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RESEARCH ARTICLE 

The Mutual Influence between the Legislative and Executive Branches in the Parliamentary System

Ridha Maiza

University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghin Sétif 2; Laboratory: The Impact of Modern
Technology on Law
Algeria

Email: r.maiza@univ-setif2.dz

Kaddour Drif

University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghin Sétif 2
Human Rights Laboratory
Algeria

Email: k.drif@univ-setif2.dz

Noureddine Moifek

University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghin Sétif 2
Human Rights Laboratory

E-mail: n.moifek@univ-setif2.dz

Faical Boukhalfa

University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghin Sétif 2
Laboratory: The Impact of Modern Technology on Law
Algeria

E-mail: f.boukhalfa@univ-setif2.dz

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Parliamentary system; legislative authority; executive authority; political responsibility;
dissolution of Parliament.

Abstract

This study seeks to examine one of the most fundamental characteristics of the parliamentary system, namely the principle of flexible or relative separation of powers, through which both the legislative and executive branches are constitutionally empowered to exercise reciprocal mechanisms of influence. This mutual interaction constitutes a central pillar of institutional balance and political stability within the parliamentary framework, shielding the system from persistent institutional deadlock and political crises. The legislature's most potent instrument vis-à-vis the executive lies in its capacity to invoke political responsibility, enabling Parliament to hold the government accountable and ultimately compel its resignation when it is deemed ineffective or incapable of fulfilling its constitutional duties. Conversely, the executive's most consequential means of influence over the legislature is the power to dissolve Parliament, typically exercised as a counterweight to excessive or abusive parliamentary control. Through this reciprocal dynamic, the parliamentary system aims to ensure equilibrium, cooperation, and constitutional integrity.

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Introduction

The English political system is widely regarded as the classical and original model of parliamentary democracy, often described as the “government of Parliament.” Its significance stems from the fact that the parliamentary system was not constructed through abstract jurisprudential theories or philosophical doctrines, but rather evolved organically through historical practice, political compromise, and constitutional custom in England. Consequently, it served as the foundational reference from which most modern parliamentary systems subsequently developed (Dicey, 1959; Jennings, 1969).

The consolidation of the parliamentary system in England passed through several historical stages closely linked to the evolution of the executive apparatus, particularly the transformation of the Privy Council. Initially established by the Monarch as an advisory body, the Privy Council was composed of members selected at the monarch’s discretion and convened according to royal will. Its primary function was to provide counsel on matters of state and public governance (Bogdanor, 2009).

Over time, the Privy Council fragmented into specialized committees, each tasked with overseeing a distinct area of public administration. Among these bodies, the Committee of State gradually emerged as the most influential, owing to its capacity for swift deliberation and decision-making. During the reign of King George I, this committee progressively detached itself from the Privy Council and evolved into what later became the Cabinet, marking a decisive turning point in the institutional development of the British executive (McLean & McMillan, 2015).

This evolution culminated in the establishment of the dual executive structure characteristic of the parliamentary system, whereby executive authority is formally vested in the Monarch while being effectively exercised by the Cabinet and the Prime Minister. Simultaneously, the relationship between the legislative and executive branches was redefined on the basis of interdependence and reciprocal oversight, rather than rigid separation (Bradley, Ewing, & McLean, 2018).

The essence of the parliamentary system thus lies in the principle of balanced cooperation, whereby each branch is granted constitutional tools to restrain the other, preventing domination or authoritarian excess. The legislature’s authority to dismiss the government through a vote of no confidence is counterbalanced by the executive’s ability to dissolve Parliament and appeal to the electorate. These mechanisms are not designed to foster conflict, but rather to ensure constitutional discipline, accountability, and institutional stability.

Against this background, the present study seeks to address the following research question: To what extent does the parliamentary system succeed in employing mechanisms of mutual influence between Parliament and the executive in order to achieve an effective balance of power?

To answer this question, the study is divided into two main sections:

1. The manifestations of executive intervention in the legislative sphere.
2. The manifestations of legislative intervention in the executive sphere.

