

The British Origins of Legislative Agenda Control in Israel

Tal Elovits¹

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Abstract

This paper explores the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of legislative agenda control in Israel's parliamentary system. Utilizing Döring's comparative framework and qualitative historical analysis, we trace how British mandate-era institutions shaped Israel's early democratic structures from 1948-1951. We find that early Israeli leaders deliberately emulated British parliamentary practices, establishing strong executive control over the legislative agenda. While some adaptations have occurred over time, the core principles of strong executive control have persisted. Notably, these Westminster principles endured even as Israel adopted proportional representation. Our analysis, incorporating Norton's five core elements of Westminster systems, reveals how Israel maintained fundamental alignment with the British model while making pragmatic adaptations to local conditions. These findings provide historical context for contemporary debates on judicial reform and the balance of powers in Israel. The study has implications for understanding Israeli democracy and offers a new comparative perspective focused on British political heritage, suggesting new avenues for comparative research.

Introduction

What unfolds when a country is established as a parliamentary democracy while adopting the legal framework of a foreign mandate regime? What kind of institutional arrangements govern such a unique atmosphere? This paper offers an intriguing perspective on these questions by adopting an institutional framework to understand the executive-legislative relationship in contemporary and early days Israel.

The unique setting that Israel emerged from and its possible effects on the contemporary executive-legislative relationship first drew our attention following the analysis of

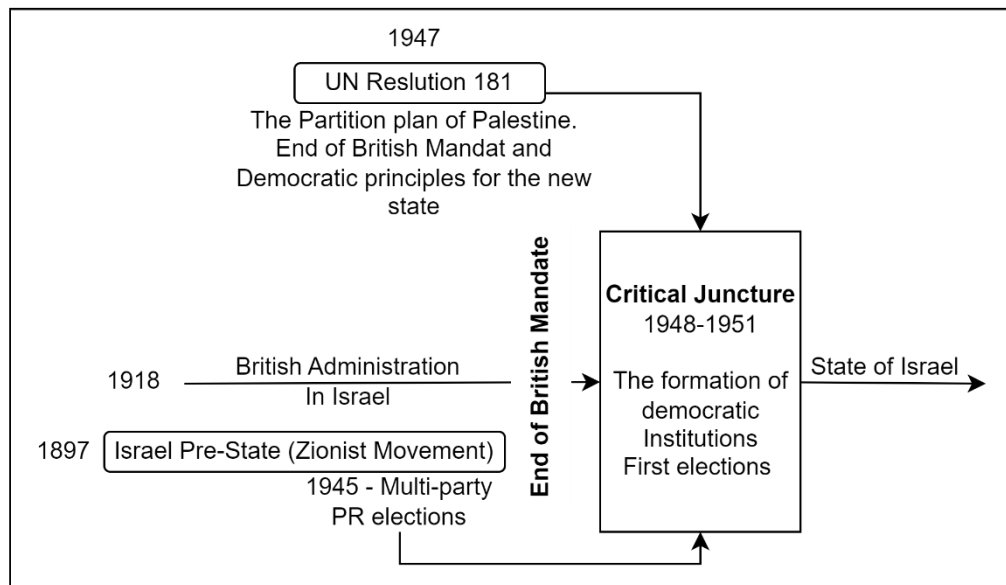
¹ PhD fellow at the Department of Social and Political Science at the University of Milan.
Tal.elovits@unimi.it, ORCID: 0000-0003-2681-1445

governmental Agenda Control in Israel. Agenda control are mechanisms that enable the government to advance its legislative agenda in parliament (Döring, 1995). We employed Döring's (1995) comparative framework to analyze the extent of agenda control in Israel. We evaluated Israel's position through an expert survey based on Döring's categorization. We found that Israel is classified as having strong government agenda control (Group 2 out of 7), similar to France, and not far from the UK.

While this result aligns with existing studies on the strength of the Israeli executive branch, it also raises intriguing observations. According to Tsebelis (2003), consensual democracies, such as Israel, typically exhibit low levels of government agenda control. However, Israel's level of agenda control resembles that of majoritarian systems, contrary to its classification in the comparative literature as a consensual democracy (Lijphart, 2012). This discrepancy prompted us to investigate the historical roots of legislative agenda control in Israel. Given that the state of Israel was established following the British mandate and that Britain exhibited the strongest control by the government, the possible connection emerged as worth exploring. Having Israel as the only parliamentary democracy established following a mandate and not being a colony at any stage provides an interesting case study.

In institutionalized scholarship, creating new countries or the revolution moment when an existing country changes its political system can be seen as a "critical juncture." This is when a significant change occurs, which is believed to have a long-term influence. The idea here is that there are moments when one can follow one path or another, and this choice has significant future consequences that, once crystallized, are difficult to change (R. Collier & D. Collier, 1991). In this study context, we perceive the establishment of Israel as a critical juncture lasting from the Declaration of Independence to the end of the first parliamentary term (1948-1951), as presented in Figure 1. We argue that changes that crystallized during this period affected and continue to affect the democratic institutions in Israel and their relationship.

Figure 1 – Critical Juncture in Israeli Political Development (1948-1951)



However, if we wish to support this argument with sufficient evidence, we must ask ourselves, can we trace back the origins of agenda control in Israel to British heritage? This main question led us to a historical exploration of the formation of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, and its relationship with its government. To answer this question, we used triangulation of sources. From legal documents and government resolutions to debates in parliament and personal memories of leading political figures. We better support our findings by analyzing government agenda control based on the Döring classification as it was at the beginning and how it has evolved, showing a path dependency from our critical juncture to the present day.

