

## Bicameral legislatures in the World

Nantapol Khaimuk

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In politics, the legislature is a branch of a government that passes, amends, and repeals laws. Also known as the parliament or congress, the legislature can comprise of one or more chambers that debate and vote on bills. A single chamber legislature is called a unicameral while a bicameral legislature has two houses: the lower house and the upper house.

As there are many nations in the world that use bicameral legislatures, we take for example how the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, and Thailand incorporate this system into their political structures.

The British Parliament is known as “the mother of parliaments” because it has set the standards for many democracies in the world. The Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is a bicameral legislature but adds The Monarch (The Queen) as the third component of the legislature. The upper house is known as the House of Lords and the lower house, the House of Commons. The House of Lords contains two types of members: the Lords Spiritual (senior bishops of the Church of England) and the Lords Temporal (members of the Peerage- the British nobility). Of the 763 members of the House of Lords, 26 seats are held by the Lords Spiritual by virtue of their ecclesiastical role in the Church of England while 92 members are hereditary peers. They are appointed by the Queen upon the advice of the Prime Minister. The House of Commons consists of 650 Members of Parliament (MPs) who are elected by the people. Legislative functions of MPs are to initiate bills that concern national taxation or public funds and are immune to amendments in the House of Lords. The House of Lords debates legislation and has power to amend or reject bills. However, Parliament Acts have immensely curtailed the power of the Lords to reject bills and a money bill cannot be delayed for more than one month. Certain types of bills may be presented for Royal Assent without the consent of the House of Lords. Impeachment proceedings used to be carried out by the House of Lords until the Constitutional Reform Act 2005 which separated judicial functions to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom.

The United States has a bicameral legislature known as the Congress and consists of the House of Representatives (lower house) and the Senate (upper house). Both houses combined, the Congress has a total of 535 members directly elected by the people. The 435 seats available in the House of Representatives is determined by population according to each state. On the other hand, the 100 seats in the Senate are a result of allowing 2 senators for each of the 50 states regardless of population. The House of Representatives and the Senate are indispensable in the legislative process as consent from both houses are required for enactment. However, there are unique powers for each house. The House of Representatives initiates revenue-raising bills and initiates impeachment cases while the Senate ratifies treaties and approves presidential appointments.

Japan’s bicameral legislature is called the National Diet and is composed of the House of Representatives (lower house) and the House of Councillors (upper house) who are directly elected by the people. The House of Representatives consists of 480 members of which 300 are elected from single seat constituencies while the remaining 180 are elected from eleven separate electoral blocs under the party list system of proportional representation. The voting system used to elect members of the lower house is a parallel system in contrast to a proportional representation. The House of Councillors has 242 seats of which 146 members are elected from 47 prefectural constituencies while the remaining 96 are elected by open list proportional representation. The National Diet is regarded

as the highest organ of state power and is the sole law-making organ of the State. The Diet's roles are to make laws and approve the annual national budget that the government submits and the approval of treaties. Additionally, it may also initiate draft constitutional amendments that if approved, must be presented to the people in a referendum. The House of Representatives is given more power than the House of Councilors as it is able to push through any bill as long as it has a two-thirds majority. As for treaties, The House of Representatives also has higher power to delay the passage but not block the legislation.

The Parliament of Thailand or the National Assembly represents the bicameral legislature of the government of Thailand consisting of the House of Representatives (lower house) and the Senate (upper house). In total, the Assembly has 650 members of which 576 Members of Parliament (MPs) and 76 Senators are elected while 74 Senators are chosen through party selection. The Senate is non-partisan meaning that none of the members are officially representing a political party. Elected members from the party list are chosen from the academic sector, the public sector, the private sector, the professional sector, and other sectors. The House of Representatives, on the other hand, has 375 seats from single constituency elections and 125 seats from proportional representation, which are directly elected by the people with. Bills are first presented to the House of Representatives for debate, amendment, and vote. If passed, the bill shall then be submitted to the Senate for further consideration within 60 days (30 days for money bills). If the Senate disagrees and amends a bill, it will be returned to the House of Representatives for approval. If the National Assembly approves the bill, an organic bill shall be, prior to its presentation to the King for signature, referred to the Constitutional Court for determining its constitutionality. Under section 154 of the 2007 Constitution of Thailand, any bill that has been approved by the National Assembly can be scrutinized for constitutionality. If members of the House of Representatives, senators, members of both houses of not less than one tenth of the total number of the existing members of both houses, or the Prime Minister are of the opinion that the said bill contains provisions that are contrary or inconsistent with this Constitution, they shall refer such opinion to the Constitutional Court for decision. The Prime Minister shall then be able to present it to the King for signature under section 150.

The notion behind a bicameral legislature was to have different selection methods of the representatives of territorial units such as districts, states, or provinces, in each house. In other words, the lower house would be represented by population while the upper house would be represented equally based on the number of territorial units. There are two points of view related to a bicameral legislature: proponents see that the checks and balances help block out any laws that were not well considered while opponents believe that it makes political reforms harder to pass. In all, the discussion of the above-mentioned bicameral legislatures demonstrate the separation of powers or in other words, a system of checks and balances that allows each branch of a government to amend or veto acts of another branch so as to prevent any one branch from exerting too much power.