1. Manifestations of Executive Intervention in the Legislative Sphere

Within the parliamentary system, the executive branch exercises a range of constitutional powers that may directly or indirectly affect the legislative authority. These include powers related to the formation of Parliament, the convening and adjournment of parliamentary sessions, participation in the legislative process, the compatibility of ministerial office with parliamentary membership, and, most significantly, the power to dissolve Parliament.

1.1. Executive Participation in the Formation of the Legislative Authority

The executive plays a central role in the formation of the legislative branch through its involvement in the electoral process. This role begins with determining electoral districts, organizing electoral registers, and issuing the formal call for elections. Parliamentary elections may occur either upon the expiration of Parliament’s constitutional term or following its early dissolution (Loveland, 2021).

Throughout the electoral process, the government exercises several administrative functions, including setting election dates, supervising electoral procedures, ensuring security, and overseeing the counting and announcement of results. While these functions are generally justified on grounds of administrative necessity, they nonetheless grant the executive indirect influence over the composition of Parliament (Bogdanor & Vogenauer, 2008).

However, such influence does not amount to a direct encroachment upon popular sovereignty, since the ultimate authority to select parliamentary representatives rests with the electorate. The executive's intervention becomes more pronounced when the constitutional framework departs from the principle of election and permits appointment as a method of legislative membership. This is notably the case with regard to the British House of Lords, where a significant number of members are appointed rather than elected. This mechanism grants the executive substantial influence over the composition of one chamber of Parliament, thereby reinforcing executive presence within the legislative structure (Russell, 2013).

1.2. The Right to Convene Parliament and Postpone Its Sessions

Parliamentary bodies do not exercise their functions on a permanent and uninterrupted basis throughout the legislative term. Rather, parliamentary activity is organized into periodic sessions, the number and duration of which are constitutionally or conventionally determined. These sessions are interspersed with parliamentary recesses, during which legislative activity is temporarily suspended. Within the framework of the parliamentary system, the executive authority is constitutionally empowered to convene Parliament, whether in ordinary or extraordinary sessions, thereby exercising a direct influence over the temporal organization of legislative work (Pactet, 1978; Ardant, 1989).

Ordinary sessions are those whose frequency and duration are predetermined by constitutional or customary rules, whereas extraordinary sessions are convened to address urgent or specific matters that cannot await the opening of a regular session. The rationale underlying this executive prerogative lies in facilitating governmental action and ensuring continuity in public policy implementation without being constrained by rigid parliamentary calendars (Al-Khatib, 2011).

In addition to the power to convene Parliament, the executive branch is also vested with the authority to postpone or adjourn parliamentary sessions, either wholly or partially. This mechanism allows for the temporary suspension of parliamentary sittings with the aim of defusing political tension, mitigating institutional deadlock, or providing both branches with an opportunity to reassess their positions. Moreover, in exceptional circumstances—such as serious security threats or national emergencies—the postponement of parliamentary sessions may be justified to preserve public order and institutional stability (Duverger, 1955; Ardant, 1989).

However, the postponement of parliamentary sessions may also serve as a preliminary step toward dissolution. In British practice, the Prime Minister may determine the date of general elections with the intention of dissolving the House of Commons. This process is typically preceded by a royal proclamation proroguing Parliament, followed directly by its dissolution. Furthermore, while the executive may adjourn a regular session before its scheduled conclusion, constitutional convention requires that such adjournment not occur prior to the adoption of the general budget, so as to prevent disruption to essential state functions (Hook & Gay, 2010; UK Parliament, 2007).

1.3. Executive Participation in the Legislative Process

In theory, Parliament possesses exclusive legislative authority over matters concerning public affairs, particularly in systems where legislative legitimacy derives directly from popular representation. In the British constitutional system, the absence of a single written constitution further expands Parliament's legislative competence, allowing it to legislate on virtually all subjects without formal constitutional limitation (Dicey, 1926).

Nevertheless, parliamentary supremacy does not imply legislative exclusivity. In practice, the initiation of legislation constitutes a shared function between the legislative and executive branches. Empirical observation demonstrates that the executive branch dominates the legislative initiative, primarily due to its control over administrative structures, technical expertise, and access to detailed policy information. As a result, the vast majority of bills presented to Parliament originate from the government rather than from individual Members of Parliament (Pactet, 1978; Jennings, 1979).

