

Comparison of
democracy and
effectiveness:
canada's
parliamentary system
and us p...



“ Political institutions that disperse power make the political system more democratic, but make it harder for governments to be effective.” Critically assess this statement in relation to at least two countries, drawing on one or more of the following institutional choices: presidential vs. parliamentary system, federal vs. unitary system, proportional vs. majoritarian electoral system.

The two democratic governmental systems, presidential and parliamentary systems have often been disputed as to which is more democratic and effective. In this essay, I will be comparing Canada’s Westminster parliamentary system and the United States’ presidential system to aid in proving that political institution’s disperse of power makes the political system more democratic and effective. These two countries were chosen as they have close cultural ties, similar plurality electoral system, and similar political orientation.

Bureaucracy and policy making

Parliamentary and presidential systems each have their own set of consequences. A main institutional consequence which both systems share is the bureaucracy’s size and its effectiveness. In the American system, the executive, legislature and judiciary are separated and equal, following the “ separation of powers” notion. The notion tends to create a broadly divided bureaucracy with formal restrictions. Thus, forming an ineffective system as a result of an ‘ ideal bureaucracy’. The legislature would rather pass bills that are supported by the majority of electorates, thus compromising the systems effectiveness (Moe and Caldwell 1994, 175). Contrarily, Presidents would

rather an effective bureaucracy that enables quick policymaking (Moe and Caldwell 1994, 175-176). Unfortunately, the legislature has set up the bureaucracy. Thus, creating a complicated relationship as it can result in a slow and ineffective policymaking process. Consequently, causing internal strife between the President and the legislature. However, the parliamentary system evades this issue as the Prime Minister is part of the legislature. The Westminster parliamentary system tends to create a majority government. Thus, enabling the Prime Minister to pass a bill efficiently and effectively as she/he can depend upon their party members to vote in support (Moe and Caldwell 1994, 177). Through the parliamentary system, the type of bureaucracy is subjected to the leader. Thus, allowing the party's policies to pass and focus on specific issues (Moe and Caldwell 1994, 177). I opine that having a smaller bureaucracy that enables quick and effective policymaking is better than a system that could result in internal friction between different levels of government.

The issue of the leader's power...The separation of powers system is set in place to act as a check and balance mechanism on the power of the leader. Thus, Congress and the Senate holding a large amount of power (Lijphart 1992, 15) . In the Canadian system, the Prime Minister has a lot more power in her/his position as she/he is a part of the legislature (Lijphart 1992, 31) . I take the stance that the advantage of efficiently passing policies outweighs the value of additional security.

Responsible government against separation of powers

The idea of a responsible government is one in which the executive is accountable for its actions to an elected legislature. In the context of Canada's responsible government, the constitution states that the Queen is the head and accountable for the whole system. The legislature has to be responsible to the President and the electorates. Next to the Queen and the legislature, the responsibility falls upon the Prime Minister. As such, the judiciary is responsible to the legislature to enforce laws. Thus, it is loyal to the crown. Also, if the Prime Minister loses the confidence of the house the parliament can be suspended. The public will not re-elect its government if they perceive that the legislature did not carry its responsibility to its people. Other than being accountable to the citizens, the responsible government has its advantages and allows for the varying levels to be accountable for one another (Leuprecht and Russell 2011, 39). Additionally, the Canadian system has an intrinsic connection between the executive and the legislative as it is evident that the Prime Minister is an elected member of Parliament, she/he sits in the house, and is a key position in the decision making process. Similarly, the American system is tripartite having the executive (President), the legislature made up of Senate and Congress, and the judiciary. However, the difference is that in the US, the executive comprises of only the President. They have a cabinet that includes the various secretaries (Ministers) but they do not constitute an executive (Leuprecht and Russell 2011, 39). As such, in times of critical matters, the sole decision responsibility belongs to just one person.

The parliamentary system has both the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. The Cabinet is made up of Ministers who are Members of Parliament (MP). Each
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MP is designated a jurisdiction to be in-charge of, by the Prime Minister.

Thus, Cabinets allow the executive to keep track of the various policy matters which would allow the Prime Minister to focus on urgent matters.

The legislature's level of power varies between the American presidential and the Canadian parliamentary systems. Both the US and Canada have a House of Commons/Representatives and a Senate. However, the functions of a Senate is not the same between the two systems. The Canadian Senate is not an exceedingly powerful body as Senators are appointed instead of elected. Furthermore, there have been calls in Canada for either abolition or major reform of the Senate. Currently, the main role of the Senate is to provide "sober, second thought". However, they are not allowed to vote against most government policies.

Unlike Canada, the American senate is elected, thus, holding more power. The Senate can vote on bills and have the support of 60 percent of Senate to pass to the Congress to be voted on (Makarenko 2007). There have been many times where bills enter the senate but fail to exit due to the high threshold. The advantage of a powerful Senate is that it acts as a check on the Congress and President, and adds to the bureaucratic structure that allows for the greater scrutiny of bills. However, as a disadvantage, the American senate increases the time it takes to pass a bill and sometimes prevents the President from passing policies that were promised.

