webdesktop is written in PHP and runs entirely on open-source platforms, i.e. Linux OS, Apache Web Server, and PostgresSQL database.

In Finland, responses to request for information are generally delivered in electronic form via secure email. Paper versions for use by committees are then prepared in the Parliamentary Office. When an official delivers testimony in a committee meeting, a paper version of the same information is generally provided at that time in addition to the recording of oral testimony in the minutes (Vuorinen 2006). The Finnish parliament utilizes a groupware system named Teamware Office which handles email, calendar, and access to document libraries. All documents stored in the Teamware document library database are stored in the standard SGML (related to XML) format. All non-classified parliamentary documents are made available to the public via the www.eduskunta.fi website.

The Czech parliament currently utilizes IBM Lotus Notes running on Microsoft Windows for electronic communication (Pechacek 2006). Lotus Notes is collaboration software that focuses on email, calendar, and instant messaging.

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Committee Resources and Staffing

Committee data collection is not seen as a function separate from other committee activities and is thus handled by each committee’s members and staff of civil servants (advisors and assistants) (Vuorinen 2006). Many parliaments have a central information office or research unit of the parliamentary library that may answer small requests for information (see Figure 1 on p. 29 and Figure 2 on p. 32), but generally committee staff handles data collection activities.

Committee Staffing Levels

Committees in the Finnish parliament may have as many as 12 staff members or as few as 3, depending on the size of the committee and the complexity of its work. These staff members are generally advisors, assistants, and secretaries, although some committees may have a subject-area expert on staff. All staff members have computers at their disposal (Eduskunta 2006; Vuorinen 2006).

In Estonia, committees have as many as 6 or as few as 3 staff, all of whom are described as either advisors or assistants (Riigikogu 2006). Staff are employees of the Chancellery. Committees have limited resources and are thus subordinate to party groups in the parliament. Each committee generally only has one room allocated to it, which doubles as meeting space and the office of the committee chairman (Ruus 2002).

Czech committees have an average of three office staff and three to four rooms. The committee budget is taken from the general Chamber of Deputies budget (Mansfeldova, Syllova et al. 2002).

In the UK, Select Committees may have from 2 to 9 or more staff, including clerks, assistants, a media officer, and committee specialists. For example, the Select
Committee on Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs has two clerks, an agriculture specialist, and environmental specialist, and inquiry manager, two assistants, a secretary, and a media officer (Parliament 2006).

**Conclusion**

Parliamentary committees in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, and the UK all play an important part of oversight of executive activities. The authority to carry out this activity is ultimately derived from the most basic laws of each nation. In the course of this work, these committees draw on many data sources. Recent efforts to innovate and improve this aspect of committee activities have been part of larger efforts to develop and improving the data management systems throughout each parliament, and indeed across government agencies.

Although data collection as such is not centralized in terms of one office handling such requests, standardizing document management and moving archives into electronic formats accessible via the Internet increase opportunities for data sharing between committees and between parliament and the public. Ultimately, the standardization of document management procedures is important to the maintenance of a healthy institutional memory. If documents are not properly registered, indexed, and archived, it is difficult to reconstruct the processes behind government actions.
Appendix A: Czech Republic—Supporting Laws and References

Constitution\textsuperscript{19}

*Ministers are required to appear in committees when requested:*

Article 38

(2) Any member of the Government shall personally appear at a meeting of the Chamber of Deputies on the basis of its decision. This shall also apply to meetings of a committee, a commission or investigating commission, where, however, the respective member of the Government may let himself or herself be represented by his or her deputy or another member of Government, unless his personal presence is expressly requested.

Rules of Procedure (Chamber of Deputies - *Poslanecká sněmovna*)\textsuperscript{20}

*Ministers and other government administrators have a duty to attend meetings when requested and to provide requested information:*

§ 39

(1) Meetings of a committee shall be attended by those Deputies who are members of the committee. The meetings may also be attended by the President of the Republic, members of the Government and persons which are entitled by law to attend meetings of the Chamber of Deputies and its bodies; the head of the Office of the Chamber of Deputies and employees of the Office of the Chamber of Deputies designated by him/her (designated by the head) may also attend.

(2) Members of the Government and members of other central administrative agencies shall have a duty to attend in person a meeting of a committee in the event that the committee requests it, and to provide the information and explanations demanded by the committee unless they are prevented from doing so by legislation on keeping information in secrecy or by legislation prohibiting making information public.

