

Research paper on englands political system parliamentary democracy

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England is a constituent country of the larger United Kingdom. The other countries that constitute the United Kingdom include Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The latter three are mere devolved administrations of the larger United Kingdom. This paper would, however, limit itself to England which is fully under the charge of the United Kingdom led by the institution of the Monarch. It should be noted that the Monarchical system of governance in England essentially rests within the Parliamentary system of governance bases on the Westminster model. England, therefore, does not practice absolute Monarchical systems but rather practices a parliamentary monarchical government that essentially passes on as a parliamentary system of government.

System of government

The system of government is the parliamentary based on the Westminster Model. Under this system, the monarch is the head of state while the government is headed by the Prime Minister, who must be a Member of Parliament. The government is divided into three independent and autonomous arms. These are the executive led by the office of the Prime Minister, the legislature which is bicameral in nature and is composed of the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Finally, third arm of government is the judiciary which is led by the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom. This court acts as the final arbiter for both civil and criminal cases.

The functions of the three arms of government are distinct and independent from each other. The executive is charged with the execution of policies hence the name, executive. They implement and execute government

policies and laws that have already been formulated. As such, the executive is squarely responsible for service delivery that any government functionary ought to dispense. The executive is led by the Prime Minister who is essentially the first one among equals in the cabinet. He draws his cabinet, which is appointed by the Crown, from Parliament that is, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The dual membership of cabinet members in both Parliament and the Executive essentially makes ministers accountable to Parliament. This perhaps attests to the Westminster model that is based on the parliamentary system of government. The executive through the cabinet is charged with the execution of policy and the actual implementation at the grassroots level.

The Cabinet essentially works on a collective responsibility model where government policy has to be passed through the office of the cabinet. In the addition, cabinet and its members are largely political officers of the government. The actual execution and implementation of government policy is through the civil service based on the departments that are loosely referred to as ministries in England. The Ministers, often called the secretaries to cabinet constitute the political leadership of the ministries. As such, they are in charge of the policy implementation process and would assume political responsibility, which at times amounts to political liability.

However, it is the civil service relevant to respective ministries that execute policies. The civil office in each ministry is led by the permanent secretary answerable to both the minister in charge of the ministry and the civil service office. It is noteworthy that while the ministers hold office in as long

as their political parties or coalitions are in power, the civil service is essentially non partisan officers of the state. They consequently serve on a permanent basis irrespective of the political party in power.

Parliament in England is bicameral in nature. This essentially implies that the legislature is composed of two houses, namely, the House of the Lords and the House of Commons. No law specifies the superiority or inferiority of either of the houses. However, from the powers granted to the respective houses and the mode of operations, one would suffice to say that the House of Commons is superior to the House of Lords. In addition, membership to the House of Commons is largely elective with a few nominative seats, as opposed to membership into the House of Lords which is rather a blend of appointments and heredity. This scenario gives more legitimacy to the former house as opposed to the latter especially in the context of legislative functioning. In political parlance, the argument propounded on legitimacy resonates on the fact that the house whose membership is based on elections represents the aspirations and touch of the citizenry and hence more legitimate.

The House of Commons is composed of members representing constituencies in the United Kingdom. The members are elected in general elections for a term of five year terms. Currently, House of Commons has six hundred and fifty constituencies translating into six hundred and fifty elected members of parliament. The electoral system is based on the first past the post model. This essentially implies that the candidate with the majority number of votes in a vote or election is declared the winner of the election. It

should be note that the total number of members in the House of Commons usually is a factor to the nominee to the office of Prime Minister. This is because the Crown nominates the leader of the party with majority members in the House of Commons to the office of Prime Minister. This practice essentially strengthens the parliamentary system of governance in England. Instances occur where the Prime Minister's party does not have majority membership in the House of Commons. This threatens to escalate into a legal-political crisis. The remedy lies in the establishment of a coalition government to address the deficit in numbers. The situation in which the leading party lacks majority membership is referred to as hung parliaments or governments. The legislative roles of the House of Commons include the formulation of laws usually in the form of bills which become laws upon assent by the Crown. Further, it should be appreciated that it is only the House of Commons that have jurisdiction on a number of legislative areas notably monetary bills.

The House of Lords up to recently, as late as 2004, had judicial powers and acted as the final arbiter in both criminal and civil matters. This was in appreciation of the traditional common law legal system. However, the Constitutional Reform Act, 2005, essentially deprived the House of Lords their judicial functions and vested the same in the newly created Supreme Court of the United Kingdom. The former has, therefore, been left to discharge legislative functions in an auxiliary capacity to the House of Commons. The House of Lords has powers to review legislation usually arising from the House of Commons. In addition, they have the powers to

propose amendments and in some cases temporarily veto a proposed bill in accordance with the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949. Case in point is the prohibition for the House to veto monetary bills. Membership into the House of Lords is based on two models, the Lords Temporal and the Lords Spiritual. The former membership refers to the appointed members who are essentially life peers and ninety two other life peers of hereditary seats. The latter membership refers to the Church of England representatives who are mostly bishops.

The judiciary essentially interprets the law and administers justice. It is hierarchically structured with original and appellate jurisdiction outlined for the various courts. However, since the Constitutional Reform Act of 2005, the judiciary is led by the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom. Under the Supreme Court, is the Court of Appeal, The High Court and the Crown Court. Interestingly, England and the larger commonwealth countries apply a body of law based on the common laws and judicial precedents. The judiciary performs its mandate independently. In fact, appointment into judicial officers is independently run through the judicial service system.

Criticism and Strengths

The parliamentary system in England essentially makes the executive accountable and answerable to Parliament. This has sufficed to create adequate checks and balances. The executive is held into account during parliamentary sessions and interrogation. In addition, the judiciary has the mandate to defend the constitution of the United Kingdom and interpret the law in consonance with the Constitution. It should be appreciated that the

constitution of England is not necessarily documented in one piece of law, rather, it is scattered in numerous bodies of law that the judiciary are charged with interpreting. The magna charter is a suitable example of the scattered pieces of legislation that constitute the constitution of England. It should be noted, however, that the interconnection between the executive and parliament threatens to erode the independence of either institutions.

Comparison to the United States of America

The English system is parliamentary based on the Westminster model while the United States System is a pure presidential system. The former recognizes the institution of the monarchy and the colossal role parliament plays in constituting the executive. The latter, however, uses its parliament, usually called Congress for purely legislative purposes. Further, the United States of America has federal governments with executive power vested on the governors; this is alien to England.

Conclusion

The English system of governance is parliamentary with the political parties playing a pivotal role in a multiparty system of governance. Overall, the English system embraces the rule of law, separation of powers and parliamentary democracy.

References

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