

# Parliamentary oversight of governmental work in Arab Maghreb Countries

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Abstract—The parliament, as the legislative authority and representative body of the general administration for the people and the nation, serves as a cornerstone in institutionalizing and guaranteeing constitutional and functional practices. The constitutional framework provides it with tools and mechanisms to perform its oversight duties over governmental activities in several countries. This study focuses on the Arab Maghreb countries, specifically Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, analyzing the latest constitutions and internal regulations currently in effect in these parliaments. Parliamentary oversight of state activities in general and governmental actions in particular, holds a vital role in structuring state authority and its constitutional institutions and parliamentary oversight of the executive authority. It is a key constitutional mechanism for ensuring the rule of law. This form of oversight is political in nature and it is exercised by the parliament based on constitutional provisions and characterized by its restriction to members of the legislative authority.

Keywords---Oversight mechanisms, Governmental work, Political responsibility...

#### Introduction

The parliament, as the legislative authority and representative body of the general administration for the people and the nation, serves as a cornerstone in institutionalizing and guaranteeing constitutional and functional practices. The constitutional framework provides it with tools and mechanisms to perform its oversight duties over governmental activities in several countries. This study focuses on the Arab Maghreb countries, specifically Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, analyzing the latest constitutions and internal regulations currently in effect in these parliaments.

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This oversight plays a leading and effective role in the national regulatory system by protecting the public interest of society and the state, as well as the rights and freedoms of individuals and citizens. Its general objectives include reinforcing democratic practices, meeting societal expectations and aspirations to the executive branch and achieving them, holding the executive branch accountable, and addressing governmental misconduct (2).

Constitutions provide the legislative authority with various tools to monitor governmental actions, which vary in strength and impact. These include oral and written questions, investigation committees of financial oversight, interpellation, motions of censure, and others. This study focuses on the most recent constitutions in force in the Arab Maghreb countries, particularly in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, and it employs a comparative methodology to analyze the oversight mechanisms established in the latest internal regulations of these parliaments.

If the constitution lays down the rules, foundations, and overarching principles for key issues—including parliamentary oversight of government actions stemming from the relationship between parliament and government—then internal regulations and organic laws provide detailed elaboration of that.

The central issue to be addressed can be raised as follows: What are the constitutionally and legally established mechanisms for parliamentary oversight of government actions in the Arab Maghreb countries, and how effective are these mechanisms in achieving the intended objectives of oversight? To address this issue, this study is divided into two sections:

- The first section examines oversight mechanisms that do not entail political accountability for the government.
- The second section explores oversight mechanisms that impose political accountability on the government.

# Section One: Oversight Mechanisms That Do Not Entail Political Accountability for the Government

In this section, we will address financial oversight, written and oral questions, the formation of investigation committees, and the mechanism of interpellation, as reflected in the latest constitutions of these countries and the most recent internal regulations of their parliaments.

## First Subsection: Financial Oversight

Parliamentary financial oversight over public funds, as a form of popular oversight, holds a fundamental position among financial oversight bodies. This oversight materializes during the implementation of financial laws, where parliament is granted constitutional and legal tools such as:

- 1. Submitting Written and Oral Questions: Parliament members may direct questions to any member of the government concerning the implementation of public policies.
- 2. **Interpellation:** Parliament can question the government on the execution of financial policies, demanding accountability for discrepancies.
- 3. **Formation of Investigation Committees:** These committees are empowered to uncover violations of legal regulations and ensure adherence to the rule of law.
- 4. Mandating Explanatory Documents: The government is obliged to provide explanatory

documentation and justifications regarding the implementation of financial laws for a specific fiscal year.

## Financial Oversight in the Arab Maghreb Countries

In Algeria financial oversight regulated Article 156 of the 2020 constitutional amendment. This provision requires the government to present each chamber of parliament with a report on the utilization of financial allocations approved for each fiscal year. The fiscal year concludes with the parliament voting on a law to settle the accounts for the relevant fiscal year, as approved by all chambers of the legislature.

The parliament's role in this context involves approving the budget settlement bill, which serves as a form of ex-post oversight reflecting the outcomes of government efforts in managing its affairs. However, practical experience has demonstrated a relative inefficiency and lack of effectiveness in this oversight mechanism (3).

