



EVIDENCE-BASED ACADEMIC ANALYSIS IN LEGISLATIVE AND PARLIAMENTARY RESEARCH

Research undertaken for the Legislature seeks to draw information from a wide range of sources and to synthesize the evidence, within a relatively short time span and in a form that is useful for Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Committees, to understand, review and seek solutions to problems faced by the people.

A Parliamentary Research Service is expected to provide multiple products ranging from brief few-page infographics, a textual synthesis, analytical papers featuring divergent perspectives on a particular topic through to actual qualitative and quantitative scrutiny of government policy and implementation or a comprehensive investigative report to help the Legislature correct the course of a state or government policy or action. Obviously, while there is emphasis on the presence of a seasoned in-house team of researchers, each member of the team having expertise of specific disciplines including social sciences, such as international relations and strategic studies, economics, development studies and public finance, sociology, constitutionalism and law; it is also imperative that a Parliamentary Research Service develops a functional system of readily available access towards individual academics, universities and think tanks. This enables House scholars to retrieve evidence-based papers at short notice, in order to then synthesize the evidence and identify viable policy options and proposals to assist with the informed decision-making by Legislators.

Developing a national pool of academic researchers

Parliamentary Research Services, such as the UK Parliament Office of Science and Technology (POST), the US Congressional Research Services (CRS), the Library and Research Service at the German Bundestag, the Parliamentary Centre in Canada and the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS), have all evolved longstanding relationships with the academia. As a first step, a national pool of academic researchers is convened where Professors teaching, supervising and conducting research in areas of law, economics, finance, governance, international relations, strategic studies, agriculture, development studies and public policy, are invited to consult with the Parliament. Academics and international parliamentary researchers are given the opportunity to

work with the Parliament over a period of time in order to examine how academic evidence may be utilised in the development of research papers provided to individual MPs, Committees and caucuses.

Role of academic research in building strong Parliaments

1. Academics conduct and supervise research with the liberty of having more time and resources to be able to witness societal trends and to analyse human behaviour. This enables them to study different phenomena and their multiple variables in detail in order to develop universal theories. Thus, engaging academic research not only helps in keeping the Legislature abreast of studies on contemporary issues and approaches regarding the challenges faced worldwide, but it also assists Parliaments and Governments in identifying key factors and variables to analyse other societal issues. These could include the impact on our lands, people and life, especially in dire situations of conflict, climate change, pandemics, human and drugs trafficking, terrorism and other natural and man-made hazards, which may trigger humongous dilemmas (i.e. soil salinity, famine, malnutrition, economic recession, unemployment, displacements, poverty and death).
2. Access to academic research also helps accumulate empirical data by experiments and by observation of evidence to recommend solutions in the shape of specific outcomes or new concepts. One example is the creation of— ‘resilient societies’, through policies of climate smart agriculture, mechanisms of conflict resolution and peace building, laws to protect women, children, laborers; taxation to enhance resources, system for disaster mitigation and building correction commissions and introducing public policy initiatives for better governance.

Multiple triangulations make parliamentary work robust

A Parliamentary Research Service is able to draw on academic input as a source of multiple types of triangulations in parliamentary work in order to make it robust. This includes firstly data triangulation where different academic studies approach a problem with different



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time, space and people. Secondly, investigator triangulation enables a mix of in-House researchers and university Professors to work on the same study ensuring multiple perspectives and approaches to analyse evidence. Thirdly, academics introduce a theory triangulation framework for interpretation that is found largely missing in parliamentary work. Last but not the least, methodological triangulation is possible, as academics promote the use of different methods with regards to the collection of evidence, ranging from desk-based research on published material to conducting surveys, interviews and observation.

Evolution of Parliamentary Studies as a discipline

Institutions lie at the core of social reality and of political order. Hence it is valid to focus historically grounded political science on them.¹ The definition of Parliament has evolved from a narrow distinction on the basis of the United Kingdom as the role model, the ‘Mother of all Parliaments’, based on age-old rise of parliamentary supremacy over the Crown. Then we have seen concepts of ‘true Parliament’ (used for example in relation to the German Bundestag) and ‘façade Parliaments’, (for weak Legislatures), with the central criterion being whether the Parliament is based on regular, free and inclusive elections. The history of the Legislature manifests “*evolution towards this true Parliamentarianism*”, as the inherent goal. Therefore, legislative scholars engage in endless debate on the appropriate role of a Member-Elect, oscillating between that of a ‘trustee’ or a ‘delegate’ or the role of a ‘politico’ serving as a residual category in between.² Nevertheless, such observations and interpretations that the successful “*true Parliaments model*” in the UK, Germany and Spain for example, can be replicated as a prototype in all parts of the world is complex as there are exceptions inherently opposite to what democracies face in Asia, the Americas and Africa.

The last half century witnessed a transformative paradigm where the debate on analysing Legislatures evolved from largely the role and performance of Legislatures and Legislators based on chronological descriptive studies by historians and political scientists to a wider scope of scrutiny of parliamentary institutions and more importantly their impact on people’s lives. The input of cross-disciplinary academics, practitioners and subject-experts in legislative work in law, economics, finance, defence, international relations and public policy has triggered a new discipline of parliamentary studies that has introduced ‘evidence-based’ inquiries of legislative outputs that are based on ‘key performance indicators’ (KPIs) *viz a viz* how legislators’ are measuring their success in law making, sustainable development and improved governance, as well as reforms in policies that are aimed at the well-being of their constituents.