(3) A member of Government may be represented at a meeting of a committee by another member of Government or by his/her deputy, unless the committee insists on the member's personal attendance.

(4) Members of government, persons representing them, and heads of central administrative agencies may bring along experts to meetings of committees.


(5) Acting chairpersons may also allow, with the agreement of the committee, other persons to speak at meetings.

*Committee minutes include all documents delivered to the committee:*

§ 43

(1) Minutes of meetings of committees shall be taken. The minutes shall state the agenda of the meeting, who directed the meeting, what proposals were submitted, if the Deputy who submitted the proposal insists on it, which speakers spoke during the debate, the names of deputies who voted on resolutions on individual agenda items and information on the results of voting. **The minutes shall include complete versions of submitted written amending proposals, proposals for new bills, resolutions which were adopted, as well as declarations and other documents which were discussed during the meeting.**

(2) After the minutes have been verified by the verifying person, they shall be signed the committee's chairperson within seven days of the end of the meeting. Objections against minutes which have been approved in this manner may be raised at the earliest next meeting of the committee, a meeting at which the committee shall make a decision regarding the objections. The approved minutes, together with the resolution on objections against them, shall be delivered for depositing, together with any schedules, within two months of the end of the meeting. In the event that a joint meeting of several committees is involved, the minutes shall be signed by the chairpersons and verifying persons of the participating committees.

(3) An audio recording of committee meetings shall be made and kept for a period of six months. Committees may resolve to keep it for a longer period. In special cases, committees may resolve that an audio recording shall not be made. The reason for such a resolution shall be included in the minutes of the meeting of the committee.

(4) In the event that a committee so resolves, a shorthand minutes, and a written out version of the shorthand minutes, shall be prepared.
Appendix B: Estonia—Supporting Laws and References

Consititution\textsuperscript{21}

§ 71. The Riigikogu shall form committees.

§ 132. The State Audit Office shall be, in its activities, an independent state body responsible for economic control.

§ 133. The State Audit Office shall audit:

1. the economic activities of state agencies, state enterprises and other state organisations;
2. the use and preservation of state assets;
3. the use and disposal of state assets which have been transferred into the control of local governments;
4. the economic activities of enterprises in which the state holds more than one-half of the votes by way of parts or shares, or whose loans or contractual obligations are guaranteed by the state.

§ 135. The Auditor General shall present to the Riigikogu an overview on the use and preservation of state assets during the preceding budgetary year at the same time as the report on the implementation of the state budget is debated in the Riigikogu.

Rules of Procedure\textsuperscript{22}

Standing committees (as opposed to select, investigative, and study committees) are responsible for both legislative review and government oversight:

§ 18. Standing committees

(2) Standing committees of the Riigikogu shall prepare draft legislation for deliberation by the plenary assembly of the Riigikogu, exercise supervision over the exercise of executive power within their particular field and perform other functions assigned to the committees by law or by a resolution of the Riigikogu.

Committees have the right to demand information:

§ 22. Rights of committees

(1) A committee of the Riigikogu has the right to:

1) demand information necessary for the performance of its functions from the Government of the Republic and agencies of executive power;

2) demand that a member of the Government of the Republic participate in a committee sitting in order to obtain information on matters within the powers of the member of the Government;
3) invite officials of government agencies and other persons to participate in a committee sitting in order to inform and advise the committee.
4) A committee of investigation has the right to summon persons to appear before the committee and to demand information and documents necessary for the performance of its functions. A summoned person is required to appear, provide explanations and reply to questions. The information and documents demanded by the committee shall be submitted by the due date specified by the committee.

Criminal penalties are outlined for failing to provide information to a committee:

§ 23. Hindering work of committee of investigation
(1) Failure to appear before a committee of investigation without good reason following a summons from the committee, failure to submit information or documents, or refusal to provide explanations or to reply to questions is punishable by a fine of up to 300 fine units.

(2) The provisions of the Penal Code (RT I 2001, 61, 364; 2002, 86, 504; 82, 480; 105, 612; 2003, 4, 22; 83, 557; 90, 601; 2004, 7, 40) and of the Code of Misdemeanour Procedure (RT I 2002, 50, 313; 110, 654; 2003, 26, 156; 83, 557; 88, 590; 593) apply to misdemeanours provided in subsection (1) of this section.
(3) A court shall conduct proceedings in the matters of the misdemeanours provided in subsection (1) of this section.
Organizational Structure

Figure 1 Organizational Structure of Estonian Riigikogu

NB: Stars indicate committees and offices involved in data collection/management.