In Morocco according to Article 148 of the Moroccan Constitution, parliament plays an oversight role over public finances. The 2024 internal regulations of the House of Representatives expand on this role, specifying that:

- 1. The Permanent Committees are entrusted with general oversight responsibilities.
- 2. **The Public Finance Oversight Committee** is specifically tasked with monitoring and tracking public government spending.
- Examining Reports: This includes reviewing thematic reports issued by the Court of Accounts
  and other legislative texts related to public finance oversight, as stipulated in Article 148 of the
  Constitution.

In Tunisia the Tunisian Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP), as the first chamber of the Tunisian parliament, exercises its oversight role in accordance with the 2022 Constitution. The 2023 internal regulations of the ARP detailed procedures for oversight of governmental actions. Oversight can occur at various stages:

- Ex-Ante Oversight: When approving the state budget, the parliament discusses the state's
  resources, costs, and expenditures before granting authorization through legislation or by
  analyzing the implications of draft laws.
- 2. **Concurrent Oversight:** During the execution of the state budget, the parliament monitors the methods of its implementation.
- 3. Ex-Post Oversight: This involves evaluating, amending, and closing the state's budget results.

According to Article 78 of the Constitution, the ARP approves draft finance laws and the budget settlement in compliance with the provisions of the Organic Budget Law. The draft finance law must be presented to the ARP no later than October 15, with a final approval deadline of December 10.

Additionally, Article 12 of Decree No. 1 of 2024, concerning the organization of relations between the ARP and the National Council of Regions and Districts (4), stipulates that the President of the Republic must present draft finance laws to both the ARP and the National Council of Regions and Districts within the timeframes specified by the Constitution and applicable legislation.

The relevant committees of both chambers are tasked with reviewing and discussing these draft laws in joint sessions held at the ARP headquarters. Voting is conducted publicly, and the results are announced simultaneously.

#### Second Subsection: Oral and Written Questions

The act of questioning involves directing an inquiry to a minister to clarify matters related to the activities of their ministry, to draw the government's attention to an issue, or to address violations related to a specific subject. It is also defined as a parliamentarian's request for information about an unknown matter, verification of an incident they have heard about, or inquiry about the government's intentions regarding a specific matter. Such inquiries are purely exploratory and do not imply accusations.

In Algeria article 158 of the 2020 constitutional amendment addresses oral and written questions, granting parliament members the right to question any government member. Responses to written questions must be provided within a maximum of 30 days. If either chamber of parliament deems the minister's response—whether oral or written—justifies a broader discussion, this debate is conducted in accordance with the rules established by the internal regulations of the People's National Assembly and the Council of the Nation.

In Morocco under the 2011 Constitution, oral and written questions are part of the parliamentary oversight mechanisms (5). Precedence is given to a weekly session for questions from members of the two parliamentary chambers and corresponding government responses. The government must respond within 20 days of receiving the question.

For questions concerning public policy, responses are delivered by the Prime Minister in a dedicated session held once a month. These responses must be presented to the relevant chamber within 30 days of the question being referred to the Prime Minister.

The 2024 Internal Regulations of the House of Representatives regulate questions in Chapter Five, Articles 275–301. The 2020 Internal Regulations of the House of Councillors provide more detailed provisions in Chapter Four, Articles 101–104, distinguishing between questions on public policy, oral questions, key issues, current issues, and written questions.

In Tunisia both written and oral questions are provided for in Tunisia, allowing members of the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) or the National Council of Regions and Districts to direct inquiries to government members. Additionally, both chambers may summon the government or an individual member to engage in dialogue regarding the policies implemented, the results achieved, or those being pursued.

#### Subsection Three: Establishment of Investigative Committees.

In Algeria each parliamentary chamber can, within its jurisdiction, establish investigative committees to address matters of public interest at any time (6). However, Article 159 of the 2020 constitutional amendment prohibits forming such committees regarding matters already under judicial investigation.

Under Article 159, parliamentary chambers are empowered to create investigative committees for issues of public interest. Law No. 16-12, which governs the relationship between the two parliamentary chambers and the government, provides detailed conditions and guarantees for establishing these committees. This law was amended in 2023 to enhance its provisions.

