

Legislatures



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Legislatures

- The roots of the word *legislature* are the Latin words *legis*, meaning “**law**,” and *latio*, “**bringing or proposing**.”
- **Legislatures** are *structures in which representatives of the people discuss, assess, and enact public policies*.
- The root of the name of the first modern legislature, the **British Parliament**, suggests this crucial function
- The French word *parler* means “**to talk**.”
- Most early legislatures were created to provide advice to the political executive, typically a monarch, and to represent politically relevant groups.

Functions of legislature

- **Enacting legislation:** legislatures draft, modify, and then ratify public policy in the form of legislation.
- **Representing the citizenry:** legislature represents the opinions and interests of the citizenry.
- **Overseeing the executive:** in general, the legislature is responsible for overseeing the political executive's actions.
- **Judicial:** may perform certain judicial functions like removing the president in USA.
- **Control over the budget**

Functions of legislature

- **Electoral:** in some countries, the legislature elects the president.
- **Amendment of the constitution:** in democracy, the power to amend the constitution rest with the legislature.

Legislative Structures

- Based on number, legislative of a country can be two types:
 - ▣ **Bicameral:** has two houses; usually first chamber is called lower house and the second chamber is called upper house. Most of the countries have bicameral system such as USA, England.
 - ▣ **Unicameral:** has one chamber; for example, Bangladesh, Turkey have unicameral system.

Bicameral or unicameral?

- Arguments in favour of bicameralism:
 - ▣ The **second chamber checks the despotism** of the first chamber.
 - ▣ Second **chamber serves as a check upon hasty, rash and ill-considered** legislations.
 - ▣ For giving **representation to special interests/classes**.
 - ▣ The second chamber **gives representation to units in federation**.
 - ▣ Promote **independence of the executive better**.

Bicameral or unicameral?

- Arguments in favour of unicameralism:
 - ▣ Formulation of law and **policies can be lengthy in bicameralism.**
 - ▣ The **second chamber can be superfluous if it just agrees with the first chamber.**
 - ▣ **Difficulties in organizing a second chamber.**
 - ▣ Having a **second chamber can be costly.**
 - ▣ **Public opinions can be represented by one chamber as well.**

Bangladesh

- The legislative body of Bangladesh is known as *Jatiya Sangsad* (National Parliament).
- The elected occupants are called members of parliament or MPs.
- The current parliament of Bangladesh contains 350 seats, including 50 seats reserved for women.
- First past the post for 300 seats, 50 seats reserved for women distributed by proportional representation.
- A first-past-the-post (winner takes all) electoral system is one in which voters indicate on a ballot the candidate of their choice, and the candidate who receives the most votes wins.
- Elections are held every five years unless the parliament is dissolved before that time.

Bangladesh

- Speaker and Deputy Speaker usually lead the parliament.
- The leader of the House is elected from ruling party and the leader of the opposition is elected from the opposition party/parties.
- Article 70 of the Constitution makes floor crossing illegal. Members engaging in floor crossing lose their membership.
- Floor crossing is described in the Constitution as:
 - ▣ Resignation from the political party that nominated the member,
 - ▣ Voting against the nominating party, or
 - ▣ Abstaining from voting, either by abstention or absence, against the directive of the party Whip.

Suggested readings

- Danziger, J. N., & Smith, C. A. (2016). *Understanding the political world: A comparative introduction to political science*. Boston :Pearson, pp. 142-150.
- Agarwal, R. C. (2014). *Political Theory: Principles of Political Science* (New Delhi: S. Chand and Company Limited). (Chapter 22).

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