This exploration of the historical moments when institutions were created holds significant implications for today's political debate in Israel. The British model of democracy, particularly the sovereignty of parliament and the strong executive, remains the preferred model to aspire to. For example, in 2023, when the 37th government proposed a controversial judicial reform, it used Britain as a model where there was no constitution, no judicial review of legislation, and parliament had the final say to justify its proposal and used the lack of a constitution in Israel to point out the similarity (Navot & Lurie, 2024). We can influence the current political discourse by highlighting the British roots of executive-legislative relations in Israel. Furthermore, by connecting the current institutional arrangements to their historical roots, we can offer a new comparative perspective for Israel, focusing on British political heritage. While Israel is mostly

compared in scholarship with European democracies, we believe that comparing Israel with former British colonial democracies might yield important insights.

We continue this paper by introducing the concept of agenda control and reviewing the characteristics of British agenda control. Drawing from existing studies of the UK and other British-affiliated democracies, we discuss evidence of British footprints in other related democracies. We then introduce our case study historical context and methodological approach. The core of this paper is devoted to the Discussion section, where we present our analysis, providing evidence for the British roots of agenda control in Israel. We conclude by discussing the contribution of our findings.

Agenda Control and the British Model of Democracy

The British model of democracy, often called the Westminster system, is characterized by its majoritarian nature. In this model, the executive branch is politically responsible to parliament, and parliament holds legislative supremacy, often manifested in unwritten constitutions. This model has evolved over the centuries, establishing principles such as parliamentary sovereignty, cabinet dominance, and party governance.

A distinctive feature of the British model is the central role of a strong government. "Core to understanding the Westminster system is that it is executive-centric," stated Norton (2022). The Prime Minister and the Cabinet hold significant power, often dominating the legislative process. This dominance is facilitated through party discipline enforced by party whips and the government's control over the parliamentary timetable (Rhodes et al., 2009). This concept is based on the idea that the electorate chooses a government to implement its manifesto and should have the tools to implement its programme effectively.

The emphasis on strong government is not an accident of history but a deliberate constitutional engineering choice. Flinders and Kelso (2011) state, "Parliament was designed to be subservient to a dominant party in order to facilitate and legitimise 'strong government'." This arrangement was intended to provide stability and governing capacity, even if it came at the expense of broader representation or more stringent checks of executive power.

A key feature of the British model, and by extension of the Westminster system, is the high degree of agenda control exercised by the executive. Norton (2022) notes that the executive is "the driving force in setting the parliamentary agenda," and Döring (1995) provides examples of how this executive supremacy is facilitated through several institutional mechanisms:

1. Control of the Parliamentary Timetable: In the UK, the government almost exclusively determines what will be debated in the House. The Government alone determines the plenary agenda with limited exceptions for opposition and private member days.
2. Financial Initiative: The government has the exclusive right to initiate 'money bills'—legislation with financial implications. This ensures that the executive maintains control over fiscal policy.
3. Guillotine Procedures: The government can impose time limits on debates, allowing it to manage the pace of legislative passage.
4. Committee Structure: While committees scrutinize legislation, they generally cannot fundamentally alter government bills, preserving executive control over policy content.

Additionally, the fusion of executive and legislative powers, as common in British-style democracies, means that the government typically commands a majority in parliament, facilitating agenda control (Rhodes et al., 2009).

While the Westminster system originated in Britain, numerous countries have adopted and adapted it, particularly in former British Commonwealth. These adaptations often involve modifications to fit each country's unique political and cultural context (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2016; Harding, 2004; Kumarasingham, 2012; Patapan, 2005). For instance, India has integrated Westminster practices with its local governance traditions, maintaining strong executive power while adapting parliamentary procedures to fit its diverse political landscape. This blending allowed India to retain a semblance of colonial administrative efficiency while promoting democratic governance (Patapan, 2005).

In the Caribbean, the Westminster model has both enjoyed widespread support and sparked debate because of its association with colonial oppression and slavery. The

system's top-down governance and adversarial politics have led to polarized political practices, raising questions about suitability in these contexts. Critics argue that the replication of the authoritarian features of Westminster governance perpetuates polarization and victimization, detracting from its democratic potential (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2016).

Small states in the Pacific have interpreted Westminster traditions differently, often because of the absence of institutionalized political parties. In these cases, the system can function more like a consensus democracy, constantly maneuvering to establish ruling coalitions. For example, the Marshall Islands adopted a hybrid system combining elements of both Westminster and Presidential systems, despite not having a direct British colonial history. This adaptation was driven by local leaders' belief that the Westminster model would better suit their cultural and governance needs (Corbett & Veenendaal, 2016; Patapan, 2005).

Giuliani (2022) notes that these adaptations often involve modifications to the classic model, such as incorporating written constitutions, judicial review, and alternative electoral systems. While these changes might seem to dilute the core principles of the Westminster model, Harding argues that they demonstrate the model's flexibility and adaptability, allowing it to remain relevant in diverse settings, and that the core principles of parliamentary supremacy, executive dominance, and strong party discipline persist.

These variations reflect what Flinders et al. (2022) describe as Westminster's principles as adaptable to different political cultures and needs. They argue that the Westminster model should be seen as an "organizing perspective" rather than a rigid set of rules, allowing for adaptation to different political contexts.

In light of the current debate regarding the scope and merits of the British democracy model as a comparative model (Flinders et al., 2022; Russel & Serban, 2022; Russell & Serban, 2021), Norton (2022) suggests that a set of core features can define Westminster systems:

1. Executive-driven: The executive branch is primarily responsible for public policy, proposal initiation, and parliamentary agenda setting.

