



Report

Parliaments and Foresight: Scanning and Reflections on Parliamentary Futures Work

Clem Bezold

Co-Founder, Institute for Alternative Futures; Co-Founder, Public Sector Foresight Network, Alexandria, Virginia, USA

Abstract

There has been significant growth of foresight in parliaments in recent years, highlighted by the World Summits of the Parliamentary Committees of the Future in 2022 and 2023. This paper is a scanning report of a sample of those activities along with insights and observations on parliamentary foresight. Specifically this paper explores those developments and activities in the context of anticipatory governance in and through parliaments, considers the impediments to creating and sustaining foresight, identifies ideal foresight attributes and functions, samples the types of parliamentary foresight efforts pursued, and provides observations on the growth and spread of parliamentary foresight.

Keywords

Parliamentary Foresight, Foresight Attributes and Functions, Anticipatory Governance

Introduction

There has been significant growth of foresight in parliaments in recent years, highlighted by the World Summits of the Parliamentary Committees of the Future in 2022 and 2023. This paper is a scanning report of a sample of those activities along with insights and observations on parliamentary foresight. Specifically this paper explores those developments and activities in the context of anticipatory governance in and through parliaments, considers the impediments to creating and sustaining foresight, identifies ideal foresight attributes and functions, samples the types of parliamentary foresight efforts pursued, and provides observations on the growth and spread of parliamentary foresight.

Anticipatory Governance Evolving

Parliamentary foresight is a critical part of anticipatory governance. Both have been evolving in what they are and how they should be pursued.

Leon Fuerth and Evan Faber define anticipatory governance thusly:

Anticipatory governance is a systems-based approach for enabling governance to cope with accelerating, complex forms of change. Anticipatory governance is a “systems of systems” comprising a disciplined foresight-policy linkage, networked management and budgeting to mission, and feedback systems to monitor and adjust. (Fuerth and Faber, 2012, p. 7)

Jose Ramos (2014) identified seven traditions for anticipatory governance reaching back to the 1960s: 1) science, technology and innovation foresight; 2) anticipatory democracy; 3) futures commissions; 4) foresight informed strategic planning; 5) transition management; 6) integrated governmental foresight; and 7) network foresight.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: clembezold@gmail.com (C. Bezold)

Most of Ramos' traditions, like Fuerth and Faber's approach, are heavily focused on analytics, science and technology forecasting, and strategic planning. However, experience has shown how essential public involvement and participatory planning are to anticipatory governance, which from my perspective and writing includes anticipatory democracy and the work of local and national futures commissions (Bezold, 1978). Having started with this focus when the Institute for Alternative Futures (IAF) was founded in 1977, in later years, we added more conscious inclusion of vision as a method to develop powerful preferred futures, as well as greater sensitivity to more fundamental assumptions and culture-related factors.

Our evolution at IAF with respect to the role these "softer" elements play in effective anticipatory governance is paralleled by recent reviews that emphasize the complexity and social/cultural aspects needed for anticipatory governance to be effective. A review by the School of International Futures (SOIF, 2021) conducted for the United Kingdom Government Office of Science found that anticipatory governance requires an effective foresight ecosystem with capabilities in four arenas:

- **Culture and behavior** – creating ownership and commitment to foresight among policymakers
- **Structures** or units doing foresight throughout the government
- **People** with foresight skills and capacities, champions, networks, and support, and
- **Processes** drawing on diverse methods working across all of government

In a review of foresight-linked anticipatory governance in four countries (Finland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and South Korea), Heo and Seo (2012) point out that in the United States anticipatory government meant anticipating emerging issues and trends and evaluating the implications and impact of government policies under different circumstances. They note the differing consequences of anticipatory governance across the four countries and provide a framework that includes five components: Governance transformation; a system for anticipatory government; strategic design; assessing the quality of the AG; and science and technology studies (Heo & Seo, 2012, p. 4). Strategic design, in turn, includes:

- Vision of preferred futures that resonate strongly with people's values and aspirations,
- Intelligence to identify critical emerging issues, and
- Strategy development to translate aspirations into realities.

These more recent reviews of anticipatory governance systems note that such systems must go beyond science and technology to include a sense of transformation, values and aspirations, and strategy development that can translate aspirations and goals into realities, i.e., that can contribute to achieving the nation's or community's preferred future (their vision).

Foresight Attributes and Functions Informed by Aspirational Futures

The evolution and focus of anticipatory governance outlined above is consistent with the "aspirational futures" approach we developed at IAF (Bezold, 2009, 2018, 2020). Given our aspirational futures approach, the need for participatory futures (Toffler, 1978; Ramos, et. al. 2019) and its development of future consciousness (Lalot et. al. 2019), recognizing the interactive role of the foresight ecosystem, and the need for human capabilities and support for foresight, we have identified some key attributes and functions of foresight.

Foresight attributes should include:

- Focus on the big picture, whole systems, culture and context
- Guided by strong shared vision
- Public participation and learning

Foresight should serve these functions:

- Providing early warning of threats and opportunities
- Understanding systems, context, and culture
- Generating, reinforcing shared vision
- Providing scenarios, alternative futures
- Providing design alternatives
- Anticipating impacts, particularly side effects of decisions, policies, and legislation
- Oversight/evaluation of the quality of foresight in policymaking/legislation and of the functioning of the nation's foresight system

These attributes and functions are relevant for foresight focused on the whole system, or national futures, and foresight focused on specific policy areas, topics, or agencies, e.g., education, the environment, or defense.

To what extent are these attributes and functions included in the growing number of parliamentary foresight activities led by various parliamentary Committees on the Future? Let's first consider foresight activity in parliaments in relation to the other branches of government.