According to Article 79 of Law No. 16-12, a committee can be formed upon a motion signed by 20 members of the People's National Assembly or the Council of the Nation. The motion is submitted to the relevant chamber's bureau, which appoints the committee members from among its members, following the rules for forming standing committees. The chamber establishing the committee must inform the other chamber of its formation.

To ensure impartiality and objectivity, lawmakers or senators who signed the motion cannot be members of the investigative committee (7).

The committee has broad investigative powers, including conducting inquiries, inspections, and discussions. It is entitled to access relevant documents, records, and evidence necessary for its work. The organic law explicitly grants committees the right to access and copy documents, stating, "The investigative committee is authorized to review any document and obtain copies of it." However, this access is not absolute; it excludes classified or strategic materials related to national defense, vital economic interests, and state security.

The committee concludes its work by preparing a report, which is submitted to the President of the People's National Assembly or the Council of the Nation. The report must also be shared with the deputies or senators within 30 days and forwarded to the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister (or Head of Government, as applicable). The report can be discussed in a secret session after consulting the government, but the assembly can adopt it without further debate. Such limitations on parliamentary debate may restrict lawmakers from fully utilizing the committee's findings (8).

In Morocco investigative committees, referred to as fact-finding committees, can be formed under Article 67 of the 2011 Constitution. They may be initiated by the King, one-third of the House of Councillors, or one-third of the House of Representatives. These committees are tasked with gathering information regarding specific incidents, public administration, institutions, or state-owned enterprises and reporting their findings to the initiating chamber.

The Moroccan Constitution includes a key restriction: investigative committees cannot be established to address issues under judicial proceedings. Furthermore, the committee's mandate ends as soon as a judicial investigation is launched into the matter that warranted its formation. The 2024 internal regulations of the House of Representatives do not specifically address investigative committees. However, the 2020 internal regulations of the House of Councillors regulate these committees in Articles 299–307.

In Tunisia the Tunisian Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) can establish investigative committees as a tool for government oversight. Forming such a committee requires a majority vote of those present at a general session, with at least one-third of all members voting in favor. Once formed, these committees must submit a report to the ARP's bureau, which then presents it at a general session for discussion. After completing its work, the committee is dissolved unless the general session decides to extend its mandate for further investigation.

#### Subsection Four: Interpellation

Interpellation is a parliamentary oversight mechanism enshrined in Article 160 of the 2020 constitutional amendment. It is invoked concerning matters of national importance or the implementation of laws. The Constitution requires a government response within 30 days of receiving an interpellation.

Interpellation allows parliament to hold the government or a specific minister accountable for their actions within their official duties (9). Members of parliament, upon encountering information that raises concerns or doubts about a specific issue, may demand explanations from the government regarding its actions within any given domain.

While similar to parliamentary questions, interpellation differs significantly in purpose and consequence. Questions seek information or clarification, whereas interpellation is a preliminary step that may lead to a vote of confidence. If the parliament finds the government's response unsatisfactory, this could escalate to a motion of no-confidence, potentially resulting in the government's political accountability.

Article 160 of the Constitution empowers parliament members to scrutinize the government on any matter of national importance or regarding the implementation of laws. The provision aims to ensure governmental accountability and responsiveness to parliamentary concerns. Unlike other oversight tools, it imposes no substantive limits on the topics parliamentarians can raise.

However, the Organic Law No. 21-06, governing parliamentary procedures, imposes specific formal requirements for interpellation:

- 1. **Signatory Threshold:** An interpellation must be signed by at least 30 deputies from the People's National Assembly or 30 senators from the Council of the Nation.
- 2. **Scope:** It must address a single issue of national importance or the application of specific laws (10).
- 3. **Notification:** The President of the People's National Assembly or the Council of the Nation, as appropriate, must notify the Prime Minister or Head of Government of the interpellation text within 48 hours of its submission.
- 4. **Session Scheduling:** The interpellation session is scheduled in consultation with the parliamentary bureau and the government and must occur within **30 days** of submission (11).

During the session, the representative of the interpellation's signatories presents the issue, followed by the government's response, regardless of which assembly the session is designated for.