British constitutional convention further reinforces executive predominance in legislative matters relating to public finance. Parliament is traditionally prohibited from proposing legislation that introduces new public expenditures or increases existing ones without the consent of the Council of Ministers. Financial initiative is thus regarded as an exclusive governmental prerogative, reflecting the principle that responsibility for fiscal policy rests with the executive authority (Al-Khatib, 2011; Gobar, 2010).

Although Members of Parliament theoretically retain the right to introduce private members' bills, long-standing parliamentary practice has progressively confined legislative initiative to the government. For several decades, proposals not endorsed or debated by the Council of Ministers have had minimal prospects of adoption, largely due to procedural constraints and the difficulty faced by individual MPs in securing sufficient parliamentary attention and agenda priority (Nasr, 2022).

1.4. Compatibility between Ministerial Office and Parliamentary Membership

One of the defining characteristics of the British parliamentary system is the compatibility between ministerial office and parliamentary membership. According to entrenched constitutional practice, an individual may simultaneously hold a seat in Parliament and serve as a minister without forfeiting parliamentary membership. This arrangement constitutes a concrete manifestation of the principle of flexible separation of powers, which underpins cooperation rather than strict institutional division (Charlot, 1999).

In this context, appointment to ministerial office presupposes membership in one of the two Houses of Parliament, whether the House of Commons or the House of Lords. This requirement aims to ensure direct communication and functional integration between the executive and legislative branches. Ministers, by virtue of their parliamentary status, are entitled to attend parliamentary sessions, participate in debates, defend government policy, and vote on legislative matters (Jennings, 1979; Ardant, 1989).

Such dual membership fosters close institutional interaction, facilitates the exchange of information, and enhances political accountability. Parliamentary debates thus become a central forum for clarifying governmental orientations and aligning legislative deliberation with executive priorities, thereby reinforcing cooperation and institutional cohesion within the parliamentary system (Al-Khatib, 2011).

1.5. Dissolution of Parliament

The dissolution of Parliament refers to the premature termination of the parliamentary mandate before the expiration of the constitutionally prescribed legislative term. This form of dissolution must be distinguished from natural dissolution, which occurs automatically upon completion of the parliamentary term. In cases of early dissolution, Members of Parliament lose their mandates entirely, and legislative authority is temporarily suspended pending new elections (Marksens, 1972).

During this transitional period, the electorate assumes a decisive role in resolving institutional conflict between Parliament and the government. General elections function as a democratic mechanism through which voters arbitrate disputes between the two branches, thereby restoring equilibrium within the parliamentary system. In this sense, dissolution represents a return to popular sovereignty as a corrective instrument in the balance of powers (Pactet, 1978; Nasr, 2022).

Historically, the power of dissolution in England was vested in the Monarch. However, as political authority gradually shifted from the Crown to the Cabinet, this prerogative was effectively transferred to the ministry. Contemporary constitutional practice requires that the Monarch exercise the power of dissolution only upon the formal advice of the Prime Minister, reflecting the principle that the King “reigns but does not govern” (Dicey, 1926; Duverger, 1955).

A decisive precedent in this regard emerged following the dismissal of the Portland administration despite its parliamentary majority. The subsequent appointment of William Pitt, who dissolved Parliament and called for new elections resulting in an overwhelming electoral victory, consolidated the convention that dissolution constitutes a ministerial right exercised to consult the electorate in cases of persistent conflict with Parliament. Since then, dissolution has been recognized as a constitutional instrument enabling the executive to appeal directly to the people to determine the outcome of political disputes within the parliamentary framework (Jennings, 1979; Ardant, 1989).

The Equilibrium between Dissolution and Political Responsibility

The power to dissolve Parliament constitutes one of the most distinctive features of the parliamentary system and represents, without exaggeration, the most formidable instrument available to the executive authority in its relationship with Parliament. The mere prospect of dissolution often induces Members of Parliament to adopt a cautious and restrained approach when confronting the government on controversial matters. In this sense, the dissolution mechanism operates as a deterrent, preventing excessive parliamentary intervention and contributing to institutional equilibrium (Pactet, 1978; Marksens, 1972).