Foresight in Executives, Parliaments, Judiciaries

Foresight should have the attributes and perform the functions listed above, throughout government (whether international, national, provincial, or local). Yet government foresight is typically done within a single branch of government (executive, legislative, judicial), most often in the executive branch, rather than across all the government. Excellent reporting and analysis of executive branch foresight has been done in recent years (e.g., OECD, 2019, 2021; SOIF, 2021; Greenblott et al., 2019; Olson & Dunagan, 2019). There is a rich but sparse history of foresight in the judicial branch – led by the work and writing of Jim Dator (1972, 1978, 1994, 2000, 2019; Dator and Bezold, 1981) and Sohail Inayatullah (1991, 1994; McNally & Inayatullah, 1988). Foresight in legislatures also has a rich but sparse history, in the United States going back to the 1970s (Bezold, 1975; Rose, 1978; Bezold & Renfro, 1978). Recently welcome attention has been provided by Boston et al. (2019, 2020) and Koskimaa and Raunio (2020, 2023, 2024). Koskimaa and Raunio's work has focused particularly on the growing number of parliamentary committees of the future.

Impediments to Foresight

Foresight, whether in the executive, parliament, or the judiciary, should have the attributes and pursue the functions noted above. Before describing the growth of parliamentary foresight, it is relevant to note that the structure and operations of governments and their legislatures have made foresight something that is often seen as something strange, threatening, to be ignored, or opposed. Typical impediments to foresight in legislatures (and some antidotes) include:

- Politics can impede foresight, particularly where there is not a cross-party acceptance of the value of foresight, particularly considering side effects, impacts and alternatives. As noted above and below, if foresight analysis supports a particular political party or leader's views the foresight activity can be ignored or stopped when parties change power.
- Members of Congress have argued that their constituents, the public, don't want "something they don't think they need, and they don't see the current need for dealing with anticipated problems" (Bezold, 1978, p.117). The impacts of the problem, e.g. of climate change, do lead to calls for action, but proposed actions are often costly or too late. Boston et. al. (2020) phrase this impediment from perspective of the broader government: "It is no surprise that governments prioritise matters of immediate public concern, as this reflects the structure of political incentives in contemporary democracies" (Boston et al., 2020, p. 47).
- Public awareness of futures thinking, of futures literacy, is limited for most populations. While futures studies, futures literacy, and efforts to "teach the future" are growing, most people and most constituents remain ill equipped to understand or call for foresight. In most nations this lack of futures literacy affects politicians as much as the public.

- The media tends to worsen this lack of understanding of futures and foresight. As Jim Dator notes, “the established media, willfully ignorant of the utility of futures studies, only know how to exaggerate, ridicule, and mock. Generally speaking, the media do not know how to identify and evaluate presently-laughable but futuristically-important statements, and to place them in their proper context. It goes without saying that the social media exacerbate these behaviors” (Dator, 2024, p.160).
- Most nations lack the ability to develop national shared visions. The public, and parliamentarians, have few means to develop shared vision and the transformational goals needed to achieve them. (This makes the UN’s Agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (United Nations, 2015) and their uses by governments and parliaments a major advance supporting foresight, as discussed below).
- The future, in terms of time, in parliaments, is most often defined by election cycles.
- Whole-nation scenarios (possible futures), visions (preferred futures) or integrated plans (design alternatives and strategies) are lacking in many countries. In this context, legislative committee specialization by topics fragments reality, making interactions across topics or policies areas easy to ignore.
- Proponents of legislation want to avoid identifying the negative secondary impacts or side effects of their proposals. Technology assessment (Anghel, 2024) and requiring environmental, budgetary, and other “impact” statements help remedy this impediment. Assessing impacts on achieving vision and goals, as in the case of Finland using the potential contribution of emerging technological advances to achieve the SDGs, is a further welcome antidote here (Linturi, 2021).
- Oversight by parliamentary committees can be highly partisan, fixated on finding publicizable problems of programs by the opposite party, rather than providing serious review of agencies and evaluation of their programs. Parliamentary oversight of futures or foresight is necessary and can benefit from the focus on evaluating foresight by the futures community (Georghiou, et. al, 2006, Johnston 2012, Gardner, et. al. forthcoming), particularly if these foresight evaluation efforts broaden to consider the attributes and foresight functions noted above.

World Summits of Parliamentary Committees of the Future

Despite these and other impediments to foresight in parliaments, in recent years, there has been significant growth of foresight in parliaments. This takes many forms – creating special committees, assigning “the future” in whole or part to existing committees, creating parliamentary foresight offices, better integration with executive agencies’ foresight work (and doing better oversight of executive branch foresight), and promoting foresight capacities in the government (as a whole, and in specific agencies), in the legislature (again as a whole and in specific committees), and among the public. In many parliaments, the increased focus on foresight is being led by their “Committee on the Future” or “Committee for the Future.” These committees, in turn, have been promoting foresight in other parliaments, led by Finland’s Committee for the Future and Uruguay’s Special Futures Committee, which have initiated major convenings, in particular two recent world summits.

The first World Summit of the Committees of the Future was held in the Parliament of Finland on 12-13 October 2022. Hosted by the Finnish Parliament’s Committee for the Future, representatives from thirteen nations took part in person or virtually in this first-ever gathering of parliamentary futures efforts. The agenda, presentations, and Joint Statement are available on the [World Summit webpage](#). The meeting’s final [Report](#) (Committee of the Future, Parliament of Finland, 2022) additionally includes background on the origins of the summit and detailed descriptions of futures activities in fourteen parliaments.

The second World Summit of The Committees of the Future, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of Uruguay, was held on 25-27 September 2023. It celebrated the important growth of foresight in parliaments and discussed the need for regulation or management of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly artificial general intelligence (AGI). The Summit included parliaments with established futures committees or futures efforts as well as parliaments interested in developing their own effort. Seventy organizations took part, including forty-two national parliamentary delegations; three regional parliaments – the European Parliament, the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), and the Mercosur Parliament (Parlasur); and several international organizations. The Second World Summit’s Outcome Document/Final Declaration (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023) and other information are available on the Summit [webpage](#) and more coverage is available [here](#).

Role of Committees in Parliaments

The work of parliaments is done in many places: among the parliamentary leadership, individual parliamentarians and their offices, support organizations of the parliament, and particularly in parliamentary committees. How committees function depends on whether the nation's governance is a parliamentary or presidential system.