A major distinction between the two systems is that the executive, legislature and judiciary are all separate entities in the American system. Each of them would act as a check on each other. Thus, if one entity is

becoming too powerful, the veto system can be used to balance its power across the three entities (Liphart 1992, 15). In the American system, for a bill to pass, the bill has to be signed off by the President (Moe and Caldwell 1994, 175). Otherwise, the bill can be vetoed by the President. However, Congress can overturn the veto with a two-thirds majority vote in Congress. Similarly, the President has the power to pass a bill through executive order if the legislature has voted against it. For example, Barack Obama threatened the use of executive order on the gun control bills if Congress did not pass the regulations he proposed (Mccarthy 2016). An advantage of the executive order is that it checks the power of the Congress, and enables the President to pass policies that she/he deems are important. However, a disadvantage of the executive order is that it gives the President too much power. Thus, the overuse of executive order can lead to an autocracy instead of a democracy. In contrast to the Parliamentary system, the Prime Minister does not hold this power. In a majority government, an executive order is not necessary as in most cases, the bills she/he wants will be passed. I believe that the responsible government is a more effective and stable system. Its union between the levels of government allows effective policymaking and increased accountability. Although the American system, does have strengths such as better scrutiny on bills, the separation of powers creates internal instability and an ineffective system in policymaking.

Elections

Another key distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems is the electoral policy. The American presidential system allows its voters to vote for their Senator, Representative, and President. This can be deemed <https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-democracy-and-effectiveness-canadas-parliamentary-system-and-us-presidential-system/>

more democratic as citizens are given the prerogative to choose the leader and the legislature (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997, 453). However, it raises the concern of a popular candidate being selected instead of one that is best suited for the job.

In contrast to the Canadian system, the possibility of different political parties being in charge of different entities can be viewed as both a strength and weakness of the American system (Linz 1990, 53). For instance, in the current 116th United States Congress, the Senate has a majority of Republicans, the House of Representatives has a majority of Democrats and President Donald Trump is a Republican. Since 2010, there have been countless examples proving that the system is inefficient, with Congress frequently stalling social and economic policies that the President has wanted to pass. This is contentiously the most substantial flaw of the separation of powers system as progress would not be made if the executive and legislature are not willing to compromise.

The Canadian system is exempt from the above-mentioned issue as the Prime Minister is not directly elected. Rather, voters would elect a member of parliament in each riding. The party who wins the most seats will then become the leading party and its leader would become the Prime Minister, thus, making her/him a part of the legislature. However, the Canadian system is not impeccable and arguments that not having a direct vote for the leader is undemocratic. Despite the validity of the argument, I opine that efficiency and productivity reaped is a larger advantage for the Canadian system.

Party discipline

The issue of party discipline raises another crucial difference to consider between the American and Canadian systems. Essentially, party discipline means the ability of a party leader to gain support from her/his party members (Krehbiel 2000, 212). Due to the responsible government system, which was created in support of strong parties, the Canadians have a strong party discipline. In the Canadian parliamentary system, to avoid the Prime Minister from losing the confidence of the House, members of parliament have to vote with their party. Party discipline is essential as the opposing parties increasingly scrutinise and often vote against the government's policies (Lemco 1988, 283-284). Thus, for a party in leadership to be effective, unity and strong support for their leader have to be present (Lemco 1988, 283-284). Furthermore, the electoral system constructs a strong party structure as the electorate often vote for the party rather than the leader of the party. Thus, the party's manifesto is crucial as citizens would vote in support of a party's pursuit of policies. Hence, party leaders and members tend to put the party in front of their personal views, thus allowing for optimal policymaking (Lemco 1988, 287).

Contrary to the Canadian parliamentary system, the American presidential system sometimes creates party splits, thus resulting in weak party discipline. Currently, the Republicans and Democrats have a very strong party discipline which has led to increased polarisation on issues and hostility towards each other. This has resulted in both parties having increased party discipline. However, party discipline is of less significance in the American system as separate elections are held between the President

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and the legislature. Although parties have to be loyal to the President for the effectiveness of the system, compromise has to be found between the parties (Moe and Caldwell 1994, 175). Although compromise is important in democratic governance, an increasing compromise might pose a risk of parties deviating from their manifesto.

In conclusion, I believe that the Parliamentary system is more democratic and effective as compared to the Presidential system. The main negative point of the US system is the separation of powers as it forms a bureaucracy. Thus, causing an inefficient policymaking process. Parliamentary systems are superior due to the notion of responsible government as it ensures that each entity of government is responsible for each other. Hence, allowing an effective, democratic and stable system.

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