2. Rule-based Conflict: The system is characterized by a structured adversarial conflict between the government and the opposition, operating within well-established rules and procedures.
3. Neutral Speaker: The speaker is a neutral presiding officer who enforces the rules fairly and ensures a balanced debate.
4. Dominant Chamber: The system features a dominant legislative chamber in which the executive is chosen and held accountable.
5. Public Debate: The emphasis is on public debate in the chamber, with legislative committees often meeting in public.

Norton argues that these features, although not always present in the purest form in every country, collectively define the Westminster system and distinguish it from other parliamentary and presidential systems. He acknowledges that the system has evolved and adapted over time but maintains that its core principles endure

In analyzing and establishing British influence and roots in Israeli democracy, we use Norton's core features while using Döring agenda control to measure the first core, executive-driven system.

Not in a revolution, Nor a coup – The Formation of Democracy in Israel

Before approaching our analysis, we wish to address the settings in which Israel was established. Unlike countries that gained independence following an independent war against foreign rulers or a revolution against the existing government, Israel emerged through a clean transition from its former ruler. This is not to say that there was no violence or war at that time. Some militant Zionist groups acted against British rule during the 1940s, and pre-state Israel was engaged in a war-like situation before its official establishment. However, this was a war with neighboring Arab countries, and although there were some terror attacks against British officials, these were not the main basis on which Israel was founded (Eban, 1951). This clean transition contributes to the fact that Israel did not experience a "no man's land" situation in which it was unclear what law ruled.

Israel was one of the first countries to be established following a United Nations (UN) resolution. In November 1947, following a decay of diplomatic committees dedicated to

the question of the Jewish and Arab nationalities in the British Mandate territory in Palestine, the UN adopted resolution number 181, the partition of Palestine into two states: Jewish and Arab. This resolution set the stage for ending the British mandate in Palestine. A month after the resolution, the British government ended its mandate on May 15, 1948.

On May 14, 1948, the day before the end of the British mandate, the Provisional Government declared Israel's independence. The Provisional Government was based on the Jewish Agency managing board, the main Zionist movement pre-state organization. David Ben Gurion, who had led the Jewish Agency board for 13 years, headed the Provisional Government. On that day, the newly formed People's Council proclaimed that, as long as it is otherwise decided, the laws and orders in place by the British Mandate will also be in place in the new Israeli state.

In this section, we briefly provide the historical context of our study by reviewing the three roads leading to our critical juncture: Israel's pre-state institutions, The British mandate administration in Israel, and the UN resolution. It was in 1948 that these roads met and started to merge into the State of Israel.

Israel's Pre-State Institutions

The foundations of Israeli statehood were established before the formal declaration of independence in 1948. During the British Mandate period, the Jewish community in Palestine, known as the *Yishuv*, developed a sophisticated network of quasi-governmental institutions that later formed the basis of the Israeli state apparatus (Honig & Arsenault, 2021; Medding, 1999; Rosetti, 1959).

- 1) The *Jewish Agency*: Established in 1929, the Jewish Agency served as the de facto government for the Yishuv. The British Mandate authorities recognized it as the official representative of Jewish interests in Palestine. Under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, the Jewish Agency operated with departments that paralleled government ministries, including those for immigration, agriculture, education, and defense.
- 2) The *Va'ad Leumi* (National Council): This elected body served as the main national institution of the Yishuv from 1920 to 1948. It managed internal affairs, such as

education, local government, and religious services, effectively operating as a shadow government. Significantly, the Va'ad Leumi held elections based on a multiparty system, reflecting the Yishuv's diverse political landscape. This democratic practice laid the groundwork for Israel's future multiparty parliamentary system.

- 3) *Keren Hayesod* and *Jewish National Fund*: These fundraising organizations were crucial in financing land purchases and development projects, laying the economic groundwork for the future state.

These pre-state institutions provided the Yishuv with a high degree of autonomy and self-governance within the framework of the British Mandate. They developed administrative expertise, fostered leadership, and created a sense of national unity. When Israel declared independence in 1948, these institutions were rapidly transformed into state organs, providing the new country with a ready-made government structure and experienced personnel.

British Mandate of Palestine

The British Mandate of Palestine, which began in 1917 and was officially established by the League of Nations in 1922, marked a significant period in the region's history. Although Palestine was neither a British colony nor part of the Commonwealth, 31 years of British administration profoundly shaped the foundations of Israeli democracy and its institutions (Honig & Arsenault, 2021).

Under the Mandate system, Britain was tasked with administering its territory and preparing it for self-governance. This involved the establishment of administrative structures, legal frameworks, and local institutions. As the highest authority, the British High Commissioner issued laws and orders that regulated most aspects of life in Mandatory Palestine.

The enduring influence of the Mandate period is evident in several key areas.

- 1) **Legal System:** Of 377 laws and orders published during the Mandate, all but three were initially adopted by the new Israeli state, following independence. As of 2024, 63 of these laws remain in effect, including crucial legislation such as the Tax

Ordinance of 1940, the Emergency Act of 1945, and the Local Municipality Ordinances of 1934 and 1941.

- 2) Common Law: The common law tradition introduced during the Mandate period continued to shape Israeli jurisprudence. Israeli courts often turn to English common law principles and precedents for guidance when Israeli legislation is silent or unclear.
- 3) Administrative Structure: The British established a centralized bureaucracy that formed the basis for Israel's early government institutions.
- 4) Emergency Powers: The Emergency Regulations of 1945, originally a British measure, remain in use by Israel today.