While there is wide variation in both types of systems, in parliamentary systems the government is formed from and by the majority party (or coalition of parties) in the parliament. The government, so formed, sets the policies and actions of the executive agencies, with parliamentary committees typically providing discussion and oversight. In presidential systems, the executive (e.g., the president) and the legislature are separately elected, and legislatures and their committees typically have more defined authority and greater responsibilities (particularly originating legislation) than in parliamentary systems. This makes legislative committees in presidential systems more significant in developing policies and passing legislation.

Most committees in both presidential and parliamentary systems specialize in the topics (and corresponding agencies) they are assigned. The committee's staff and elected members build up expertise in the areas of the committee's jurisdiction, the laws and regulations in those areas, the relevant departments and agencies, and the organizations and parts of civil society affected by those areas. The breadth and importance of a committee's jurisdiction can effect parliamentarians' choices of which committees are most desirable for wielding power, getting attention, and in countries where campaigning is expensive, getting campaign contributions (e.g., where there are corporations or wealthy players involved in or affected by the topic, those groups can make election campaign contributions and give other benefits to committee members). This issue is most pronounced for the United States given the lack of public financing of campaigns and the need for raising private contributions for election campaigns.

Mapping the Work of Futures Committees to the Functions of Parliaments

Given the growth in legislative foresight activity, what aspects of foresight are Futures Committees and their foresight kin in parliament pursuing, particularly in relation to the prime functions of legislatures? The Appendix includes a listing of 35 general or specific foresight activities, grouped by the three prime functions of parliaments. It is based on research for my presentation at the Second World Summit in Uruguay. The principal sources on these foresight activities include a review of documents from the first World Summit of the Committees of the Future, particularly the country descriptions in the meeting Report (Committee of the Future, Parliament of Finland, 2022), discussions at the Second Summit, internet research, comments on an earlier draft of this paper from participants at the Second Summit, and recent literature on parliamentary foresight, particularly articles by Koskimaa & Raunio (2020, 2023, 2024).

Foresight can contribute significantly to the major functions of parliaments:

- **Representation** (representing the people, carrying their aspirations and voice into the workings of the government)
- **Legislation and policymaking** (proposing and/or shaping laws and policies)
- **Accountability and oversight** (ensuring the fiscal and operational functioning of government agencies, policies, and systems)

Legislatures, of course, have other functions, which may vary from upper to lower chamber of the parliament and across parliaments, such as approving budgets and expenditures; declaring war; and confirming cabinet, military, and diplomatic appointments. As noted, in parliamentary systems another major function is for parliaments to "provide the government" (Boston, et al. 2020, p.44). But for our purposes the three functions mentioned here are the prime functions for considering how foresight contributes to or supports parliamentary work.

Input from the sources mentioned above, grouped (with the caveats mentioned below), leads to the list of parliamentary foresight activities related to the three prime functions of parliaments, as shown in the summary table here (Table 1) and detailed in the Appendix.

Table 1: Foresight Work in Parliaments circa 2023

Foresight Work in Parliaments circa 2023 Grouped by Prime Parliamentary Function	
(numbers represent the frequency of examples in each category detailed in the Appendix)	
➤	Representation -- carrying the people’s voice and aspirations 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Educating on and involving the public in the future 6 ■ Developing or enhancing the nation’s vision 2 ■ Developing and debating the “big picture” of the future 2 ■ Developing alternative futures for focused topics 2
➤	Legislation and Policymaking 17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Building the foresight system 2 ■ Providing early warning of emerging issues, identifying key threats and opportunities 2 ■ Developing alternative futures in which to explore policy options 1 ■ Providing future-focused analysis or opinions to other committees in their parliament 1 ■ Producing or influencing laws or regulations affected by their foresight work 3 ■ Using science, technology, or innovation as a focus and starting place for foresight 8
➤	Accountability and Oversight 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Monitoring the achievement of national goals and objectives, including shared global goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals 2 ■ Overseeing the foresight capacities of the government, agencies, and officials, enhancing foresight systems and the foresight capabilities of officials 5

While more research is needed on the details of these activities, including their cost, utilization, and impacts, it is heartening that each of the attributes and foresight functions we recommend is covered by one or more of the activities.

How Many Parliaments Are Involved with Foresight?

How many parliaments are involved with foresight? There has never been a systematic assessment. The numbers shown in the table above sample the foresight activities of parliamentary committees participating in the two World Summits; they give a sense of the range of legislative activity and interest in foresight around the world, if not a count of parliaments involved with foresight. But Finland’s Committee for the Future did the field a service in 2022. In preparation for hosting the first summit, Finland’s Committee for the Future asked their Ministry of Foreign Affairs for help in identifying other countries whose parliaments were engaged in future-oriented decision making. The study found that some futures work was being done in 43 parliaments. Of these, six parliaments (Brazil, Chile, Iceland, Lithuania, the Philippines, and Uruguay) had future committees “with a permanent mandate to consider a broad range of future-related matters and composed of elected members of parliament.” (Committee of the Future, Parliament of Finland, 2022, p. 6). In many of the other parliaments doing futures work:

“consideration of futures issues was distributed to their existing committees. Of these committees, eight were assessed to have so broad a mandate that they matched the idea of a committee of the future quite closely despite operating under some other name (Austria, Canada, Estonia, France, Japan, Poland, Thailand, and Viet Nam). Some five parliaments had an internal office for foresight, and in nine countries foresight was carried out only in the prime minister’s or president’s office but not in the parliament.” (Committee of the Future, Parliament of Finland, 2022, p. 6)

The forty-two national parliamentary delegations at the second World Summit in Uruguay in 2023 included parliaments with established futures committees or futures efforts as well as parliaments interested in developing their own effort. It is not known the overlap among those 42 attending the Summit in 2023 and the 43 identified as having some foresight activity in Finland's 2022 survey of parliaments.