Appendix C: Finland—Supporting Laws and References

Constitution

The government is required to deliver annual reports on its activities:

Section 46 - Reports to be submitted to the Parliament
The Government shall submit annual reports on its activities to the Parliament and on the measures undertaken in response to parliamentary decisions, as well as annual reports on State finances and adherence to the budget. Other reports shall be submitted to the Parliament, as provided in this Constitution, or in another Act or in the Parliament's Rules of Procedure.

The Parliament has the right to receive from the Government the information it needs in the consideration of matters:

Section 47 - Parliamentary right to receive information
The Parliament has the right to receive from the Government the information it needs in the consideration of matters. The appropriate Minister shall ensure that Committees and other parliamentary organs receive without delay the necessary documents and other information in the possession of the authorities. A Committee has the right to receive information from the Government or the appropriate Ministry on a matter within its competence. The Committee may issue a statement to the Government or the Ministry on the basis of the information. A Representative has the right to information which is in the possession of authorities and which is necessary for the performance of the duties of the Representative, in so far as the information is not secret or it does not pertain to a State budget proposal under preparation. In addition, the right of the Parliament to information on international affairs is governed by the provisions included elsewhere in this Constitution.

The parliament establishes the State Audit Office:

Section 90 - Supervision and audit of State finances
The Parliament supervises the financial management of the State and compliance with the State budget. For this purpose, the Parliament elects the State auditors from among its members. An independent body, the State Audit Office, exists to audit the financial management of the State and compliance with the budget. More detailed provisions on the duties of the State Audit Office are laid down by an Act. The State auditors and the State Audit Office have the right to receive information needed for the performance of their duties from public authorities and other entities that are subject to their control.

The Grand Committee and Foreign Affairs Committee have special rights:

Section 97 - Parliamentary right to receive information on international affairs

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament shall receive from the Government, upon request and when otherwise necessary, reports of matters pertaining to foreign and security policy. Correspondingly, the Grand Committee of the Parliament shall receive reports on the preparation of other matters in the European Union. The Speaker's Council may decide on a report being taken up for debate in plenary session, during which, however, no decision is made by the Parliament. The Prime Minister shall provide the Parliament or a Committee with information on matters to be dealt with in a European Council beforehand and without delay after a meeting of the Council. The same applies when amendments are being prepared to the treaties establishing the European Union. The appropriate Committee of the Parliament may issue a statement to the Government on the basis of the reports or information referred to above.

Rules of Procedure

All information received by a committee are appended to the minutes:

Section 43 - Committee documents and access thereto

Minutes shall be drawn up on Committee meetings, indicating the members present, the experts heard, the proposals and the decisions made, with voting results; the documents received or drafted by the Committee for the consideration of the matters shall be appended to the minutes. The secretary of the Committee shall verify the minutes by signing them.

Committee minutes shall become public when they have been verified by the secretary, and the preparatory documents on a matter shall become public when the Committee has concluded its consideration of the matter. However, a parliamentary group not represented in a Committee or a Committee section shall have access to a copy of the preparatory documents on a pending matter, unless these are secret.

Committee documents shall be secret if access to their contents would cause significant damage to the international relations of Finland or to the capital or financial markets. Likewise, documents shall be secret if they contain information on a business or professional secret or the state of health or financial status of a person, if access to that information would cause significant harm or damage and unless there is a pressing public interest requiring that the documents be public. A Committee may decide, for a comparable compelling reason, that a given document is to be secret. Documents covered by the scope of discretion, as exercised by the Committee on the basis of section 50(3) of the Constitution, shall also be secret.

The provisions in section 31 of the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999) apply, in so far as appropriate, to the secrecy periods applicable to Committee documents, unless the Committee decides on a shorter period.

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The Speaker’s Council may issue more detailed instructions on access to Committee documents.

Organizational Structure

Figure 2 Parliamentary Office of Finnish Eduskunta

Appendix D: Germany—Supporting Laws and References

Constitution (Basic Law)\textsuperscript{25}

*Committees may require the attendance of ministers:*

**Article 43**
[Attendance of members of the Federal Government and of the Bundesrat]
(1) The Bundestag and its committees may require the appearance of any member of the Federal Government.
(2) The members of the Bundesrat and of the Federal Government as well as their representatives may attend all sessions of the Bundestag and of its committees. They shall have the right to be heard at any time.