This legal and administrative continuity significantly eased the transition to statehood, providing Israel with an established framework for building democratic institutions (Eban, 1951). However, one must remember that this framework was designed to control a foreign territory and not to facilitate democratic life.

UN Resolution 181

The United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 on November 29, 1947, recommending the partition of Mandatory Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states. This resolution not only provided a framework for territorial division but also outlined fundamental democratic principles for the proposed states.

Key democratic elements stipulated in Resolution 181 include the following:

- 1) Constitutional government: Both states were to adopt democratic constitutions, including provisions for elected legislative bodies.
- 2) Universal suffrage: This resolution called for elections based on adult suffrage and proportional representation.
- 3) Protection of minority rights: Specific clauses mandated non-discrimination and equal protection under law for all citizens, regardless of race, religion, or language.
- 4) Civil liberties: The resolution emphasized freedom of conscience, speech, press, and assembly, as well as freedom of religion and cultural expression.
- 5) Independent judiciary: It called for establishing independent court systems to uphold these democratic principles.

- 6) Economic union: The resolution proposed an economic union between the two states, emphasizing cooperation and shared infrastructure.

These provisions reflected the post-World War II ideals of liberal democracy and aimed to establish stable democratic governance in both proposed states. The resolution's emphasis on these principles provided a blueprint for the democratic foundations of the State of Israel upon its establishment in 1948.

The formation of Israeli democracy represents a unique confluence of historical forces. Unlike many newly independent states, Israel's path to statehood was characterized not by revolution or coup but by a complex interplay of international mandate, pre-existing institutions, and diplomatic resolution. The British Mandate provided a legal and administrative framework, while the Yishuv's pre-state institutions offered a foundation of democratic governance and civil society. UN Resolution 181 provides international legitimacy and a blueprint for democratic principles.

Methodology

Our study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the historical roots and current manifestations of agenda control in Israel's parliamentary system. This approach combines agenda control analysis using Döring's (1995) comparative framework with qualitative historical analysis, allowing us to triangulate our findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Döring's Framework

We utilized Herbert Döring's 1995 comparative framework to analyze the extent of agenda control in Israel. This framework categorizes countries into seven groups based on the strength of government agenda control and provides a standardized measure for cross-national comparisons (Döring, 1995).

- a) Expert Survey: We surveyed 15 experts on Israeli parliamentary procedures and political processes. These experts were selected based on their academic publications, professional experience in the Knesset, and recognition of Israeli politics. The survey was conducted online using a structured questionnaire that operationalized Döring's seven categories of agenda control. The experts were

asked to evaluate Israel's position on each of Döring's indicators, providing both numerical ratings and qualitative justifications for their assessments. We received eight anonymous replies (53%).

- b) Legal Sources: We used the Knesset rules of procedure (RoP) and relevant laws.
- c) Comparative Assessment: We compared Israel's aggregated expert ratings with those of other countries in Döring's framework. Particular attention was paid to Israel's proximity to the UK and Ireland in terms of agenda control strength. This comparison allowed us to situate Israel within the broader spectrum of parliamentary democracies and identify potential anomalies in its institutional arrangement.

Historical Analysis

To trace the origins of agenda-control in Israel to its British heritage, we employ a historical analysis approach, drawing on methods from historical institutionalism.

- a) Critical Juncture Analysis: We focused on the period from Israel's Declaration of Independence to the end of the first parliamentary term (1948-1951) as a critical juncture in developing Israel's political institutions. This approach allowed us to identify the key decisions and events that shaped the long-term trajectory of Israel's parliamentary system (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; R. B. Collier & D. Collier, 1991).
- b) Source Triangulation: We used a variety of primary and secondary sources to corroborate our findings: legal documents, government resolutions, parliamentary debates, and personal memories.

To demonstrate path dependency from the critical juncture to the present day, we compared the initial implementation of agenda control mechanisms to their current form and function using legislative records, parliamentary reports, and secondary literature on Israeli politics.

To contextualize our findings within the broader landscape of Westminster-inspired systems, we analyzed how Israel's system aligns with or diverges from Norton's (2022) five core features of Westminster systems.

We acknowledge the potential limitations in our methodology, including reliance on expert opinions, which may introduce subjective bias, and the challenges of historical analysis with potentially incomplete or biased primary sources. To mitigate these limitations, we employed rigorous triangulation methods.

This multi-faceted methodological approach allows us to comprehensively analyze the origins, development, and current state of agenda control in Israel's parliamentary system while also situating our findings within the broader context of Westminster-style democracies. By doing so, we aim to offer a nuanced understanding of how British democratic traditions have influenced and continue to shape Israel's political landscape.

We now turn to the main part of this paper, presenting our findings and the story of agenda-control formation in Israel.

Agenda Control in Israel – then and now

In this section, we approach agenda control analysis by first classifying Israel into each Döring group. We introduce the historical findings for each category, following our expert survey results, alongside the institutional arrangements outlined in the Knesset RoP and supported laws for each category.