Future surveys of parliamentary foresight activities need to better characterize the types of foresight focused on the nation and longer-term futures, as well as foresight done in the various committees and their corresponding agencies and in the parliament's support organizations. And these surveys should identify the areas or sectors on which the foresight is focused, e.g. transportation, education, defence and security, vs. whole system forecasts (and the extent to which whole system futures research is incorporated into sector-focused futures work).

Factors Affecting the Growth of Parliamentary Foresight

From this review of foresight activities and from the growing literature, some observations can be made about factors affecting the growth of parliamentary foresight.

Champions of Foresight within the Parliament – Most parliamentary foresight efforts have champions in the parliament, who promoted the establishment of a foresight committee or process. In Finland, Members of Parliament Martti Tiuri and Eero Palosinki toiled as academics, and later as MPs, to establish technology assessment and other foresight tools in the 1970s and 1980s, leading to the Committee for the Future being established in 1993 (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2023, p. 3).

The departure of a champion, in the absence of having the parliament's foresight processes institutionalized, can lead to the dissolution of the Committee or the ignoring of the foresight requirements. In Brazil, the Senate Committee for the Future was established in 2013. In 2023, after the retirement of its champion, it was "extinguished", and a new Commission for the Defense of Democracy was created in its place following attacks on government buildings prompted by defeated President Bolsonaro.

In the United States, the House of Representatives added a "foresight" requirement for House committees to its House Rules in 1975. Congressman John Culver of Iowa had been a relentless champion of foresight as member of a special committee reforming the operations of the House in 1973 and 1974. At Culver's insistence, the "foresight provision" was included in those Bolling Committee reform recommendations and added to the House Rules. During the year the Bolling Committee on House Reform finished its work in 1974, Culver campaigned and was elected to the Senate. The foresight provision remains in the House Rules but has been largely ignored in the absence of any ardent champions and more reinforcement for foresight in the House, or in the U.S. foresight ecosystem (Bezold, 2018).

"The Future" as the Committee's Jurisdiction -- It is significant that the current growth of parliamentary foresight is being led by committees whose focus is specifically and broadly on the future. This broad focus can create opposition from established committee leaders who argue that the futures committee's focus would impinge on their "turf." Koskimaa and Raunio point to an example of this in Germany:

Here, another good example is Germany where "the idea of creating a future-oriented full committee has been considered [twice] in the Bundestag and twice formally rejected ... In both cases, established committees prevailed over future-oriented proposals because they feared that any such body would become a "supercommittee, capable of overriding their 'leading' role in their traditionally defined area of competence". In addition, legislators could feel that the foresight body would somehow be an odd, novelty element, detached from the usual, more serious legislative business, making it, . . . a 'bad investment' for busy MPs. (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2023, p. 5, citing Kinski & Whiteside, 2023)

In Finland, similar issues were raised about its Committee for the Future. In the 1980s and early 1990s, proposals for a legislative foresight unit in Finland met fierce opposition from leaders in the legislature (the Eduskunta), claiming that the unit was unnecessary, that foresight could be done by existing committees, and that its cross-sectoral focus could jeopardize the work of other committees. In the early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union slumped Finland's strongly export-driven economy into a major recession. A process was established for each newly elected government to issue its broad "report on the future." The Committee for the Future, which would provide

Parliament's response, was created in 1993. Subsequently the Committee was made permanent and added to its tasks bringing foresight to the other committees and assessing technological development (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2023, pp. 3-4).

State of the Nation's Foresight Ecosystem – Parliaments and their committees take the lead or take part in doing foresight by generating the visions, futures reports, and futures discussions depending on the foresight ecosystem in their nation, including the foresight work of regional and international partners, the government, specific agencies, universities, and others. Many factors shape whether and how well foresight is conducted, including the nature of the country's vision development and renewal, its early warning systems of threats and opportunities, whether it is required to produce "reports on the future," and to what extent dialogue occurs in the parliament and agencies and with the public. The advanced state of the foresight ecosystem in Finland (world leading futures studies programs, public involvement, active champions, acceptance by political leaders, recognition of the value of foresight in the face of major challenges) contributed to Finland's success and the longevity of the efforts.

As noted, the champions of Finland's Committee for the Future, Martti Tiuri and Eero Palosinki, had worked for nearly two decades in Finland's foresight arena as academics, futurists, and then as Members of Parliament before the Committee was established in 1993 (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2023).

Peer Foresight Promoters from Other Parliaments – Koskimaa & Raunio's (2024) exploration of the emergence and global diffusion of legislature-based futures institutions shows the importance of the leadership and support Finland's Committee for the Future has provided to many of the parliamentary futures committees established in other countries.

Regional Neighbors – In the Baltic and Nordic regions, Finland's Committee for the Future helped shape Lithuania's and Iceland's foresight efforts (though Sweden and Norway had not yet developed legislative foresight units as of 2023). In South America, Chile and Brazil had futures committees by 2013, with Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay following in later years. (As noted, the Brazil committee was "extinguished" in 2023; the Argentine effort did not survive a change in government shortly after its creation.)

Demise from Loss of Champion or Changing Politics – Permanent establishment of parliamentary futures committees integrated into national foresight processes is ideal. But as in Brazil and Argentina, as noted above, sometimes such efforts end. The Israeli Knesset created a Commission for Future Generations in 2001, initiated by a champion Joseph (Tommy) Lapid. His retirement in 2006 coincided with the termination of the Commission's work (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2024). In 2008, Hungary created an Ombudsman or Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations; in 2012, the post continued but was subsumed under the office of the Commissioner of Fundamental Rights (Koskimaa & Raunio, 2024).

Foresight that is closely associated with one party or political faction can be short lived, as political leadership in the legislature changes. A famous case of political demise of a foresight effort in the U.S. Congress is the ending of the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment by Newt Gingrich when the Republicans swept into the majority. They took control of the House and elected Gingrich as Speaker of the House. In spite of the fact that Gingrich is a futurist and has been since the 1970s (Gingrich, 1978), his "Conservative Opportunity Society" platform did not appreciate OTA's work. Gingrich blasted OTA as "staff driven bureaucracy made up largely of liberal democrats that was giving Congress inadequate and often bad advice" (Cahlink, 2019). Ironically, in the 2020s, House Democrats have been discussing recreating OTA.

