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## Consultation on the theme of the third Global Parliamentary Report

August 2019

### How to participate

The main objective of the Global Parliamentary Report is to stimulate discussion and change in parliaments, leading to better parliaments and stronger democracies. The two editions of the Global Parliamentary Report have been jointly published by IPU and UNDP.

IPU and UNDP invite all stakeholders – parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, other people working with parliaments - to take part in a consultation on the theme of the third Global Parliamentary Report.

A “long-list” of seven potential themes is found below. Please use this [online form](#) to indicate up to three preferences for themes that you think should be chosen for the theme of the next Report. Participants in the consultation also have the option to write in another proposal for a theme if they wish.

Please feel free to share this Consultation widely and encourage others to participate. The deadline for indicating preferences for the theme of the report is 20 September 2019.

The results of this consultation will be presented at a joint IPU-ASGP session on 17 October 2019 during the 141st IPU Assembly in Belgrade. Entitled: “*Parliament in a changing world: Preliminary consultation on the 2021 Global Parliamentary Report*”, the session will allow for in-depth discussion of the short-listed themes, and an exchange of opinions on how the report should be framed.

A decision on the theme of the next Global Parliamentary Report should be taken in November 2019, while its publication is planned in 2021. Parliaments and other stakeholders will have the opportunity to contribute to the research for the report in the course of 2020.

For further information, please contact Irena Mijanovic at the IPU ([standards@ipu.org](mailto:standards@ipu.org)).

### About the Global Parliamentary Report

The first-ever Global Parliamentary Report, published in 2012, was about “[The changing nature of parliamentary representation](#)”. The Report analyses changes in relations between parliaments and citizens, and suggests improvements to parliamentary strategies for meeting public expectations. It benefitted from the input of 75 parliaments and more than 600 parliamentarians as well as experts in the parliamentary development community.

The second Global Parliamentary Report in 2017, entitled “[Parliamentary oversight: Parliament's power to hold government to account](#)”, provides a global perspective on how oversight is practiced by parliaments. It makes 28 recommendations that amount to a scenario for change in favour of stronger oversight and accountability. The Report was based on responses to questionnaires from 103 parliamentary chambers in 85 countries, as well as survey responses from more than 370 parliamentarians from 128 countries, interviews with parliamentarians and written contributions from parliaments, international and non-governmental organizations and experts.

Both reports are grounded in the parliamentary experience and have drawn upon data, interviews and good practice examples from parliaments and parliamentarians in more than 150 countries. The reports have been used by many parliaments to build capacity and improve performance.

The third report should focus on a particular theme that is topical and relevant to all parliaments and which merits in-depth investigation. It should draw on evidence from the parliamentary community and other stakeholders and set out policy options and recommendations for parliaments. Please note that it is not a report on the “state of the world’s parliaments”.

The primary target audience is the parliamentary community – parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and people/organizations who work to strengthen parliaments – as well as the broader set of policymakers with an interest in parliament. Through the Global Parliamentary Report, we aim to inform this community and help them to take action on the issues raised in the report.

### **“Long list” of potential themes of the third Global Parliamentary Report**

Please use this [online form](#) to indicate up to three preferences from the “long list” of themes below. It is also possible to use the form to submit a proposal for a different theme that does not appear in this list.

1. The rise of participatory and direct democracy: Challenges and opportunities for parliaments
2. Parliamentary committees: Engine room or decoration?
3. The impact on parliaments of money in politics
4. Parliamentary legislative power: Who makes the laws?
5. Violence and intimidation against parliamentarians: A threat to democracy
6. From citizen to parliamentarian: Who gets elected and how, and the impact on the work of parliament
7. Parliamentary ethics and values-based democracy

### **Description of the potential themes**

#### *1. The rise of participatory and direct democracy: Challenges and opportunities for parliaments*

More and more countries are introducing forms of participatory and direct democracy into their national and other tiers of government systems. New technologies and social media have enabled alternative or complementary ways of law-making. Digital platforms, e-petitions, crowdsourcing legislation are modern ways of citizens’ engagement. From one perspective, these initiatives can increase the transparency and legitimacy of legislative projects and, consequently, lead to better laws. On the other hand, there are also possible risks and adverse implications for parliament and democracy.

The rise of participatory democracy initiatives comes in a context of changing forms of social interaction and the ever increasing speed at which news spreads online, which can seem to be opposed to the deliberative – slow, in the eyes of some - nature of parliamentary work.

The Global Parliamentary Report could provide a better understanding of key elements of direct and participatory democratic processes, their potential to support or to challenge some of the traditional roles of parliament and good practice models grounded in parliamentary experience.

#### *2. Parliamentary committees: Engine room or decoration?*

Parliamentary committees are often seen as the most important unit of modern parliaments. It is in committees where the “real work” of parliament takes place. But for numerous reasons, the way that

committee work is organized shows a lot of variety between parliaments when it comes to their right for legislative initiative, oversight mandate, structure, agenda control, openness to public and external experts, etc.