Previously, the government's political responsibility could only be invoked in conjunction with its general policy statement. The 2020 constitutional amendment, however, strengthened interpellation by explicitly linking it to the motion of censure (Article 161). This change has elevated interpellation from a mere oversight mechanism to a potential trigger for government accountability.

While interpellation poses serious consequences for the government, the legislator has introduced safeguards to prevent its misuse. These include procedural rigor and the need for substantial parliamentary support, ensuring interpellation is employed judiciously and for serious issues only. Despite its new capacity to establish political responsibility, interpellation remains classified in this section because its procedural nature aligns with other non-binding mechanisms. On the other hand, that is not found to be the case when it comes to the recent constitutions or the internal regulations of parliamentary chambers in Morocco and Tunisia.

# Second Section: Oversight Mechanisms That Establish Government Political Responsibility

In this section, we examine mechanisms that establish the political responsibility of the government. These mechanisms include the discussion of the government's action plan or program, a motion of censure, a vote of confidence, and the discussion of the government's general policy statement. We analyze their application in the most recent constitutions and parliamentary regulations, with a focus on current practices.

# Subsection One: Discussion of the Government's Action Plan or Program Definition and Scope:

The government's action plan or program represents a framework for implementing the President's agenda, encompassing general policies and strategies in domestic and foreign affairs (12). It is viewed by legal scholars as a contract or agreement between the government and parliament, forming the basis of parliamentary oversight over governmental performance (13). The government is obligated to implement this plan, as it serves as the parliamentary tool for assessing the government's work.

In Algeria this oversight mechanism is constitutionally enshrined. Article 110 of the Constitution mandates that the government present its action plan before the Council of Ministers prior to its submission to the People's National Assembly (PNA). The Prime Minister or Head of Government,

depending on the political system, may adjust the plan based on parliamentary discussions, subject to consultation with the President.

Presentation Deadline: The Prime Minister or Head of Government must present the action
plan to the PNA within 45 days of the government's appointment, as stipulated by Article 47
of the law governing the organization of the PNA and the Council of the Nation and their
relations with the government.

# 2. Approval or Rejection:

- If parliament approves the plan, both government and parliament are jointly responsible for its implementation.
- If parliament demands amendments that the government refuses, the government must resign. The President then appoints a new Prime Minister or Head of Government.
- o If the newly appointed government's plan is rejected a second time, the PNA is dissolved. The current government continues as a caretaker until new elections are held within three months (Article 188 of the Constitution).

The process is further detailed in Articles 46–48 of the 1999 Organic Law, which regulates the PNA, the Council of the Nation, and their functional relationship with the government. This law establishes procedures for presenting the government's plan and the potential political and constitutional consequences of parliamentary rejection (14).

In Morocco under the 2011 Constitution, specifically Article 88, the Head of Government must present their program to a joint session of both parliamentary chambers after the King appoints the government members. The program outlines the main objectives in political, economic, social, and environmental fields.

- 1. **Discussion:** The program is debated in both chambers.
- 2. **Vote of Confidence:** A vote is conducted in the House of Representatives (lower house), where an absolute majority is required to approve the program. Upon approval, the government is considered inaugurated and holds the confidence of the parliament.

The 2024 Internal Rules of the House of Representatives (Articles 259–261) detail the procedures for presenting and debating the government's program. Similarly, the 2020 Internal Rules of the House of Councillors address the discussion process in the upper house.

In Tunisia the Tunisian Constitution and parliamentary regulations do not explicitly provide for the discussion of a government action plan or program. Consequently, this mechanism is absent from Tunisian parliamentary practice.

#### Subsection Two: Motion of Censure

The motion of censure is a parliamentary tool for holding the government accountable, potentially leading to its resignation. This mechanism typically arises from dissatisfaction with the government's general policy or the outcomes of parliamentary oversight activities. In Algeria the motion of censure is outlined in Article 161 of the 2020 Constitutional Amendment. It can be triggered by:

- 1. The discussion of the government's general policy statement.
- 2. An interpellation addressing the government's responsibility.
  - A motion of censure must be signed by at least one-seventh of the National People's Assembly members (Article 161). With 406 total members, this translates to 58 deputies as a minimum threshold (15).
  - Approval of the motion requires a two-thirds majority vote (Article 162).
  - A minimum of three days must pass between the submission and the voting on the motion.
     This waiting period has been criticized for potentially undermining the motion's effectiveness

by allowing time for political maneuvering.