The Critical Juncture Period (1948-1951)

The period from Israel's Declaration of Independence in May 1948 to the end of its first parliamentary term in 1951 represents a critical juncture in developing the country's legislative institutions and agenda control mechanisms. Our analysis of agenda control during this period, based on Döring's classification, revealed a system that strongly favored government control:

1. Plenary Agenda: The government had complete control over setting the floor agenda, placing Israel in Döring's Group 1. This was exemplified by Article 4 of the first Knesset RoP, which stated that "the government will set the agenda" and that "the agenda cannot be modified without the government's approval." This arrangement is not without controversy. On March 20, 1949, the newspaper *Maariv* headlined, "Who sets the Knesset's agenda?" reflects the public interest

in this crucial issue. Justice Minister *Pinhas Rozen* articulated the government's position, stating that "the management of the House must be in the hands of the majority, in whose name the coalition government operates." (Maariv, 1949) This view prevailed in a Knesset vote of 63 to 13 against changing the rules.

2. Financial Initiative: Initiating bills with financial implications was not limited, categorizing Israel in Group 3. Any Member of the Knesset (MK) or minister could initiate a "money bill" under regular voting procedures. This arrangement reflected the new state's need for flexibility in financial matters but also increased the potential for fiscal instability.
3. Committee Stage and Rewrite: The plenary established the principle of a bill before the committee debate (Group 1). From the outset, the parliamentary floor was central to the legislative process, with bills first heard and voted on in the plenary before moving to a committee. Furthermore, committees cannot deviate from government proposals without their consent (Group 1). This was explicitly stated in Article 11 of the Knesset RoP from 1948 to 1957, significantly limiting the committees' ability to influence legislation independently.
4. Committee Timetable: Bills were automatically considered in the committee agenda (Group 1), with little independence for committees in setting their timetables. This arrangement ensured swift consideration of government priorities, but potentially at the cost of thorough deliberation on complex issues.
5. Curtailing Debate: A majority vote can set debate restrictions in advance (Group 1). The first RoP allowed any majority vote to end or postpone a debate, giving the government a powerful tool for controlling the pace and scope of parliamentary discussions.
6. Lapse of Bills: Following the British model, a bill's lifespan ended with the legislative term (Group 1). This approach ensured that each new Knesset started with a clean slate but potentially led to the loss of progress on important legislation across terms.

During this formative period, the foundations of Israel's parliamentary system were laid, heavily influenced by *David Ben-Gurion's* preference for strong executives and elements of the British parliamentary model. *Ben Gurion* admired British democracy, as we can

learn from a letter he sent to his wife in 1940: “Few countries have had a truly democratic regime, and none of them has democracy struck as deep roots as England.” (Kedar, 2015).

Others, such as *Moshe Rosetti*, a lobbyist in the British parliaments during the 1940s who served as the first Knesset secretary (1949-1968), also clearly preferred the British model. In an article written in 1954, during his tenure as the parliament secretary, he explains that “the separation of powers between the executive and the legislature and the method of forming governments is entirely based upon the British model.” (Rosetti, 1954)

These institutional arrangements reflect the leadership’s emphasis on a strong executive. Ben-Gurion's skepticism about Jewish immigrants’ ability to quickly adapt to democratic self-governance after centuries of living under non-democratic regimes influenced his preference for a flexible parliamentary system rather than a rigidly written constitution (Kedar, 2021).

The configuration of agenda-control mechanisms established during this critical juncture had profound and lasting effects on Israel's political system, particularly regarding the relationship between legislative and executive branches. It sets a precedent for strong government control over the legislative process, a feature that would persist, albeit with some modifications, in the decades to come.

Evolution of Agenda Control Mechanisms

While the foundations laid during the critical juncture period had lasting effects on Israel's parliamentary system, several key aspects of agenda control have evolved. This evolution, which reflects changing political realities, institutional adaptations, and a minor shift in the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches, underscores the dynamic nature of political systems.

1. Plenary Agenda: The most significant early change occurred in January 1950, when the House Committee decided that the Speaker alone would set the agenda based on the government's proposal. With minor modifications, this arrangement

remains in place today, codified in Article 25(b) of the Knesset RoP as of 1959. Our expert survey results indicate that Israel has moved from Group 1 to Group 2 in Döring's classification, where the agenda is decided at the president's conference and the government holds a majority larger than its seat share. This represents a slight downgrade in government control, albeit still maintaining a significant influence. This change reflects a modest shift towards greater parliamentary autonomy while preserving substantial government influence over the legislative agenda.

2. Financial Initiative: A major shift occurred in 2003 when the government initiated changes in response to the financial crisis. The Basic Law: The State Economy was amended to restrict private members' ability to initiate legislation with significant financial impact (more than approximately 1.5 million Euros) unless supported by the government or by more than 50 MKs in all three readings. This moved Israel from Group 3 to Group 2 in Döring's classification, introducing some limitations to financial initiatives. This change represents an attempt to balance fiscal responsibility with legislative initiatives, reflecting the growing complexity of Israel's economic challenges.
3. Committee Stage and Rewrite: While committee stage has remained consistent since the critical juncture (Group 1), there has been an evolution in committee rewrite powers. In 1957, the Knesset adopted changes to its RoP, allowing committees to rewrite bills as long as the changes were within the scope of the original proposal. The current RoP (Article 85) maintains some restrictions on introducing new aspects not included in the original text. This change represents a modest increase in committee power, allowing for more substantive input into legislation while preserving the government's overall control of the legislative agenda.
4. Committee Timetable: This aspect has seen significant changes. Our expert survey indicated that Israel moved from Group 1 to Group 3, where committees now have more independence in setting their timetables. However, Article 117(a) of the RoP allows the government to request the transfer of a bill to another committee if the deliberation exceeds six months, maintaining some government influence. This evolution reflects a growing recognition of the importance of