Comparing parliamentary committees globally has the potential for identifying good practices that may be applicable and transferable between parliaments, resulting in more effective parliamentary committees.

### 3. *The impact on parliaments of money in politics*

Citizens are losing trust in institutions. Many feel like their governments are not acting in their interest and that the economy is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful. From one perspective, policy is seen to be captured by narrow interests acting in their own favour. A more participatory politics that extends the democratic principle to economic decision-making would go some way to addressing this problem.

How representative are parliaments of the public at large from the standpoint of income and asset wealth? Are large discrepancies between citizens and their representatives significant in terms of policy outcomes? How are parliamentary elections being funded in countries around the world? To what extent does private funding affect electoral outcomes and MPs' policy choices? What rules are in place in parliaments around lobbying and conflicts of interest, and how effective are they? The third Global Parliamentary Report could address these questions and, as a result of an extensive research and good practice examples from parliaments, provide a set of guidelines.

### 4. *Parliamentary legislative power: Who makes the laws?*

Parliaments across the world differ significantly regarding their legislative mandates and powers, and the ways in which they use them. In many cases, governments seem to be real "law-makers", with most legislative activity being initiated by the executive. Enabled by new technologies and social media, citizens are emerging as the third player in legislative arena.

What is the state of legislative power of parliaments and how it can be strengthened in order that parliaments plays its full role in making laws for the wellbeing of the people? The research would deal with current trends in the legislative role of parliaments, legislative power, capacity and procedures and overall legislative effectiveness. What is the relationship with government, is there inflation of laws, how is the legislative work of committees organized, how can parliaments be proactive in post-legislation scrutiny, what innovative practices can be introduced, how to engage citizens to have better laws – these are key research questions that could be addressed by the Report. An analysis of data and information from parliaments should result in identifying good practice examples and recommendations on strengthening the law-making role of parliaments.

### 5. *Violence and intimidation against parliamentarians: A threat to democracy*

Parliamentarians are increasingly intimidated and threatened as they carry out their work as representatives of the people. The reasons for this vary. In days long past, politicians were more likely to be treated with deference. Today's public discourse, however, helped by the anonymity and reach of social media, increased polarization and citizens' assertiveness, has given way to a hostile and aggressive atmosphere towards politicians. It seems that "the gloves are off" and that the anger vented at politicians, justified or not, is taking on new proportions. This phenomenon arguably reduces the space for dialogue and has a negative effect on democracy.

Politicians themselves may be partly to blame: in some cases, discriminatory and overly simplified language have helped to fan the flames of resentment and open the door to seeing violence as an acceptable response.

Women parliamentarians are doubly affected as they are also targeted because of their gender with a view to discouraging them from remaining or becoming politically active. In some contexts, opposition parliamentarians have been silenced to limit criticism of the government.

What are the trends and challenges? The Global Parliamentary Report could examine the situation of parliamentarians across the globe, identify problems and responsibilities and propose concrete recommendations for action by parliaments, political parties, law enforcement agencies, the private sector, civil society and society as a whole, to promote a safe work environment for parliamentarians.

6. *From citizen to parliamentarian: Who gets elected and how, and the impact on the work of parliament*

The democratic quality of representative government and the ability to represent society depends on the political (and other) qualities of elected members of parliament. While citizens vote candidates into office, someone has to select those candidates beforehand. This step is a prerequisite of democratic elections but it inevitably limits the available options for voters. To understand the composition of parliaments, it is thus necessary to explore candidate selection methods and electoral systems. Candidate selection systems may for example encourage different role behaviours, individual qualities and shifting loyalties. This selection usually also determines the extent to which MPs “mirror” the people, based on criteria such as gender, age, minority status, wealth and economic class, etc.

Who the parliamentarians are, and how they reach parliament, arguably influences how they act once they become parliamentarians, including the issues that they choose to work on, and the political positions that they take. The relationship between the individual parliamentarian and their political party is a key element for investigation here.

The huge variety of potential selection systems may be explored as regards their effects on the quality of parliamentarians and parliaments. Research in this field could provide insights about good practice models and may thus increase trust in parliaments by improving selection methods and general knowledge about them.

7. *Parliamentary ethics and values-based democracy*

Parliamentary democracy is in crisis across the world. One consequence of the increasing concern among voters has been the emergence in the 1980s and 90s, of codes of ethics for members of parliament, together with structures and processes aimed at ensuring openness and ethical conduct and limiting inappropriate or corrupt activity.

Taking as its starting point the values and principles underlying parliamentary democracy, the Global Parliamentary Report could consider in turn the various role-players, structures and processes of parliamentary democracy, together with the forms of misconduct, corruption and other malpractices that afflict them. By examining how these aspects of democracy are intended to function and interact, and contrasting this with the current reality encountered in many jurisdictions, the aim would be to bring into focus the key priorities to be addressed in limiting and dis-incentivising malpractice and promoting values-based democracy.