This executive prerogative finds its functional counterpart in the political responsibility of the government before the House of Commons, particularly through the mechanism of the vote of no confidence. The existence of these two opposing yet complementary instruments—dissolution and political responsibility—forms the cornerstone of balance within the parliamentary system. Were Parliament empowered to dismiss the government at will without the executive retaining the right to dissolve the House of Commons, the principle of balance would be fundamentally undermined. Parliament would then enjoy absolute dominance over the executive, capable of overthrowing governments without fear of electoral arbitration, thereby disrupting the structural equilibrium upon which parliamentary governance is based (Al-Khatib, 2011; Ardant, 1989).

Accordingly, the interplay between dissolution and political responsibility ensures that neither branch can unilaterally impose its will. Instead, both are ultimately accountable to the electorate, which serves as the final arbiter in resolving conflicts between Parliament and the government (Nasr, 2022).

2. Manifestations of Legislative Intervention in Executive Authority

In contrast to the mechanisms available to the executive branch, Parliament itself possesses a set of constitutionally and conventionally entrenched tools enabling it to exert substantial influence over the executive authority. This reciprocal influence confirms that the parliamentary system is founded upon mutual control and institutional interdependence, rather than hierarchical subordination (Duverger, 1955).

It must, however, be emphasized that parliamentary influence is directed exclusively toward the government and its ministers, and not toward the Monarch. In accordance with the long-established English constitutional principle that *“the King can do no wrong”*, the Monarch is exempt from both political and criminal responsibility. This exemption is justified by the absence of any effective governing power vested in the Crown, consistent with the maxim that *power accompanies responsibility*. Since the Monarch exercises no real authority, responsibility necessarily rests with the Cabinet, which holds actual executive power (Dicey, 1926; Jennings, 1979).

Parliament’s influence over the executive thus manifests through several mechanisms, including the effective selection of the Prime Minister, the right to question ministers, the establishment of parliamentary investigation committees, and, ultimately, the power to hold the government politically accountable.

2.1. Parliamentary Role in the Selection of the Prime Minister

Formally, the appointment and dismissal of the Prime Minister and ministers in the British parliamentary system fall within the prerogatives of the Monarch. However, constitutional practice has rendered this authority largely symbolic. In reality, the Monarch is bound by convention to appoint as Prime Minister the leader of the political party that commands a majority in the House of Commons, regardless of personal preference (Jennings, 1979; Charlot, 1999). This convention reflects the fundamental requirement that any government must enjoy parliamentary confidence in order to assume and retain office. A government that lacks such confidence is constitutionally incapable of exercising power and must resign. Consequently, the parliamentary system does not recognize the legal existence of a government unless it is effectively installed by Parliament. In this sense, Parliament functions as the government’s electoral body, transforming the appointment process into a de facto parliamentary selection (Carroll, 2019).

As Carroll aptly observes, the Monarch appoints the Prime Minister but does not choose him; the Monarch’s role is purely formal, while the decisive political choice lies with the parliamentary majority.

2.2. Parliamentary Questions as an Instrument of Oversight

Parliamentary questions constitute one of the most accessible and frequently employed tools of legislative oversight. Their origins in Britain date back to the eighteenth century, coinciding with the emergence of ministerial responsibility (Al-Khatib, 2011).

The primary function of parliamentary questions is informational rather than punitive. They enable Members of Parliament to seek clarification from ministers regarding specific governmental actions or administrative shortcomings. While their direct political consequences are generally limited, they play a critical role in exposing errors, inefficiencies, or violations within governmental policy, whether intentional or inadvertent (Pactet, 1978).

The questioning process establishes a bilateral relationship between the questioning Member of Parliament and the responsible minister. Other MPs do not participate in debate at this stage, rendering the question a personal parliamentary right that may be withdrawn or escalated into an interpellation if the response proves unsatisfactory. Questions may be submitted orally or in writing, with responses typically required within a specified timeframe. In cases of urgency, immediate responses may be demanded, subject to the discretion of the Speaker of the House of Commons (UK Parliament, 2007).

2.3. Parliamentary Investigation Committees

Parliamentary investigation committees represent a more advanced and intrusive form of legislative oversight. These committees are composed of Members of Parliament elected for a specified period and entrusted with examining matters falling within parliamentary competence. Their mandate is not restricted to a particular domain of governmental activity, allowing Parliament to investigate any issue relating to ministerial conduct (Arnitz, 1917; Begouin, 1931).