Thus some foresight innovations, associated with a group that takes power and installs the foresight effort, are "extinguished" when the opposing party or coalition take power/gain the majority. While it is better to have partisan-supported foresight than none, it is better still to have broadly supported permanent foresight processes, such as those in Finland.

UN Vision – The UN Agenda 2030 and its related Sustainable Development Goals represent a global shared vision that nations have agreed to. Each member nation of the United Nations has committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in their country and to reporting yearly on them. Agenda 2030 is the vision. The SDGs represent the stretch targets to achieve that vision. Shared visions define a preferred future that puts in place the values of the envisioning nation or community. For Agenda 2030 and the SDGs the UN describes the underlying universal values as calling for "[A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.](#)"

This process has had a significant impact on parliamentary foresight, with some futures committees involved in reviewing their nation's path to achieving the SDGs.

Foresight for Good or Evil – Foresight can support nations and communities in understanding threats and opportunities, and in developing and achieving their vision. Vision should be driven by underlying values – the vision creates the preferred future that embodies those values. Ideally visions are ennobling by pursuing values that are uplifting. Developing shared vision should include this type of focus on values (Schultz, et. al. 1993).

But not all vision processes, and not all visions promulgated by leaders, focus on such values. In the 20th century, the values of two visionary leaders were very different. The values underlying Hitler's vision included inequality of individuals and "races," the right of the strong to rule the weak, and subordination of the individual to the state. The values of Mahatma Gandhi were [non-violence, truthfulness, simplicity, self-reliance, and compassion](#). The visions their followers pursued and that foresight, when it was used, supported were very different futures and levels of good and evil.

For Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, as noted, the UN describes the underlying universal values as calling for "[A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met](#)". I believe that these values have played an ennobling role on the vision and the pursuit of the SDGs.

Foresight supporting good or evil is complex and relative – individuals or nations assess the results of achieving a vision or implementing policies in relation to their values and the impacts on them. The benefits and harms of policies on individuals and communities lead to differing analysis of good and evil depending on their degree of benefit and harm.

Future Generations Focus – In legislatures, the "future" is often simply the number of years until the next election. In some places, a focus on future generations has become an important antidote, including at times becoming the framing of a foresight office or effort. In Wales, the parliament used the future generations focus to set in law a national vision for sustainable well-being, including environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions and explicit well-being goals. It created a future generations commissioner who helps public bodies consider the long-term effects of their decisions in light of the stated vision and goals. The commissioner's duties include reporting on Wales's movement toward achieving its SDGs. In 2023, the parliament in Scotland was considering establishing a similar commissioner for future generations. The German Bundestag created a [Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development](#) that since 2004 has monitored initiatives' consistency with the National Sustainability Strategy and suggests sustainability goals and measures. As noted, Hungary created an Ombudsman or Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations and Israel created its Commission for Future Generations. These and other parliamentary groups and individuals have created the [Network of Institutions for Future Generations](#) whose mission is for societies to safeguard and promote the "interests rights, and well-being of future generations."

Science and Technology – Science and technology, sometimes including innovation and information and communication, is a sector where change is expected, where forecasts are familiar. Eight parliaments listed in the Appendix use their science and technology committee as their lead foresight committee. Technology assessment is a foresight function focusing on the long term effects of new technologies. That is a related assignment of several of the foresight efforts reviewed here. Some committees with the name "committee on (or for) the future" do technology assessment. Finland's Committee for the Future provide a unique technology assessment – exploring the potential of new technologies to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs (Linturi, 2021).

Foresight on Threats vs. Opportunities – In most government settings it is easier to focus on and forecast future threats than opportunities. This is reinforced by the greater presence of foresight efforts in intelligence and defense sectors than in other policy arenas. A review of U.S. federal government foresight noted that defense and intelligence agency foresight units typically had four times more staff and funding than the foresight units in civilian agencies (Greenblott et al., 2019). The benefit of opportunities is most effectively considered in relation to how they can achieve the nation's vision. In developing scenarios or alternative futures, among the scenarios should be ones that explore how visionary futures might be achieved, as well as exploring how challenges can be prepared for or prevented (Bezold, 2009).

UN Family Foresight Promotion – As noted, the United Nations-led shared global vision in Agenda 2030 and the SDGs have had a profound impact on foresight, particularly visionary foresight. In addition, foresight is well

developed throughout the UN system; nearly every UN agency has made use of foresight in its work (UN Futures Lab, 2023, p. 9). In September 2024, the United Nations will hold a [Summit on the Future](#), whose stated goal is to accelerate efforts to meet existing international commitments and to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. The UN Secretary General's Office supports foresight through its Futures Lab and its Innovation Lab. UNDP provides foresight support to countries, including a guidebook (UNDP, 2018) and many other examples detailed in publications on its [Foresight and Futures](#) webpage. UNESCO focuses on [Futures Literacy and Anticipation](#) and has run Futures Literacy Laboratories in 44 countries (Miller 2018).

Conclusion

Parliamentary foresight is a part of anticipatory governance. Both appear to be growing despite recurring reversals. Foresight activities are dealing more often and more effectively with culture and context, with aspirations and visions, and with future consciousness. I believe the infrastructure for early warning of threats and opportunities is getting stronger, as is the capacity to produce and use scenarios/ alternative futures.

The need for foresight continues to grow from emerging threats and opportunities. Nationalism and xenophobia are growing, with democratic values and democracy itself threatened in some places. Challenges from climate change, energy, water, health, equity (rich-poor gap), gender equality, and technology (including AI), among many others are growing (Millennium Project). But opportunities are plentiful and may be able to overcome many of our current and emerging challenges. Foresight is needed to explore these challenges and opportunities as well as aid in developing shared vision. National foresight processes that continue to grow in sophistication, future consciousness, and effectiveness, with parliaments playing their roles effectively, are essential to our collectively mitigating the challenges and optimizing the opportunities we face in achieving our preferred futures.

