

**COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS:
THE CASES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the comparative features of the presidential and parliamentary system of government using United States of America and United Kingdom as case studies. The research explores the structure, functions and operational mechanizes of both system with emphasis on the relationship between the executive and legislative arms of Government, Leadership, Selection, Accountability, Separation of powers, and political stability. The presidential system practiced in the United States is characterised by a clear separation of powers, fixed tenure of office, and an independently elected president who serves as both Head of Stated and Head of Government. In contrast, the parliamentary system in the United Kingdom is based on the fusion of powers, collective responsibility, and the emergence of the prime minister from the legislation. Findings reveal that, while the presidential system promotes check and balances and executive independence, it may also leads to executive- legislative conflict and rigidity in Governance. On the other hand, the parliamentary system encourage cooperation between the executive and legislative and allows flexibility in leadership change, though it may produce instability in cases of weak coalition Governments.

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Introduction

Government systems determine how political authority is organized, exercised, and controlled in a state. Two of the most widely adopted democratic systems are the presidential system and the parliamentary system. These systems differ mainly in the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government.

In a presidential system, the executive branch is independent from the legislature, and the president serves as both head of state and head of government. In a parliamentary system, the executive is derived from the legislature and remains accountable to it.

The United States of America represents one of the most established presidential systems, while the United Kingdom is the classic example of a parliamentary system. Studying these two countries provides a clear understanding of how each system operates in practice.

REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Scholars of comparative politics have extensively studied presidential and parliamentary systems to understand their institutional dynamics.

According to political analysts, the major distinction between the two systems lies in the relationship between the executive and legislature. Presidential systems emphasize separation of powers, while parliamentary systems operate on a fusion of powers between these branches.

In the United States, the president is elected independently of Congress and serves a fixed term, giving the office a strong democratic mandate. The president also possesses significant powers such as vetoing legislation,

appointing officials, and commanding the armed forces.

Conversely, in the United Kingdom, the prime minister emerges from the majority party in Parliament and must maintain parliamentary support to remain in office. The prime minister can be removed through a vote of no confidence, making the executive more accountable to the legislature.

Another difference lies in constitutional structure. The United States operates under a written and codified constitution, whereas the United Kingdom has an unmodified constitution based on statutes, conventions, and legal precedents.

These differences influence the distribution of political power and the mechanisms of governance in both systems.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Presidential System

A presidential system is a form of government in which the president serves as both head of state and head of government and is elected independently of the legislature.

Key characteristics include:

1. **Separation of Powers:-** It is a constitutional principle dividing government responsibilities into three distinct branches: legislative (make laws), executive (enforces laws), and Judiciary (interprets laws) to prevent concentration of power.
2. **Fixed tenure of the executive:-** A fixed tenure of the executive common in presidential systems (e.g. 4 – year terms in the USA), ensures

stability, continuity, and policy planning by preventing easy removal of the head of State, usually by impeachment.

3. **Independent election of the president:-** This refers to the process in a presidential system where the president is elected separately from the legislative by the people or through an electoral body, rather than being chosen by parliament
4. **Strong checks and balances:-** This refers to a political system in which the powers of Government are carefully divided among different branches so that no single branch becomes too powerful. Each branch has the authority to limit, supervise, or restrain the actions of the other. The United States is the most prominent example of this system.

Parliamentary System

A parliamentary system is a form of government where the executive branch derives its authority from the legislature and is accountable to it.

Key characteristics include:

- i. **Fusion of executive and legislative powers:-** The fusion of powers is a principle of Government where the executive and legislative arms are closely connected and may share members or functions.
- ii. **Prime minister as head of government:-** A prime minister is the head of Government in parliamentary system, responsible for leading the cabinet, setting policy, and overseeing day – to – day operations.

- iii. **Executive drawn from the legislature:-** It is the defining feature of a parliamentary system of Government, where the head of Government (Prime Minister) and cabinet ministers are sitting members of parliament.
- iv. **Possibility of removal through a vote of no confidence:-** A vote of no confidence is a parliamentary mechanism used to test whether a leader or government still retains the supports of the legislatures. It is also a significant tool that can lead to the resignation of government or prime minister and cabinet. The United Kingdom represents the classic model of parliamentary democracy.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED STATES AND UNITED KINGDOM

A. Structure of the Executive

United States

- a. **The president is both head of state and head of government:-** In a presidential system, such as Nigeria or the United States, the president holds the combined roles of head of State (ceremonial leader, representative of national Unity) and head of Government (chief executive overseeing the administrative, ministries, and policy implementation)
- b. **The president is elected through an electoral college system:-** The electoral college is the system the United States uses to elect the president and vice president.

- c. **The executive branch is separate from the legislature:-** The separation of the executive branch from the legislature is a foundational principle of democracy known as the separation of powers. While the legislature makes laws, the executive branch (such as the president and agencies) is tasked with enforcing and administering them.