If the National People's Assembly approves the motion, the Prime Minister or Head of Government must resign, leading to the resignation of the entire government. The resignation is submitted to the President of the Republic. In Morocco the 2011 Constitution grants both parliamentary chambers the authority to vote on a motion of censure:

- A motion must be signed by at least one-fifth of the members (Article 105).
- Approval requires an absolute majority of the members.
- Voting may only occur after three full days following the submission of the motion.
   If the motion is approved, the government must collectively resign. Additionally, the Constitution prohibits submitting another motion of censure within the same year if the initial motion is approved.
- The same conditions apply:
  - o A motion must be signed by one-fifth of the members.
  - O Voting occurs only after three full days of submission.
  - o Approval requires an absolute majority (Article 106).

Additionally, the President of the House of Councillors must send the motion to the Prime Minister, who has six days to respond by presenting the government's position. This response is followed by a debate, but no vote is taken after the debate.

In Tunisia the **2022 Constitution** uses the term motion of no confidence (16), instead of a motion of censure. The process has distinctive features compared to Algeria and Morocco:

#### Conditions for Activation

- Both chambers must meet jointly to debate and vote on the motion and can together oppose the
  government. If they allege that the government has violated the general policy of the state or the
  fundamental principles established in the Constitution.
- It requires signatures from half of the members of the People's Assembly and half of the members of the National Council of Regions and Districts.
- The motion must be submitted 48 hours before voting, a shorter period than the three days required in Algeria and Morocco.

# Section Two: Mechanisms of Oversight That Impose Political Responsibility on the Government

This section examines the mechanisms by which the legislature can hold the government politically accountable, including votes of confidence, motions of censure, and the discussion of general policy statements, as stipulated in the latest constitutional frameworks and parliamentary regulations of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.

#### **Subsection Three: Votes of Confidence**

In Algeria a vote of confidence in Algeria serves as a tool initiated by the Prime Minister or Head of Government to confirm the government's standing in the National People's Assembly. This mechanism is outlined in Article 111, Paragraph 5, of the 2022 Constitutional Amendment.

#### **Procedures**

#### 1. Initiation:

- The Prime Minister or Head of Government submits a request for a vote of confidence to the National People's Assembly.
- 2. **Agenda Inclusion**: The request is mandatorily placed on the Assembly's agenda. During the debate, only one deputy in favor and one against may address the Assembly.

### 3. **Voting**:

- The vote is decided by a simple majority (i.e., more votes in favor than against).
- o If the Assembly does not grant confidence, the government must resign collectively, adhering to the principle of collective responsibility.
- 4. **Alternative Option**: If the government anticipates a loss, it may request the President of the Republic to dissolve the Assembly and call for new elections (17).

In Morocco, a vote of confidence serves as a critical parliamentary oversight mechanism under Article 103 of the 2011 Constitution.

- 1. The Prime Minister may request a vote of confidence from the House of Representatives concerning a policy statement or a specific legislative text.
- 2. Approval requires an absolute majority of the total members of the House.
- 3. Voting cannot take place until three full days after the confidence motion is introduced.
- 4. If the House denies confidence, the entire government must resign collectively.

The procedure is further detailed in Articles 266 and 267 of the House of Representatives' Internal Regulations (2024).

In Tunisia the 2022 Tunisian Constitution does not provide for a vote of confidence as a distinct mechanism. Neither the Constitution nor the parliamentary internal regulations address this tool explicitly.

# Subsection Four: Discussion of General Policy Statements

In Algeria, the general policy statement is an annual report presented by the government to the National People's Assembly, as mandated by Article 111 of the 2020 Constitutional Amendment. This statement:

- Reviews the implementation of the government's action plan.
- Outlines the challenges encountered and the future projects under consideration.
- Debate: The statement is followed by a general debate in the Assembly.
- Motion Submission: Deputies can propose a motion of confidence or censure based on the discussion.
  - o A motion of confidence requires 20 deputies' signatures for consideration.
  - o The motion must be submitted within 72 hours after the conclusion of the debate.
- If the Assembly rejects the government's policy, the Prime Minister or Head of Government must resign.
- The Organic Law No. 21-06 provides detailed procedures for proposing motions related to the general policy statement, ensuring parliamentary oversight remains robust.