Journals as sources of evidence-based legislative research

Consequently, the growth in journals specifically pertaining to parliamentary disciplines has also opened new avenues of accessing evidence-based analysis and scrutiny in parliamentary work. The *International Journal of Parliamentary Studies*, published in close cooperation with Ludovika University of Public Service, Hungary, calls for papers in fields of legal and social sciences, seeking remedies to specialization within these disciplines and the



Image: Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS).

contradictions of legislative theory and practice. Thus, access to evidence provided by academics has enabled legislative scholars to present a comparative perspective during legislative assessment as well as post-legislative scrutiny.

The Parliamentary Affairs: A Journal of Representative Politics, published by Oxford University Press and the Hansard Society of UK (founded in 1944 and is one of the recognised contemporary sources of academic research on parliamentary affairs) presents critical theoretical models on case studies of Parliaments from different regions.

The *Journal of Democracy* published in Washington by John Hopkins University Press, is another academic source, analysing contemporary challenges such as financial secrecy, artificial intelligence, non-state terrorism, theocratic democracy and acute economic and political crisis. Thus, parliamentary and legislative research now has access to a plethora of academic writings as sources of evidence-based scrutiny of issues faced by democracy and representative institutions.

Engaging academics in parliamentary work at the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services

As early as its formative years (2009-10), the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) set up its systems to access authoritative data and empirical evidence to enable the provision of credible and reliable research in the shape of briefing papers, data analytics and technical reports for both Legislators and Committees. The in-House team of researchers (as of 2024) comprises six researchers, including four academics who evolved as parliamentary researchers. The Institute utilised the available legislative fellowships and parliamentary attachments for its in-House researchers to undertake ‘hands on’ experiential learning at different Legislatures in the USA and the UK.

PIPS National Pool of Academic and Parliamentary Researchers

A national pool of 50 academics from reputed Pakistani universities was established, along with the commencement of the PIPS Research and Training Services in 2010 and 2011. A Resource Directory and Policy Resource Guides were compiled with access-details of individual experts, academics, researchers, organisations, think tanks and universities. In 2024, more than 100 leading scholars



are members of the PIPS network, including 20 economists and social scientists who work closely with the in-House Research Team. PIPS has furnished more than 1,800 in-depth papers, policy briefs and legislative summaries.

Academics and Universities as partners for evidence-backed research

The PIPS Institute has trained academics and legislative researchers on legislative theory and has applied the model to assess laws for Members of

Parliament. The PIPS Institute has developed formal relationships through Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) with a number of universities in Pakistan (for example, Quaid e Azam University, National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Pakistan Institute for Development Economics, Fatimah Jinnah Women's University and Riphah International University) and leading think-tanks (Institute of Strategic Studies, and Sustainable Development Policy Institute).

These two-way partnerships have enabled the PIPS Institute to access academics' input into joint Parliamentary seminars, promote the exchange of academics as trainers and engage academics in contributing to research papers for Legislators.

PIPS also introduced Parliamentary Studies at 20 universities in Pakistan including two universities offering fully-fledged degrees at undergraduate level. The Institute's library maintains an updated repository of all laws enforced in Pakistan from 1812 until the present date (over 800 laws at the federal level and 2,700 provincial laws). The library also provides access to academia to facilitate their research projects.

International networks of Parliamentary research and library fraternity

International Parliamentary networks provide a great opportunity to connect with the wider fraternity of Parliamentary researchers and academics working for Legislatures. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) are some of the examples of networks that enhance interaction amongst parliamentary research communities. These Parliamentary networks connect the research fraternity to engage in academic and evidence-based studies in legislative work as well as discussing new realities like artificial intelligence (AI) in a digital world.

Challenges of academics' quality output in Legislative research

Engaging academics to undertake independent assignments for an MP or Parliamentary Committee can pose some practical challenges. These challenges can involve the delivery timelines/deadlines for research papers, with academic deadlines being much longer than in-House research deadlines, and the costs associated with engaging academic research compared to in-House research. In addition, the extended period with academic research may include a peer review, providing further quality assurance to the Member of



Image: Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS).

Parliament or the Parliamentary Committee who has commissioned the research.

Towards theory-based Legislative research

The Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) has its own niche and a wider overall remit than the Senate and National Assembly Research wings, along with many good connections with different organisations and academics.³ A small team of only six PIPS researchers has always made the publication of their research a top priority.

The PIPS Institute has published over 70 books, coordinating on case-by-case basis with academics on many different topics including legislative assessment, the SDGs, budget analysis, the right to education and parliamentary values. These books and research papers are accessible at www.pips.gov.pk with hardcopies disseminated amongst our 28,500 readers. Experts and Professors regularly contribute to the *PIPS Research Digest*, one of the country's most widely read parliamentary periodicals subscribed to by MPs, universities, diplomats, civil society, libraries and think tanks/universities. Access to evidence-based analysis and theory-based legislative work is widely encouraged by our pool of researchers in a two-way partnership with universities. This academic-research relationship is enormously relevant for a dynamic parliamentary research service that aims to furnish high quality and reliable research to individual Members of Parliament and Legislatures.

References:

¹ Werner J. Patzelt, 'Parliaments and Their Evolution', On parliamentary history, research on Parliaments and Research-Guiding Theory, *International Journal of Parliamentary Studies*, Brill Netherlands, Issue 3: 2023, p.5.

² Ibid.

³ Rob Clements, former Clerk, The House of Commons Library, UK Parliament, 'Final Report on support to research wings of the Pakistan Parliament', May 2016.