

# Britain and us a comparative



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For my comparative essay of political systems in the contemporary context I have chosen the US republican system and the British constitutional Westminster system. Throughout the essay I will compare and contrast the different political systems, how they interact with one another and how the systems are significant in the modern day context of world politics.

America, a former colony of Great Britain, won its war of independence in the year of 1776 and therefore was independent from Britain in terms of internal politics and overseas policies initiated into America republic, with the famous quote 'no tax without representation'. From then on America became a republican state and now is arguably the most powerful state in the world in terms of military power, economic power and political power. It is necessary now to give a brief description of the American political system before we relate it to that of Britain and contemporary world politics. America is a federal democratic system made up of three bodies known as the pillars of American politics. The three branches present in the American political sphere are the executive branch, the legislative branch and the judicial branch. The executive branch is responsible for issues such as proposing legislation, forming a cabinet and developing internal and foreign policies. The legislative is responsible mainly for finalizing many of the propositions coming out of the executive branch, and therefore wields much of the power within American politics. The judicial branch is responsible for legislative issues with the power to review legislation passed and acts as a guardian over the civil rights of citizens. As similar within the Westminster system, there is a lower and upper house but this is notably where there is a large contrast between the two systems, as the American upper house holds much

more significance in terms of power within the political system. As previously mentioned the political system consists of a lower and upper house, the lower house being the House of Representatives and the upper being the senate. The house of representatives is largely responsible for internal issues of legislation, budgetary issues such as allocation and foreign policy, whereas the upper house, known as the senate initiates and regulates much of the what is proposed by the lower house, therefore acts as a balance of power within the American political sphere.

The American electoral system should be mentioned in order to compare and contrast to that of Britain, although not into too much detail. Ultimately, party delegates are elected by citizens by popular vote using the voting system of proportional representation, where delegates need a majority vote to become a party delegate. The party delegates are then responsible for the procedure of presidential elections where the delegates vote for who will be the party leader to be legitimate for a presidential candidate. Through this system, it is regarded that an indirect electoral process is used in terms of the presidential elections as the average citizen is not directly responsible in terms of the determining the outcome. Once the presidential candidate is initiated it is ultimately down to the Electoral College system, a system where the people contained within it are representatives of individual states and have the final vote of determining the winner, a system not used within Britain. As for the parties themselves, there are two main predominant ones, that of the Democrats and that of the Republicans, one being left centrist (Democrats) and one being right centrist (Republicans), both arguably contrast slightly and lean in a similar direction in terms of policy

implementation leading to a stable system of consistent politics within America. A final note on America contains that the fact there is a post independence written constitution as to determine how the country should be run internally, as with most established republics, also an element of American politics not present within the British system.

A brief description of the British system will now be confronted in order to begin the process of comparing and contrasting the two systems as a whole. Within Britain there are three branches upon which consist of the executive branch, the legislative branch and the judiciary branch which is very similar to that of America. Within the Westminster system the executive branch is made up of ministers who run the country and are responsible for proposing legislation, developing foreign and internal policies and is headed by the Prime Minister, who chooses which ministers compose the cabinet. The legislative branch is the elected body upon which passes laws that are proposed from the executive branch, it should be mentioned that all government ministers are members of the legislative branch. Finally there is the judiciary branch upon which ensures that laws that are passed, are obeyed and has the power to review laws and works independently of the government and headed by a senior minister. The Supreme Court is the highest court within the political system of Great Britain.

The British parliamentary system is bicameral meaning, there two chambers present, that being the lower house or the House of Commons and the upper house which is the House of Lords. The house of commons consists of 650 seats which are occupied MPs who meet daily for about half the weeks of the year, where opposition parties have a opportunity to challenge the current

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governments policies and general governing of the nation and the political nature is based around transparency and the public sphere. Those who make up the executive branch are those who attend the House of Commons meetings where, the majority of the time the PM and his cabinet and members of parliament will attend the proceedings, which is chaired by a speaker who monitors the meetings and keeps order. The House of Commons is the house with the most authority within British politics. The House of Lords is the more exclusive house but does not possess the ultimate political authority and largely is based on noble tradition and status. It acts as a check on the government's activities and has the ability to revise legislation that has been passed through the House of Commons but essentially cannot block the will of the House of Commons. Like mentioned before, membership is exclusively reserved by the elite class or the nobles who are appointed by the queen, with advice from the government, which contrast from that of house of commons where MP's are elected into the house. Like America there two parties which have dominated politics within Britain, one being the labor party, which is traditional working class party leaning to the left and the other being the conservative party which leans towards the right, both mainly centrist with slightly differing views mostly, that of public spending reforms. The Liberal Democrats have always been influential with their presence but failed to be an overall competing power within parliament until the recent coalition with the conservatives, who are now in power. Within the electoral process itself, first past the post is the system used through most of England and Wales at the regional and local levels, where a candidate representing a certain constituent is voted on the basis that one person equals one vote, with the majority winning. The