Appendix: Parliamentary Futures Work by Prime Parliamentary Functions

This preliminary mapping is meant to illustrate the nature of foresight efforts in the early 2020s in relation to prime parliamentary functions (representation, legislation and policymaking, and oversight and accountability). Categorizing the various activities of parliamentary Committees of the Future and other legislative foresight efforts is complex. Many of these activities could simultaneously fall into more than one parliamentary function. For example, although vision and whole-nation futures work are cited here in representation (as a function of leadership), these activities may include or lead to legislation and policymaking. Nevertheless, such mapping is useful for understanding – and further developing – how foresight activities are contributing to achieving each of the three major parliamentary functions.

This list is not comprehensive. In the context of parliamentary systems and the dimensions of the future and foresight noted above, the list provides examples of how foresight activity by the various parliaments participating in the first two World Summits of Committees of the Future contributes to their representation, legislation and policymaking, and accountability and oversight functions.

➤ Representation -- carrying the people's voice and aspirations

- Educating on and involving the public in the future
 - In Chile, the Senate's Committee of Challenges of the Future, Science, Technology, Knowledge, and Innovation has organized a national Congress of the Future to bring national and international experts and innovators to Chilean citizens.
 - It has replicated that process for Chilean communities and regions with *Congreso Futura en tu Comuna*, a two-day roaming set of workshops.
 - In 2017 and 2020, it held the Youth Congress of the Future, focusing on policies and a vision of the future based on science and technology innovations.
 - The Congress of the Future, with the Senate and others, produced *Futuristas*, a child and family video/online engagement tool focused on emerging science and technology issues.
 - The Senate Committee on Brazil's Future held the Congress of the Future of Brazil in 2016. (The Committee operated from 2013 to 2022; it held the Congress of the Future in 2016, held public hearings, and provided oversight focused on urban mobility, information technology, and the future of the legislative process. In 2023, the Senate converted the Committee on Brazil's Future to the Committee for the Defense of Democracy, following massive demonstrations in Brazil similar to the January 6, 2021, insurrection around the U.S. Capitol.)
 - Finland's Committee for the Future uses publications and seminars to bring their work to stakeholders and civil society.
 - The Finnish Committee also invites NGOs to give statements for many of its expert hearings. Also, hearings of young people have been arranged in collaboration with Youth Agenda 2030 and some schools, as well as in the context of the Youth Parliament Day. These inputs have sometimes influenced the resolutions made by the Committee.
 - Uruguay's Special Futures Committee has a General Assembly, a broad and representative extra-parliamentary advisory group designed as a collective intelligence system.
- Developing or enhancing the nation's vision
 - Lithuania's Committee for the Future took part in the development of Lithuania 2050 (including scenarios and a long-term vision) and will provide oversight of implementation of the resulting long-term strategies.
 - South Korea's National Assembly Futures Institute developed Future Vision 2037, a vision of a mature society and goals to reach them. (Korean National Assembly Futures Institute, 2021)
- Developing and debating the "big picture" of the future
 - In Finland, the executive branch provides its Report on the Future to which the Committee for the Future prepares the parliament's response.

- In Iceland, the parliament’s Future Committee analyzes key challenges and opportunities for the nation.
- Developing alternative futures for focused topics
 - The Estonian Futures Centre analyses social trends and policies and develops alternative scenarios to debate development paths and options informed by the risks and opportunities involved. Topics have included the tax structure, higher education, green transition, and the data society.
 - Finland’s Committee for the Future has, for instance, published alternative scenarios for Russia’s development in 2007 and 2014, a report on possible wild cards for Europe in 2018, an analysis of societal transformation potential of radical technologies in 2018, and visions on the future of aging in 2022.
- **Legislation and Policymaking**
 - Building the foresight system
 - The Economic Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament initiated the Estonian Foresight Act to ensure “the conducting of foresight necessary for understanding long-term developments in Estonia, identifying of potential threats and opportunities and assessing of possible activities at science-based and high-quality level” (Committee on the Future, Parliament of Finland, p. 48). The Act created the Foresight Centre within the parliament and makes including the wider public mandatory.
 - The Chilean Senate’s Committee on Challenges of the Future, Science, Technology, Knowledge, and Innovation fostered discussion on building a national foresight strategy and framework.
 - Providing early warning of emerging issues, identifying key threats and opportunities
 - Finland’s Committee for the Future reported on the potential of radical technologies to advance sustainability and help achieve the global Sustainable Development Goals (Linturi, 2021).
 - Austria’s parliament relies on the Austrian Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Technology Assessment for information on ongoing trends and technology assessment.
 - Developing alternative futures in which to explore policy options
 - Estonia’s Foresight Centre envisions possible future scenarios so policymakers can check the “robustness” of policies and “futureproof” them.
 - Providing future-focused analysis or opinions to other committees in their parliament
 - Finland’s Committee for the Future, Iceland’s Future Committee, and Viet Nam’s Committee for Science, Technology, and Environment all provide such opinions to other committees in their parliaments.
 - Producing or influencing laws or regulations affected by their foresight work
 - Chile’s Committee on Challenges of the Future, Science, Technology, Knowledge, and Innovation worked to understand future challenges and incorporate those into the Senate’s work regarding artificial intelligence, green hydrogen, the aerospace program, and constitutional reform to protect neuro rights.
 - The Philippine Senate Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation, and Futures Thinking intervenes in deliberation on legislation and the budget “to prepare for various futures and shift to a futures-oriented mindset, through the use of strategic foresight and futures thinking tools.” (Committee on the Future, Parliament of Finland, 2022, p. 86)
 - Finland’s Committee for the Future has guided the government’s foresight process, for example, by making resolutions that demand that the government make its foresight reports in two parts, with the first part based on cross-sectoral scenario work by the ministries, without political guidance.
 - Using science, technology, or innovation as a focus and starting place for foresight. Examples include:
 - The Austria National Council Committee for Research, Innovation and Digitalization
 - The Canada House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry and Technology