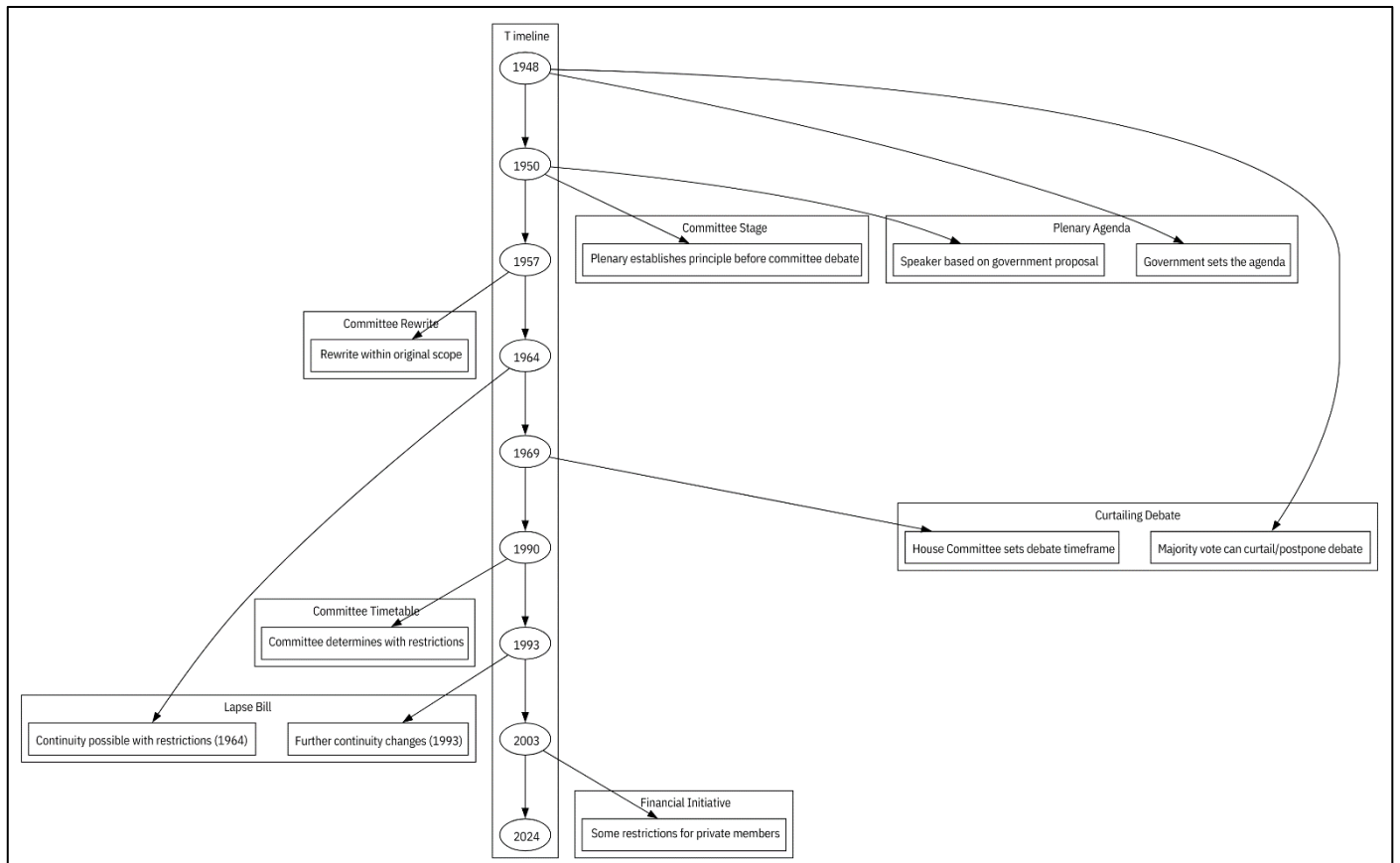
committee work in the legislative process while preserving government oversight mechanisms.

5. **Curtailing Debate:** Israel remains in Group 1, where a majority vote can set debate restrictions in advance. However, this mechanism has evolved. Since 1969, this prerogative has been transferred to the House Committee, which can now set a timeframe for debate and voting procedures. This change centralizes the power to curtail debate in a specific committee, potentially making the process more predictable but not necessarily less susceptible to government influence.
6. **Lapse of Bills:** A significant change occurred in 1964 with the introduction of the Law of Continuity, enabling bills deliberated on the previous term to continue upon government request. This was modified in 1993 to allow MKs to file continuity requests for the bills they initiated. These changes moved Israel from Group 1 to Group 3, where bills could continue under certain conditions. This evolution departed from the British model and reflected a pragmatic approach to legislative efficiency across parliamentary terms.

These evolutionary changes demonstrate a gradual, albeit limited, shift towards greater legislative independence and a slight reduction in executive dominance over agenda control. However, it is important to note that the government still significantly influences the legislative process, reflecting the enduring impact of institutional choices made during the critical juncture, as Figure 2 illustrates.

Despite some modifications, the persistence of strong government control can be attributed to the lasting influence of Ben-Gurion's vision of a strong executive and the perceived need for government stability in a country facing ongoing security challenges. Nevertheless, incremental changes suggest a growing recognition of the need for a more balanced relationship between the executive and legislative branches.

Figure 2 – The Evolution of Agenda Control in Israel



Comparative perspective

Table 1 presents a comparative view of agenda control classifications for Israel, the UK, and Ireland based on the Döring comparative scale:

Country	Plenary Agenda	Financial Initiative	Committee Stage	Committee Rewrite	Committee Timetable	Curtailling debate	Lapse Bill
Ireland	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Israel (2023)	2	2	1	1	3	1	3
Israel (1949-1951)	1	3	1	1	1	1	1
United Kingdom	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

This comparison highlights Israel's unique trajectory. While initially closely aligned with the UK and Ireland, Israel developed distinct characteristics, particularly in committee timetable control and the lapse of bills.