The establishment of such committees reflects Parliament’s reluctance to rely exclusively on information supplied by ministers. Instead, Parliament seeks to independently ascertain facts by engaging directly with relevant actors and institutions. The outcome of these investigations typically takes the form of a detailed report submitted to the parliamentary chamber, often accompanied by recommendations addressing identified deficiencies or misconduct (Ardant, 1989).

Historically, parliamentary investigation committees in England trace their origins to the seventeenth century. Their reports have consistently exerted significant political influence, frequently precipitating reforms or ministerial resignations (Duverger, 1955).

2.4. Political Responsibility of the Government

Political responsibility constitutes the most consequential mechanism through which Parliament exerts control over the executive. In the British system, this responsibility operates at two levels: individual ministerial responsibility, relating to the conduct of a particular minister within his department, and collective ministerial responsibility, which concerns the overall policy of the Cabinet (Sutherland, 1991).

Parliament may express its lack of confidence in the government through a formal vote of no confidence. Such a vote obliges the government either to resign collectively or to seek dissolution of Parliament. Individual ministers, on the other hand, may be compelled to resign in response to parliamentary censure concerning departmental failures (Gobar, 2010).

Historically, individual responsibility preceded collective responsibility in England. Over time, collective responsibility became firmly established as a central convention, reinforcing Cabinet solidarity and political accountability (Jennings, 1979).

The principle of political responsibility emerged during the reign of George III and initially took the form of impeachment proceedings against ministers. These proceedings, conducted before the House of Lords, could result in severe penalties. Gradually, impeachment gave way to purely political forms of accountability, transforming ministerial responsibility into a cornerstone of parliamentary democracy (Dicey, 1926; Ardant, 1989).

Two primary procedures may trigger a vote of no confidence:

1. Opposition-initiated procedures, whereby Parliament withdraws confidence from the government;
2. Government-initiated confidence motions, through which the government deliberately tests parliamentary support for its policies.

In either case, loss of confidence entails resignation, reaffirming the principle that governmental authority is inseparable from parliamentary support.

Conclusion

The British parliamentary system represents a paradigmatic model of the balance between legislative and executive authority. It preserves the institutional autonomy of each branch while simultaneously embedding mechanisms of cooperation, control, and mutual influence. Through political responsibility and dissolution, Parliament and the government remain locked in a dynamic relationship governed by constitutional conventions and democratic accountability (Pactet, 1978; Duverger, 1955).

In practice, however, achieving genuine equilibrium has proven increasingly difficult. The dominance of disciplined political parties and the fusion of executive leadership with parliamentary majorities often tilt power in favor of the executive. Party loyalty frequently undermines Parliament's willingness to exercise rigorous oversight over a government led by its own party leader (Charlot, 1999).

Nevertheless, the British model continues to rest upon foundational principles: the dual executive structure, flexible separation of powers, political responsibility, and electoral arbitration through dissolution. Together, these elements constitute the enduring pillars of parliamentary governance as examined throughout this study.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on doctrinal legal analysis, constitutional texts, judicial interpretations, and secondary scholarly sources. It does not involve human participants, personal data, experiments, interviews, or surveys. Consequently, ethical approval from an institutional review board was not required. The authors confirm that all sources used in this study have been properly cited in accordance with academic integrity standards, and that the research was conducted in full compliance with recognized ethical principles of scholarly research.

Author Contributions

- Ridha Maiza: Conceptualization of the study; development of the theoretical framework; analysis of executive-legislative relations; drafting of the introduction and sections related to executive authority; overall coordination of the manuscript.
- Kaddour Drif: Analysis of parliamentary oversight mechanisms; drafting sections related to legislative control over the executive; critical review of constitutional principles and historical evolution.
- Noureddine Moifek: Literature review; integration of comparative and doctrinal references; editing and refinement of legal arguments; contribution to discussion and conclusion.
- Faical Boukhalfa: Methodological structuring; language editing; citation verification and formatting; final revision of the manuscript prior to submission.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the publication of this manuscript. The research was conducted independently, and the views expressed are solely those of the authors.

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