- The Chile Senate Committee on Challenges of the Future, Science, Technology, Knowledge, and Innovation
- Finland's Committee for the Future
- Paraguay's Lower Chamber's Special Committee for the Future for Mid- and Long-term Strategic Affairs (Sub-Committee of the Information and Communication Technology Committee)
- Poland's Committee on Digitization, Innovation and Modern Technologies
- The Thailand House of Representative Committee on Science, Technology, Research, and Innovation
- The Viet Nam Committee for Science, Technology and Environment

➤ **Accountability and Oversight**

- Monitoring the achievement of national goals and objectives, including shared global goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

The SDGs are the audacious goals growing out of the global shared vision in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015). Each nation commits to playing its part in achieving them. Most countries report annually on their progress toward or achievement of their goals. At least two parliamentary futures committees have some responsibility in their country's SDG reporting processes:

- The Philippine Senate Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation, and Futures Thinking handles all matters relating to the 2030 Agenda and the assessment of the country's performance in attaining the development goals.
- Finland's Committee for the Future is responsible for developing the parliament's response to the government's Agenda 2030 implementation report; this occurs once in each electoral cycle. The Committee also evaluated how emerging radical technologies can potentially promote achievement of the 17 SDGs and the related subgoals (Linturi, 2021).
- Overseeing the foresight capacities of the government, agencies, and officials, enhancing foresight systems and the foresight capabilities of officials.
 - The Finland Committee for the Future is promoting futures skills and competencies as cross-societal civic skills, included as part of the educational curricula and as part of the training of administration and decision makers. It has developed a pilot online training course in futures skills for decision makers.
 - The Finland Committee for the Future has frequently emphasized (e.g., in its opinions on government annual reports) the importance of pre- and post-regulatory impact analysis and the importance of enriching these analyses with foresight and risk assessment.
 - The Uruguay's Special Futures Committee is promoting anticipatory capacities and futures thinking in the parliament using a collaborative approach to collective knowledge creation, strengthening anticipatory capacities to "use the future" in the present, and enhancing its capacity to address the complexity, emergence, uncertainty, and novelty in the issues and problems the parliament faces.
 - The Philippine Senate Committee on Sustainable Development Goals, Innovation and Futures Thinking is tasked with spreading foresight in the government, including supporting lifelong learning and capacity building for government officials and employees in strategic foresight.
 - Estonia's Foresight Centre works to ensure that the scenarios they produce are considered in the drafting of bills and strategies. It organizes workshops for policymakers to use the Centre's scenarios to test the robustness of their plans and to consider alternative policy options.

References

- Anghel, S (2024). The Use of strategic foresight in Commission impact assessments: Existing Practices and the way forward (February). European Parliamentary Research Service.
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757801/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)757801_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/757801/EPRS_BRI(2024)757801_EN.pdf)
- Bezold, C. (1975). Congress and the future. *The Futurist* (June), 132-142.
- Bezold, C. (2009). Aspirational futures: Understanding threats, opportunities and visionary possibilities, *Journal of Futures Studies* 13(4) (May), 81-90.
- Bezold, C. (2018). The history and future of anticipatory democracy and foresight, *World Futures Review*, 11(4).
- Bezold, C. (2020). Aspirational Futures, updated for the Knowledge Base of Futures Studies.
<https://www.apf.org/product-page/description-the-knowledge-base-of-futures-studies-2020>
- Bezold, C., and Renfro, W. (1978). Citizens and legislative foresight. In Bezold, C. (ed.), *Anticipatory democracy: People in the politics of the future* (pp. 114-138). Random House.
- Boston, J., Bagnall, D. and Berry, A. (2019). *Foresight, insight and oversight: Enhancing long-term governance through better parliamentary scrutiny*. Kelburn: Institute for Governance and Policy Studies, Victoria University of Wellington.
- Boston, J., Bagnall, D. and Berry, A. (2020). Enhancing long-term governance Parliament's vital oversight role. *Policy Quarterly* 16(1) (February), pp.43- 52.
- Cahlink, G. (2019). Democrats may revive think tank that Gingrich killed, May 14, 2019, E&E News by Politico.
<https://www.eenews.net/articles/democrats-may-revive-think-tank-that-gingrich-killed/>
- Committee of the Future, Parliament of Finland (2022). *The World Summit of the Committees of the Future 2022*. Publication no. 3/22.
https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/valiokunnat/tulevaisuusvaliokunta/Documents/TUVJ_3_2022_WSCF22.pdf
- Dator, J. (1972). A dowager in a hurricane: Law and legal systems for the future. In Cingcade, L. (ed.). *Proceedings of the Conference on the Administration of Justice*, 6-78. Honolulu: Hawaii Supreme Court.
- Dator, J. (1978). Beyond a researchable doubt: Some alternative futures for corrections and the criminal justice system in the US." In Nanus, B. *The Future of Corrections*, 107-25. Washington, DC: National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice.
- Dator, J. (1994). The dancing judicial Zen masters: How many judges does it take to see the future? *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 46 (1), 59-70.
- Dator, J. (2000). When the courts are overgrown with grass: Futures of courts and law. *Futures* 32(1), 183-97.
- Dator, J. (2019). Judicial foresight as a part of governmental foresight. *World Futures Review* 11(3), 187-196.
- Dator, J., and Bezold, C. (eds.). (1981). *Judging the future*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Fuerth, L., and Faber, E. (2012). *Anticipatory governance practical upgrades: Equipping the executive branch to cope with increasing speed and complexity of major challenges*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press.
- Gardner, A., Barela, E., and Bontoux, L. *Applying Evaluation Thinking and Practice to Foresight Evaluation*, APF Foresight Evaluation Task Force, Association of Professional Futurists (APF), forthcoming.
- Gingrich, N. (1978). The Goals for Georgia Program. In Bezold, C. (ed.), *Anticipatory democracy: People in the politics of the future* (pp. 35-57). Random House.
- Greenblott, J.M., O'Farrell, T., Olson, R., and Burchard, B. (2019). Strategic foresight in the federal government: A survey of methods, resources, and institutional arrangements. *World Futures Review* 11(3), 245-266.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1946756718814908>. See also the interview summaries of this research listed as "Supplementary Materials" at Strategic foresight in the federal government: A survey of methods, resources and institutional arrangements. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6750717/>
- Heo, K., and Seo, Y. (2021) Anticipatory governance for newcomers: Lessons learned from the UK, the Netherlands, Finland, and Korea. *European Journal of Futures Research* 9:9.
- Inayatullah, S. (1991). Judicial foresight in the Hawaii judiciary. *Futures* 23 (8), 871-878.
- Inayatullah, S, ed. (1994). *Judicial foresight in the Hawaii judiciary: Proceedings of the Hawaii judicial foresight*