The evolution of Israel's agenda control mechanisms demonstrates a gradual shift towards greater legislative independence in some areas, while maintaining strong executive influence in others. This nuanced development reflects the enduring impact of Westminster heritage and pragmatic adaptations to Israel's unique political landscape.

These findings provide a foundation for understanding how Westminster principles have been transplanted and adapted to the Israeli context. They offer insights into the flexibility and resilience of parliamentary systems in diverse political environments, challenging simplistic notions of institutional transfer, and demonstrating the complex interplay between inherited models and local political realities.

Discussion: The Evolution and Adaptation of Westminster Principles in Israeli Legislative Practice

The story of agenda control in the Knesset is a tale of institutional inheritance and adaptation. This narrative illuminates the journey of Westminster's principles in the unique context of Israeli democracy. Our analysis reveals how these principles, transplanted from the British parliamentary tradition, have endured and evolved in response to Israel's distinct political landscape.

Institutional Genesis: The Critical Juncture of 1948-1951

In the tumultuous years following Israel's independence, architects of the new state faced a monumental task: building democratic institutions from the ground up. Our analysis of this period, which we identify as a critical juncture in Israel's institutional development, reveals a deliberate and strategic emulation of the Westminster model.

Using Döring's (1995) comparative framework, we find that early Knesset mirrored its British counterpart in key areas of agenda control. The government's grip on the plenary agenda and committee processes was as firm as in any British cabinet, placing Israel squarely in Döring's Group 1 for most categories. This institutional choice was not mere imitation but a calculated decision, reflecting both admiration for British democracy and pragmatic governance considerations in a nascent state.

David Ben-Gurion's 1940 statement praising the deep roots of democracy in England provides insight into this choice: "Few countries have had a truly democratic regime, and

none of them has democracy struck as deep roots as England." This admiration and the perceived need for a strong executive in a state facing existential threats shaped the initial institutional arrangements.

This period exemplifies a clear path dependency. The choice of the Westminster model set Israel on a particular institutional trajectory that would continue to influence its legislative practices for decades. As we will see, while adaptations occurred, the core principles of this critical juncture period showed remarkable persistence.

Institutional Layering and Adaptive Processes: 1951-Present

As Israel's democracy matured, we observed a process that institutional scholars call 'layering' (Thelen, 2004). New rules and procedures were grafted onto the Westminster framework, creating a unique Israeli interpretation of parliamentary democracy.

A pivotal moment in this evolution came in 1950 when the Knesset Speaker was given a role in agenda control. This shift shifted Israel from Döring's Group 1 to Group 2 in terms of plenary agenda control. While modest, this change began a distinctly Israeli approach to Westminster principles, balancing executive power with parliamentary autonomy.

Further adaptations were followed. The evolution of financial initiative rules, culminating in the 2003 reforms, demonstrates how Israel's system responded to changing economic realities. These reforms restricted private members' ability to initiate significant financial legislation, moving Israel from Döring Group 3 to Group 2. This change reflects an effort to balance fiscal responsibility with legislative initiatives, a concern that was less pressing in the state's early years.

Perhaps the most significant departure from the Westminster model came from the introduction of the Law of Continuity in 1964. This innovative measure, which allows bills to survive across terms, represents a pragmatic adaptation to Israel's unique political realities. It moved Israel from Group 1 to Group 3 in Döring's classification of bill lapses, enhancing legislative efficiency in a system prone to frequent government changes.

While significant, these adaptations did not fundamentally alter the Westminster character of Israel's system. As Shevah Weiss, Speaker of the Knesset from 1992 to 1996, noted, "The designer of the Israeli Parliamentarism aspired to reach the British model"

(Israel Democratic Institution, 1996). This aspiration, tempered by practical necessities, has resulted in a system that remains recognizable Westminster in character, albeit with unique Israeli characteristics.

Norton's Five Core Elements in the Israeli Context

To fully appreciate the depth of Westminster's influence and its unique manifestation in Israel, we analyze the Israeli system through Norton's (2022) five core elements of Westminster systems:

- 1) **Executive-Driven System:** The Israeli system remains fundamentally executive-centric at its core. Our findings demonstrate that the government maintains robust control over the legislative agenda despite modifications over time. The shift from Döring's Group 1 to Group 2 in plenary agenda control represented a modest increase in parliamentary oversight, but the executive's influence remained strong. This persistence of executive dominance, even within Israel's proportional representation system, exemplifies the adaptability of the key Westminster principle.
- 2) **Rule-based Conflict:** Formalizing agenda control mechanisms in the Knesset Rules of Procedure reflects this essential Westminster feature. The evolution of these rules, from the initial strict government control to the more nuanced role of the Speaker post-1950, demonstrates how Israel has fine-tuned the Westminster model to its political dynamics. This adaptation maintains the essence of rule-based conflict while accommodating the complexities of Israel's multiparty system.
- 3) **Neutral Speaker:** The evolving role of the Knesset Speaker offers an intriguing adaptation of this Westminster ideal. While the Speaker gained agenda-setting powers in 1950, coalition politics still influenced this role. As *Shevah Weiss*, Speaker from 1992 to 1996, noted, "The designer of the Israeli Parliamentarism aspired to reach the British model." (Israel Democracy Institute, 1996) This aspiration, tempered by political realities, has resulted in a uniquely Israeli interpretation of the neutral Speaker concept.