United Kingdom

- a. **The monarch serves as ceremonial head of state, while the prime minister is head of government:-** The monarch acts as head of state. Performing symbolic functions, while the prime minister leads the government, holding executive power and managing day-to-day administration.
- b. **The prime minister is the leader of the majority party in Parliament:-** The prime minister is typically the in parliament. Leader of the party that wins the most seats at a general election.
- c. **The executive is drawn from parliament:-** In the parliamentary system, the executive which includes the prime minister and the cabinet, is drawn from the members of the legislature. This structure create a “fusion of power” where the government must maintain the confidence of parliament to remain in office.

United Kingdom

The system operates under fusion of powers because the prime minister and cabinet members are part of Parliament. The government depends

on parliamentary support to remain in power.

B. Tenure of Office

United States

The president serves a fixed four-year term and can only be removed through impeachment.

United Kingdom

The prime minister remains in office as long as he or she maintains the confidence of the House of Commons.

C. Legislative Structure

United States

The legislature is Congress, consisting of: The Senate and House of Representatives

Both chambers have significant powers and can check the president’s authority.

United Kingdom

The legislature is Parliament, consisting of House of Commons and House of Lords

However, the House of Commons holds the most political power.

D. Checks and Balances

United States

The presidential system relies heavily on checks and balances. Congress can block presidential policies, while the president can veto legislation.

United Kingdom

Checks and balances are weaker because the executive typically controls a majority in Parliament, giving the government strong legislative influence.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TWO SYSTEMS

Despite their differences, the United States and United Kingdom share some similarities:

Both are democratic systems with regular elections:- Both presidential and parliamentary system functions as demarcation forms of Government that utilizes regular elections to establish legitimacy.

Both operate bicameral legislatures:- Bicameral legislatures, which consist of two separate house of chamber. Bicameralism is a type of legislatures that is divided in to two separate assemblies, or houses known as a bicameral legislature.

Both maintain independent judicial systems:- Both systems maintain as independent judiciary, acting as a crucial third arm of government meant to operate free from legislature. or executive branches may overlap in a parliamentary system.

Both guarantee fundamental rights and civil liberties:- Both presidential and parliamentary systems are designed to protect fundamental rights and civil liberties through constitutional framework.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Advantages of Presidential System

Clear separation of powers:- The separate powers is a constitutional doctrine that divides government in to three distinct, independent branches – legislative (Law making), executive (Law – enforcing), and judiciary (Law – interpreting) to prevent the concentration of powers

Strong checks and balances:- Principle of government under which separate branches are

empowered to prevent actions by other branches.

Stable executive tenure:- This ensures that the president serves a fixed term (typically 4-6 year), providing stability and policy continuity.

Disadvantages of Presidential System

Possibility of executive-legislative deadlock:- The presidential system is structured to create a strict separation of powers, which frequently leads to executive – legislative deadlock), particularly when the president and the majority of legislative belong to opposing parties.

Difficulty removing ineffective leaders:- The difficulty removing an ineffective or “bad” leader is a central challenge in presidential systems, often referred to as the “bad” leader while democracy provides mechanisms for removal these systems are intentionally designed with high threshold for stability, making it hard to remove a leader.

Advantages of Parliamentary System

- a. **Greater executive accountability:-** A parliamentary system of government offers greater executive accountability because the executive (prime Minister and cabinet) is directly drawn from, and remains legally responsible to the legislature
- b. **Faster policy implementation:-** A parliamentary system offer faster policy implementation primarily through the fusion of powers, where the executive branch (prime minister

and cabinet) is drawn from and accountable to the legislative branch (parliaments)

c. Flexibility in leadership change:-

The parliamentary system offers significant advantages in flexibility regarding leadership changes, primarily because the executive branch (prime minister and cabinet) relies on the ongoing confidence of the legislature

The United States model promotes stability through fixed executive terms and strong constitutional limits. In contrast, the United Kingdom system allows for greater flexibility and political accountability because the executive depends on parliamentary confidence.

Ultimately, neither system is universally superior. The effectiveness of a governmental system depends largely on the political culture, constitutional traditions, and institutional development of each country.

Disadvantages of Parliamentary System

i. Possibility of excessive executive dominance:-

The parliamentary system is designed for efficiency and harmony between the executive and legislative branches, but this same fusion of powers often results in excessive executive dominance, sometimes described as “cabinet dictatorship”

ii. Instability in coalition

governments:- The primary disadvantage of coalition Government in a parliamentary system revolves around structural instability, policy inconsistency, and weak governance.

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CONCLUSION

The comparative study of the presidential system in the United States and the parliamentary system in the United Kingdom highlights the fundamental differences in democratic governance. The presidential system emphasizes separation of powers and institutional checks, while the parliamentary system prioritizes cooperation between the executive and legislature.