Rules of Procedure (Federal Diet - Bundestag)\textsuperscript{26}

**Rule 42**
Summoning of a member of the Federal Government

The Bundestag may, upon the motion of a parliamentary group or of five per cent of the Members of the Bundestag present, decide that a member of the Federal Government be summoned.

*Basic Law: Article 43, paragraph (1)*
(1) The Bundestag and its committees may demand the presence of any member of the Federal Government.

**Rule 43**
Right to be heard at any time

The members of the Federal Government and of the Bundesrat, as well as persons commissioned by them, must, upon their demand, be heard at any time in accordance with Article 43, paragraph (2) of the Basic Law.

*Basic Law: Article 43, paragraph (2)*
(2) The members of the Bundesrat and the Federal Government as well as persons commissioned by them may attend all sittings of the Bundestag and its committees. They shall be heard at any time.

Appendix E: United Kingdom—Supporting Laws and References

Standing Orders (House of Commons)²⁷

The House of Commons currently has 31 select committees, many of which have special mandates enumerated in the Standing Orders. The following information regards the 18 committees which are concerned with “principal departments of government.”

Select committees related to government departments are tasked with scrutinizing expenditures, administration, and policies and have authority to call for persons, papers, and records:

§152. (1) Select committees shall be appointed to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the principal government departments as set out in paragraph (2) of this order and associated public bodies.

(2) The committees appointed under paragraph (1) of this order, the principal departments of government with which they are concerned and the maximum numbers of each committee shall be as follows:

(3) Each select committee appointed under this order shall have the power to appoint a subcommittee.

(4) Select committees appointed under this order shall have power—
    (a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time;
    (b) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference; and
    (c) to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before subcommittees, and to lay upon the Table of the House the minutes of the proceedings of subcommittees;

and the subcommittees appointed under this order shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, to report from time to time the minutes of their proceedings, and shall have a quorum of three.

(5) Unless the House otherwise orders, all Members nominated to a committee appointed under this order shall continue to be members of that committee for the remainder of the Parliament.
Appendix F Correspondence with Sources

In an attempt to the most up-to-date information possible on data collection procedures, the following questionnaire was emailed to numerous parliamentary and consular information agencies in each nation under consideration. Responses were received from the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Finland. Hungary was dropped from consideration due to non-response. Germany and the UK were retained for consideration due to the abundance of printed and online material on this subject for these nations. Phone contact was attempted with the UK, but no helpful information was obtained.

Respondents

Czech Republic: Štěpán Pecháček, Ph.D., Head of General Analyses Unit, Parliamentary Institute, pechacek@psp.cz.
Estonia: Helin Noor, Riigikogu Information Consultant, helin.noor@riigikogu.ee.
Finland: Vuorinen, Jarmo, Deputy Secretary General, Clerk to the Grand Committee, jarmo.vuorinen@parliament.fi.

Detailed information on specific responses is available from the author: owitesma@indiana.edu.

Questionnaire

Broad question:

What systems (if any) exist in your parliament for coordinating committee data collection?

Specifics:

Authority:

1. Do parliamentary committees have the authority to request documents/interviews from government ministries? Where does this authority come from (constitution, laws, rules of procedure)?
2. What are the penalties for a government minister or civil servant not complying with an information request (e.g. no penalty, monetary fine, jail time, vote of no confidence)?

Data routing/storage:

3. Is there a central office in your parliament that coordinates communication between committees and ministries?
4. When an information request is made by a committee, what is the path the request follows to reach the ministry? (i.e. Does the committee staff deliver the request, or does some central parliamentary office handle all requests?)

5. When a ministry replies to a request for information, how is that information delivered? (hand-delivery of documents, email, entry into common database)

6. When a committee receives information from a ministry or other body, how are the documents stored? (e.g. in committee paper archives, in a parliamentary library, in a common parliamentary computer database)

Staffing and resources:

7. If specific computer software or some other specific means of data management is employed in collecting data for parliamentary committee oversight of ministry activities, what is it? (i.e. name of software, types of computers used)

8. Approximately how many staff/how much staff time is devoted to this activity?
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- UK: http://www.nao.org.uk/

Parliamentary Committee Websites:

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