- congress, January 6-8, 1991. State of Hawaii, Hawaii Judiciary. <http://www.metafuture.org/Books/Hawaii-Futures-1991a.pdf>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2023). Bringing the future to the present: The democracy of the future, artificial intelligence and parliaments – Outcome Document. <https://www.ipu.org/event/second-world-summit-committees-future#event-sub-page-documents/>
- King, M. (1968) “Remaining Awake Through A Great Revolution.” Speech given at the Washington National Cathedral, March 31, 1968. <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/mlk?page=4&iframe=true> ; <https://cathedral.org/blog/today-in-cathedral-history-mlks-final-sunday-sermon/>
- Kinski, L., and Whiteside, K. (2023). Of parliament and presentism: Electoral representation and future generations in Germany. *Environmental Politics* 32(1), 21–42.
- Korean National Assembly Futures Institute (2021). *Future vision 2037: Transition from growth-oriented to matured society*. Research Report. <https://nafi.re.kr/english/research.do?mode=view&articleNo=3341&article.offset=0&articleLimit=10&srSearchVal=2037>
- Koskimaa, V., and Raunio, T. (2020). Encouraging a Longer Time Horizon: The committee for the future in the Finnish Eduskunta. *Journal of Legislative Studies* 26(2), 159-179.
- Koskimaa, V., and Raunio, T. (2023). Curtailing political short-termism in legislatures: A trade-off between influence and institutionalization? *European Journal of Futures Research* 11(8). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40309-023-00220-2>
- Koskimaa, V., and Raunio, T. (2024). Expanding anticipatory governance to legislatures: The emergence and global diffusion of legislature-based future institutions. *International Political Science Review* 45(2), 262-277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121221134995>
- Kurzweil, R. (2024). *The Singularity is Nearer: When We Merge with AI*, Viking.
- Lalot, F, Ahvenharju, S. Minkkinen, M., and Wensing, E., (2019) Aware of the future?: Development and validation of the futures consciousness scale. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, December 2019.
- Linturi, R. (2021). *Towards a better future: Technological opportunities and threats to the promotion of sustainable development*. (Publication no. 1/ 2021). Committee for the Future, Parliament of Finland. <https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/valiokunnat/tulevaisuusvaliokunta/julkaisut/Sivut/towards-a-better-future.aspx>
- McNally, P., and Inayatullah, S. (1988). The rights of robots: Technology, culture and law in the 21st century. *Futures* 20(2), 119–36.
- Millennium Project. *15 Global Challenges*, <https://www.millennium-project.org/projects/challenges/>
- Miller, R. (2018) *Transforming the future: Anticipation in the 21st century*, UNESCO Publishing. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000264644>
- Novaky, E., and Monda, E. (2015) Future Studies in Finland. *Society and Economy* 37(1), 31-48.
- Olson, R., and Dunagan, J. (2019). Introduction to special issue: Government foresight. *World Futures Review* 11 (3), 183-186.
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). *Strategic foresight for better policies: Building effective governance in the face of uncertain futures*. <https://www.oecd.org/strategic-foresight/ourwork/Strategic%20Foresight%20for%20Better%20Policies.pdf>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2021). *Foresight and anticipatory governance in practice: Lessons in effective foresight institutionalisation*. Strategic Foresight Unit, Office of the Secretary General. https://www.oecd.org/strategic-foresight/ourwork/Foresight_and_Anticipatory_Governance.pdf
- Ramos, J. (2014). Anticipatory governance traditions and trajectories for strategic design. *Journal of Futures Studies* 19(1). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288381021_Anticipatory_governance_Traditions_and_trajectories_for_strategic_design
- Ramos, J., Sweeney J., Peach, K., and Smith, L. (2019). *Our futures: by the people, for the people: How mass involvement in shaping the future can solve complex problems*. nesta,

- https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Our_futures_by_the_people_for_the_people_WEB_v5.pdf
- Rose, C. (1978). Building a Futures Network in Congress. In Bezold, C. (ed.). *Anticipatory democracy: People in the politics of the future* (pp. 105-133). Random House.
- School of International Futures (SOIF). (2021). *Features of effective systemic foresight in governments around the world*. (April). <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/609aa813d3bf7f2888d18fe3/effective-systemic-foresight-governments-report.pdf>
- Schultz, W., Bezold, C., and Monahan, P. (1993). *Reinventing Courts for the 21st Century: Designing a Vision Process - a guidebook to visioning and futures thinking within the court system*. National Center for State Courts.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271513654_Reinventing_Courts_for_the_21st_Century_Designing_a_Vision_Process_-_a_guidebook_to_visioning_and_futures_thinking_within_the_court_system
- Toffler, A. Introduction on Future-Conscious Politics, in Bezold, C. (ed.). *Anticipatory democracy: People in the politics of the future* (pp. xi-xxii). Random House.
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. No. A/RES/70/1.
<https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2018). *Foresight manual: Empowered futures for the 2030 Agenda*. Global Center for Public Service Excellence.
https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP_ForesightManual_2018.pdf.
- United Nations Futures Lab Network (UN Futures Lab). (2023). *UN strategic foresight guide*. (December).
<https://un-futureslab.org/media/uploads/2024/03/UN-Futures-Lab-2023-UN-Strategic-Foresight-Guide.pdf>