In Morocco under the 2011 Constitution, Moroccan parliamentary regulations require the Prime Minister to present an annual report on the government's activities.

- A discussion of the government's policies can be initiated either by the Prime Minister or upon the request of:
  - o One-third of the House of Representatives.
  - o A majority of the House of Councillors (18).
- The Prime Minister may link this discussion to a confidence vote, tying the government's continuation to parliamentary approval.

The Internal Regulations of the House of Representatives (2024) and the House of Councillors (2020) provide the procedural details for these discussions.

In Tunisia article 114 of the 2022 Tunisian Constitution grants the People's Assembly and the National Council of Regions and Districts the right to:

- Summon the government to discuss general policy and evaluate its performance.
- Hold sessions for policy evaluation, initiated by:

- o The parliamentary bureau.
- o A majority of members from either chamber.

## Further regulations include:

- Internal Regulations of the People's Assembly (2023): Article 131 outlines procedures for initiating policy discussions.
- Decree No. 1 of 2024: Article 25 mandates regular exchanges of oversight reports between the two chambers (19).

#### Conclusion

The relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government has been a subject of significant interest in legal and academic circles. This issue is not new, as its roots stretch back to the establishment of governmental powers in the state. What differs across nations is the unique ways each country organizes its governing structures.

The 2020 Constitutional Amendment in Algeria solidified the principle of the separation of powers in general and emphasized parliamentary oversight of the government's actions in particular. It reinforced the relationship between the government and the parliament, promoting functional cooperation between the two.

In Morocco, the 2011 Constitution—along with all prior constitutions—addressed the relationship between the government and parliament. Similarly, in Tunisia, the 2022 Constitution included provisions for oversight mechanisms in general, which were further detailed in the parliamentary internal regulations. The constitutions of all three countries of the Maghreb region agree on the existence of mechanisms that impose political responsibility on the government, while some mechanisms do not result in such responsibility. Based on this study, we can draw the following conclusions:

- Recent Constitutional Amendments in the Maghreb countries have enhanced parliamentary
  oversight over government actions by expanding the available mechanisms and regulating the
  procedures and timelines in the constitutions and internal regulations of their parliaments. These
  regulations oblige the government to engage with parliamentary oversight mechanisms in all
  their forms.
- Parliamentary Oversight serves as a democratic and representative political control aimed at
  safeguarding the legitimacy of public policies, national programs, and reforms. It also ensures
  that the government addresses the concerns and interests of citizens, protecting the state's
  fundamental political, economic, social, and security interests.
- Parliamentary oversight remains central to the ongoing constitutional reforms, particularly the 2020 constitutional amendment in Algeria, the 2011 constitution in Morocco, and the 2022 constitution in Tunisia.
- Diverse Mechanisms of Parliamentary Oversight have been introduced, and governments are now more obligated to interact effectively with them to ensure the realization of their objectives. Some mechanisms impose political responsibility on the government, while others do not.
- There is a reciprocal exchange of influence between the executive and legislative branches, with an emphasis on preserving political, economic, and social legitimacy in government actions. The protection of citizens' rights, freedoms, and interests is essential in promoting good governance in the Maghreb countries.

Based on the above findings, we propose the following recommendations:

1. Enhancing Parliamentary Mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of oversight in the Maghreb countries.

- 2. Activating the Role of Parliament in financial matters, ensuring greater oversight in fiscal and economic decision-making.
- 3. Strengthening the Effectiveness of oversight mechanisms, especially those that do not directly impose political responsibility on the government.
- 4. Promoting Cooperation between parliament and the government, with a focus on revising legal frameworks—particularly internal regulations and organic laws governing the relationship between parliament and the government. This will help activate constitutional and legal mechanisms to ensure effective parliamentary oversight of government actions.

By implementing these recommendations, parliamentary oversight can be more robust and better positioned to safeguard the public interest and contribute to strengthening democratic processes in the region.

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