- 4) **Dominant Chamber:** The unicameral Knesset embodies this Westminster feature, albeit with a distinct twist. Unlike the British Parliament, the Knesset's dominance is absolute, without a second chamber to provide checks and balances. This amplifies the importance of other mechanisms, such as committee oversight and the evolving role of the Supreme Court in maintaining democratic equilibrium.
- 5) **Public Debate:** The emphasis on plenary discussions in the legislative process mirrors Westminster traditions. Our analysis of debate-curtailed mechanisms (consistently in Döring's Group 1) reveals how Israel has balanced this principle with the need for legislative efficiency. This balance reflects the pragmatic adaptation of Westminster ideals to the pressure of governing a state in a complex geopolitical environment.

Through Norton's framework, this analysis reveals a nuanced picture of Israel's legislative system. Although adapted to local conditions, it remains fundamentally aligned with Westminster's principles. The executive-driven nature of the system and the emphasis on rule-based conflict echo the British model. The evolving role of the Speaker and the dominance of a single chamber represent uniquely Israeli adaptations, balancing Westminster ideals with local political realities. Tempered by pragmatic constraints, the commitment to public debate further illustrates this balance.

A system that is neither a carbon copy of Westminster nor a complete departure from Westminster has emerged. Instead, we see a thoughtful adaptation of core principles to different political and cultural contexts. This adaptive resilience of Westminster's principles in the Israeli system challenges simplistic notions of institutional transfer and suggests a more complex process of democratic evolution.

The Israeli Twist: Westminster in a Proportional Representation Context

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Israel's institutional evolution is the persistence of these Westminster principles within a proportional representation system. Unlike the UK's typical majority government, Israel's electoral method usually results in coalitions.

Nevertheless, as our analysis shows, the mechanisms for government control over the legislative agenda remain robust.

This adaptation challenges the simplistic notion of institutional transfer and demonstrates the flexibility of the Westminster model. As *Dan Tichon*, Knesset Speaker from 1996 to 1999, observed, "The Israeli model is somewhat leaning towards the British." (Israel Democracy Institute, 1996) This "leaning" suggests a nuanced understanding of how democratic institutions can be transplanted and adapted.

Considering the implications of this analysis, it becomes clear that the Westminster model's influence on Israeli democracy goes beyond surface-level similarities. It has provided a flexible framework within which Israel has crafted its unique democratic identity, which continues to evolve in response to its changing needs and challenges.

Our study contributes significantly to the ongoing debates on the adaptability and reach of the Westminster model (Flinders et al., 2022; Russell & Serban, 2021). Israel's case demonstrates that key Westminster principles can survive and thrive in contexts quite different from their origin, challenging and enriching our understanding of institutional transfers and adaptations.

This finding opens new avenues for comparative research. Israel's experience suggests that it might be more productively studied alongside other Westminster-influenced systems, particularly in small states or former British territories facing similar geopolitical challenges, rather than solely compared to European democracies.

Conclusions

This study explored the historical roots and contemporary implications of legislative agenda control in Israel, tracing the influence of the British mandate period on modern parliamentary practices. By employing Herbert Döring's comparative framework and analyzing a wealth of historical and contemporary sources, we have highlighted the enduring impact of British parliamentary traditions on Israeli democracy.

The critical juncture of 1948-1951, when Israel's political institutions were established, set the stage for a system characterized by strong executive control over the legislative agenda. The resulting democracy, while uniquely Israeli, bore the imprints of its British

administrative heritage, Zionist institutional experiences, and post-war international norms. This historical context is crucial for understanding the development of Israel's parliamentary system and, more specifically, the evolution of agenda control mechanisms in the Knesset.

These early institutional arrangements have had a lasting impact, shaping the dynamics of executive-legislative relations in Israel today. Our analysis reveals that while some adaptations have occurred over the decades, the core principles of strong executive control have persisted. This continuity is evident in the contemporary practices of the Knesset, where the government continues to wield significant influence over the legislative process. The historical preference for a dominant executive remains a central feature of parliamentary democracy in Israel.

This historical context has significant implications for contemporary political debates. The early adoption of strong executive control mechanisms has established a persistent pattern in which the Israeli government retains substantial influence over the legislative process. This influence is clearly illustrated in the 2023 judicial reform proposal, which sought to strengthen parliamentary sovereignty and reduce judicial oversight, thereby enhancing executive power. Proponents argue that such reforms would streamline governance and prevent judicial overreach, citing the British system as a model in which parliamentary decisions are final. However, critics fear that weakening judicial oversight could erode the rule of law and democratic accountability. They emphasize that an independent judiciary is crucial for safeguarding civil liberties and ensuring that the executive and legislature do not exceed their constitutional mandates.

This debate underscores the ongoing tension between the need for efficient governance and the imperative to maintain robust checks and balances to prevent the potential abuse of power. The historical reliance on strong executive control complicates this debate, highlighting the challenges of implementing reforms that balance effective governance with the protection of fundamental democratic principles.

In conclusion, the historical roots of legislative agenda control in Israel continue to shape contemporary political debates, particularly regarding the balance between power and judicial reform. Understanding these historical contexts allows policymakers and

scholars to navigate the intricate dynamics of Israeli democracy better and strive for reforms that uphold efficiency and democratic accountability. This historical perspective enriches our knowledge of Israel's political system and offers valuable lessons for other democracies that navigate the complex balance between efficiency and accountability.

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