

Parliamentary System

A parliamentary system, also known as parliamentarianism (and parliamentarism in U.S. English), is distinguished by the executive branch of government being dependent on the direct or indirect support of the parliament, often expressed through a vote of confidence. Hence, there is no clear-cut separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches, leading to a lack of the checks and balances found in a presidential republic. Parliamentarianism is praised, relative to presidentialism, for its flexibility and responsiveness to the public. It is faulted for its tendency to sometimes lead to unstable governments, as in the German Weimar Republic and the French Fourth Republic.

Parliamentary systems usually have a clear differentiation between the *head of government* and the *head of state*, with the head of government being the prime minister or premier, and the head of state often being an appointed figurehead or hereditary monarch with only minor or ceremonial powers. However, some parliamentary systems also have an elected president with many reserve powers as the head of state, providing some balance to these systems (called a parliamentary republic). As a general rule, constitutional monarchies have parliamentary systems.

The term *parliamentary system* does not mean that a country is ruled by different parties in coalition with each other. Such multi-party arrangements are usually the product of an electoral system known as proportional representation. Parliamentary countries that use first past the post voting usually have governments composed of one party. The United Kingdom, for instance, had a coalition government during the Second World War. However, parliamentary systems in continental Europe do use proportional representation, and tend to produce election results in which no single party has a majority of seats.

There are broadly two forms of Parliamentary Democracies.

Westminster System or Westminster Models tend to be found in Commonwealth of Nations countries, although they are not universal

within and exclusive to Commonwealth Countries. These parliaments tend to have a more adversarial style of debate and the plenary session of parliament is relatively more important than committees. Some parliaments in this model are elected using "First Past the Post" electoral systems, (Canada, India and the UK), others using proportional representation, e.g. Ireland and New Zealand. The Australian House of Representatives is elected using the alternative or preferential vote while the Senate is elected using PRSTV. However even when proportional systems are used, the systems used tend to allow the voter to vote for a named candidate rather than a party list. This model does allow for a greater separation of powers than the Western European Model, although the extent of the separation of powers is nowhere near that of the United States.

Western European Parliamentary Model (e.g. Spain, Germany) tend to have a more consensual debating system, and have hemi-cyclical debating chambers. Proportional electoral systems are used, where there is more of a tendency to use party list systems than the Westminster Model legislatures. The committees of these Parliaments tend to be more important than the plenary chamber. This Model of Parliamentarism is sometimes called the West German Model- since it was used in the Parliament of the West German, later united Germany Parliament.

There also exists a Hybrid Model, drawing on both presidential systems and parliamentary systems, for example the French Fifth Republic. Much of Eastern Europe has adopted this model since the early 1990s.

Parliamentarianism may also be heeded for governance in local governments. An example is the city of Oslo, which has an executive council as a part of the parliamentary system. The council-manager system of municipal government used in some U.S. cities bears many similarities to a parliamentary system.