

Role of Parliamentary Committees

April 13, 2023 • vajiramandravi.com



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Why in News?

- During the course of the ongoing 17th Lok Sabha, only 14 Bills have been referred for further examination to the Parliamentary Committees so far.
- As per data from PRS, **as little as 25% of the Bills introduced were referred to committees in the 16th Lok Sabha**, as compared to 71% and 60% in the 15th and 14th Lok Sabha respectively.

- This represents a declining trend of national legislation being subjected to expert scrutiny.

About Parliamentary Committees

- The functions of the Parliament are varied, complex and voluminous.
- Moreover, it has neither the adequate time nor necessary expertise to make a detailed scrutiny of all legislative measures and other matters.
- Therefore, it is assisted by a number of committees in the discharge of its duties.
- The Constitution of India makes a mention of these committees at different places.
 - However, the **Constitution does not make any specific provisions w.r.t. their composition, tenure, functions, etc.**
 - All these matters are dealt by the rules of two Houses.
- Accordingly, **a Parliamentary Committee means a committee that –**
 - Is appointed or elected by the House or nominated by the Speaker / Chairman
 - Works under the direction of the Speaker / Chairman
 - Presents its report to the House or to the Speaker / Chairman
 - Has a secretariat provided by the Lok Sabha / Rajya Sabha

Classification of Parliamentary Committees

- Broadly, parliamentary committees are of two kinds – **Standing Committees** and **Ad Hoc Committees**.
- Standing Committees are **permanent** (constituted every year or periodically) and work on a continuous basis.
- On the other hand, Ad Hoc Committees are **temporary** and cease to exist on completion of the task assigned to them.
- Standing Committees can be further classified into the following **six categories** –
 - Financial Committees
 - Departmental Standing Committees
 - Committees to Enquire
 - Committees to Scrutinise and Control
 - Committees Relating to the Day-to-Day Business of the House
 - House-Keeping Committees or Service Committees
- Ad Hoc Committees are further subdivided into **Inquiry Committees and Advisory Committees**.

Role of Parliamentary Committees

- Since **Parliament meets only for 70 to 80 days in a year**, there is not enough time to discuss every Bill in detail on the floor of the House.

- Parliamentary Committees go into the details of a specific piece of legislation, analyse the impact it may have on governance indicators, and then make their recommendations.
- The government is required to table an **'Action Taken' report** for the House to judge the progress made on the suggestions of the committee.
- Even though ***committee reports aren't binding on the government***, it helps the legislature ensure an oversight on the executive.
- Another important mandate of committees is to go into issues that are crucial from a nation-building standpoint but don't hold as much political significance.
- A lot goes into the functioning of Parliament and the committees shoulder a big chunk of that responsibility.

Advantages of a Parliamentary Committee

- Deliberations in Committees present several advantages.
- Committees can get inputs from experts and stakeholders on various matters.
- Their ability to devote more time on each item allows them to examine matters in greater detail.
- They also help parties reach consensus on various issues.

Challenges Faced by Parliamentary Committees

- There are several areas where Committees need strengthening.
- For example, **all Bills are not referred to Committees**.
- They are **thinly staffed and do not have full-time technical expert support**. Some Committees may not seek evidence from experts on important Bills.
- Further, **attendance of MPs in Committee meetings is about 50%**, which is lower than the 84% attendance seen during the Parliament sittings.

How to Improve Effectiveness of Parliamentary Committees?

- **Referring Bills to Committees -**
 - Currently, it is not mandatory to refer a Bill to a Committee. In some Parliamentary systems like the UK, all Bills other than Money Bills are automatically referred to Committees.
 - However, in India it depends on the decision of the Speaker or Chairman, in consultation with the Minister putting forth the Bill, whether a Bill should be referred to a Committee.
 - Referring all Bills to a Committee would ensure that all laws go through a minimum level of Parliamentary scrutiny.
- **Expert Witnesses and Research Support -**
 - To aid in their study, members of DRSCs can consult with expert witnesses, stakeholders, and government officials.

- Engaging with experts and stakeholders enables Committee members to better understand the details of complicated issues, and the potential impact of a policy or legislation.
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Q1) What is a parliamentary form of government?

parliamentary system, democratic form of government in which the party (or a coalition of parties) with the greatest representation in the parliament (legislature) forms the government, its leader becoming prime minister or chancellor.

Q2) How many members are there in an Estimates Committee?

The Committee on Estimates consists of 30 members—all from Lok Sabha who are elected by Lok Sabha every year from amongst its members according to the principle of proportional representation by means of single transferable vote.

Source: [The role of Parliamentary Committees](#) | [PRS](#)

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