political party with the most constituents will form the government, who will take the majority of the seats within the House of Commons. The runners up form 'her majesty's royal opposition', who will take the remaining seats within parliament. Within Scotland and Northern Ireland however, the voting system used differs from England and Wales. Scotland uses a mixed system called the 'additional member system', where voters usually get two votes, one for an individual candidate and one for the overall party. With Britain being a constitutional Monarchy, the queen is officially the head of state but does not wield much political power and rarely interferes within the political activity. The House of Lords would be the main involvement within her political activities through tradition, as historically the monarch would appoint House of Lord members, but as previously mentioned the House of Lords holds less authority over the House of Commons. To finish a description of the British political system it should be mentioned that, unlike America, Britain does not have a written constitution but rather a build up of traditional folk laws with modern additions to previous concepts of how the country should function in terms of the monarchy, politics and civil society in the modern contemporary era.

Now to compare the two political systems which have been described, being that of the American federal republic system and Britain's parliamentary system within a constitutional monarchy.

Similarities are easily distinguishable whilst looking into the formation and functioning of the political systems with respect to those who function inside and out of the overall system. At first it should be noticed that the political structures contain all the same elements of an executive body, a legislative

body and judiciary body, where the framework embodies that the executive branch is responsible for the proposal and development of legislation and the initiation of policy formation. The executive branches are within the lower house where in both systems, wield much political power. However it is quite clear that within the contrasting systems, the power of the lower house differs with respect to the balance of power between the upper house and lower houses. With Britain, the House of Commons is ultimately the most influential body and is not, in theory, open to checks and balances of a higher authority, as the legislative branch consists of government ministers, whom of which initiate legislation and policies. Within the American system although the lower house is responsible and has the power to propose such issues, the Upper house or the Senate, has the ability to initiate the proposed legislation, which is largely through the legislator finding sponsors within the Senate, which is not the case within Britain. With these checks and balances present within the US, it ensures power is spread across the political arena and power is not subjected to one body. This leaves many implications as the reasons for why these differences occur between the powers of the upper house. It could be argued in the case of Britain that the House of lords is not elected by the people or in fact, by anyone with political significance and the members themselves may lack the political experience to wield such power with interfering within politics and would act as a hindrance due their own conservative biases. With Britain's political culture, represented as a stable democracy under a hereditary power, emphasizes the irrelevance of the nobles to enter into modern day politics, with a feudal upper house system.

America political culture of strong democracy and liberty is found within the context of the Senate and the House of Representatives, as both are elected in for a predetermined term in office, if all members of the upper and lower house are elected, the need for a balance of power is necessary for full representation, which is brought through the culture of democracy. This leads me to now consider the voting systems and electoral processes with respect to the nations under consideration. Very clearly both the US and the UK have constituted democracy as their political system, but there are some clear cut differences that need to be examined. First would be that of the process of electing the prime minister or in America's case the president. Within both systems the party leadership is not determined by the civilian population but party delegates; however it could be argued that within Britain, through the first past the post system, a PM is directly elected by the people once the general elections come underway, as apposed to the American Electoral College system, which determines the presidency. This has implications as to why the PM has unwieldy power of choosing their own cabinet members and has the ability to determine when elections shall be held as long as it is within five years. As they have been democratically elected by the people without hindrance within the first past the post system to represent the nation as a unitary state, it leaves no question to the conditions determined within the political process. Within the US, the Electoral College system creates the idea of an indirect process of a presidential election within civil society, where there have been cases where the winner has not even won the majority of the vote, but key state votes. With this voting system in place, it is key that the balance of power is established within the system so state representatives still have the ability t



o protect the rights and interests of the civilian population, who ultimately will not be completely subjected to the rule of a president, who does not represent their interests. This is prevalent in the idea of state arguably, being able to hold a form of autonomy from the central government and are able to initiate independent state laws and policies, which helps uphold the democratic political structure within the US. England does not face this problem as a unitary state due to size and devolution of the nations which constitute Great Britain, as they share similar political freedoms to that of states within America.

Although there are similarities and contrasts within each system discussed, one thing is concrete, that both countries hold democratic values as political culture which goes hand in hand with the liberalist approach to world politics, which is evident how the two countries discussed throughout the essay have interacted in the contemporary age as strong allies. With the idea of international peace, the installation of democracy and strong trade orientations America and Britain have supported each other in several conquests, such as that of the Middle East where the two allies have fought with the idea of crushing terrorism and installing democracy. The two nations have never vetoed one another within issues brought forth within the UN security council and have managed to uphold good relations arguably, through the favoring political cultures upheld by political stability installed though democratic principles within both nations. Although there have been criticisms by many that Britain is the 51st state of America, it reflects how the two countries function with respect to one another.