

Legislative Committee System

Legislative committees (sometimes called commissions) are units of organization within a legislative chamber that allow groups of legislatures to review policy matters or proposed bills more closely than would be possible by the entire chamber. In many countries, referral to committee is a formal step in the process of adopting a bill (see Stages of Legislative Procedure). The possible roles of the committees vary from country to country, depending upon the governing system, strength and organization of political parties, available resources and other political factors. Roles might include initiating and amending bills, administrative review, investigations and budgetary review. Committees may also be the locale where inter-party negotiations occur. Few countries, even those that also have a presidential system, have a committee system that approaches the power of the US congressional committees to initiate, amend or bury legislation. (For more information, see Table V: Role of the Committee in the Legislative Process.)

The Standing Rules of a legislative chamber may list the committees to be formed, provide rules for assigning members and chairs of committees and decide how much power to grant them. In some cases, constitutions require the establishment of committees in general and/or require specific committees. Committees may be permanent, or they may be organized around a particular topic or bill.

Number, Size and Membership of Committees

The number and size of committees vary greatly and does not necessarily correspond to the size of the legislature.

- **The Senegal** National Assembly has 120 members and 11 permanent committees, while the **French** National Assembly has 577 members and six permanent committees.
- Committees with a large number of members have been criticized for being unwieldy and ineffective. For example, each French National Assembly committee has 72 to 144 members. One way in which members have dealt with this is to form smaller working groups within committees to deal with particular bills.
- A system with too many committees may be criticized for overextending legislators and/or creating duplication in their work. The **US** House of Representatives has 435 members and 19 permanent committees. However, each of these committees has dozens of subcommittees that further divide the labor. The number of subcommittees has been reduced in recent years.

Legislative rules often require each legislator to sit on at least one committee, but they differ in how members are selected and on the number of committees on which they can serve.

- Membership on committees is often allocated in proportion to each party's representation in the legislature (very small parties may not be represented on committees in some cases).
- Most countries limit the number of committees on which an individual member may sit. Exceptions to this rule include **Argentina, Canada, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Japan, Namibia and the UK.**
- **Russia** has an unusual system of committee assignment. The Duma (lower house of Parliament) allows each member to choose his or her committee assignments freely, resulting in a wide variation in size and party balance on each committee. However, the Standing Rules stipulate that overall size of each committee be between 12 and 35.

Committee chairs, who lead committee activities and are often looked to as experts on the committee's subject matter, are determined in several ways.

- In many countries, committee chairs are chosen only from the majority party. In a few cases, such as in **Germany, Portugal and Romania**, members from opposition or minority parties may chair committees.
- Chairs are nominated and confirmed through several mechanisms, including through party caucuses, by presiding officers, votes of the committee members or entire legislatures.
- In some cases, some special committee chairmanships are reserved for the opposition. For example, the House of Commons (**UK**) Public Accounts Committee has an opposition chair because it reviews the financial performance of government and has an audit function.
- In some countries, for example **Brazil**, committee chairmanships rotate on an annual basis, therefore there are no longstanding powerful committee chairs, as in the US.
- In the **Russian** Duma, every committee has a chairman and several deputy chairmen. The chairman is typically from the majority party (or party in a majority coalition), but the deputy chairmen are usually from those other than the party the chairman represents.

Committee leaders have different roles in the legislative process in different governing systems.

- In a presidential system, committee chairs usually lead the floor debate on a bill related to the work of that committee.
- In parliamentary systems, the relevant cabinet minister and the opposition spokesperson usually lead floor debate.
- In some parliamentary systems, opposition parties assign "shadow ministers", party leaders who follow the activities of a given ministry. They may be more likely to develop expertise in the relevant area than a committee chair.

For a comparison of committee systems on number and appointment process, see Table I.

Activities and Types of Committees

There are two major types of committees. **Ad hoc committees** are formed for the purpose of reviewing particular bills or groups of bills and then are disbanded when that work is completed. They are typical of the British Westminster and some other parliamentary systems where the ministerial cabinets dominate the legislative process. In **permanent committees** (sometimes called *standing* committees), the jurisdiction of the committee is defined by subject matter, which tends to parallel the structure of the administrative or cabinet agencies (such as committees on Health, Defense, Labor, Education, Finance, etc.) There are other types of permanent committees, including those that oversee the rules of the legislature or that have specific auditing functions. In bicameral systems, reconciliation committees may meet to revise differences in a bill that is modified by two different chambers.

- In the Westminster system, the ad hoc committees have very little power. They tend to make only those amendments introduced by cabinet ministers, who exert party discipline at the committee level.
- In the **US** presidential model, committees can prevent bills from proceeding, make substantive amendments and often initiate legislation.
- In the **French hybrid** model, there are permanent, standing committees in the National Assembly, but they can only make technical amendments. They cannot prevent bills from coming to a vote by the full Assembly because each piece of legislation must be reported back to the full chamber within a given period of time.
- The **German** Bundestag (lower house) committees are very active, particularly in the area of reviewing and substantively amending bills.

In addition to reviewing and in some cases initiating proposed bills **oversight committees** hold private and/or public meetings to examine the executive branch's implementation of the laws, call witnesses and produce reports. Permanent committees may act as oversight committees. In the UK and similar Westminster systems, committees that parallel the ministries are called **select committees** and may be permanent. They have an oversight rather than legislative function. Legislatures may also form committees appointed for a given period to consider a specific matter. In presidential systems, *these* are called **select committees**. They differ from the Westminster select committees because they do not necessarily mirror the cabinet ministries in subject matter and always exist for a short term. For example, the **US** Congress recently established a Select Committee to research and publicize the Year 2000 computer problems. The select committees do not usually have formal legislative powers, but are organized to gather information, examine witnesses and hold public hearings.

For a comparison of committee systems and their oversight roles, see Table II: Attendance at Committee Meetings.

Committee Meetings and Hearings

When do committees meet?

Many legislatures place controls on the times during which committees can meet. In many instances, committees do not, or cannot, meet when the legislative chamber is meeting in plenary or full session, or they meet and take recesses when the plenary is voting. Most committees meet during the time when the legislature is in session, but special rules may allow committees to meet at other times.

How do committee members vote?

Committees usually reach decisions by a vote of the majority. The “majority” may not mean a majority of committee members, but a majority of a certain minimal number of members present (a quorum). Voting is usually less formal than in the plenary (i.e. it may be a show of hands.)

For a comparison of timing of committee meetings, see Table IV: Meetings of Committees.

Public Access to Committees

Many countries hold committee meetings in private. Others allow their committee meetings to be open to the public, as required by their internal rules, the constitution or by practice (although they may occasionally close them if the subject matter affects national security). Others hold a mix of public and private meetings. Rules concerning public meetings allow for advance posting of time and date, radio or television broadcast and/or the distribution of written transcripts of the meetings.

Committees in some legislatures hold **public hearings** to gather information on legislation, policy issues or to exercise oversight of the executive branch. Members may solicit the opinion of legal and academic experts, representatives of business and civic organizations and individual citizens. In some cases, they can call upon executive branch members to testify or to defend policies.

The benefits of public hearings may include:

- Providing the legislature with outside expertise;
- Providing a forum for the exchange of ideas;
- Educating citizens on current issues; and

- Increasing public confidence in the transparency of the legislature.

Committee Staff

Staff size and degree of professionalism reflects the relative importance of committees in a given system. It also reflects a legislature's overall access to resources. Committees may be organized with a secretariat that employs staff and organizes the administration of the committee. In the **US**, each of the 19 permanent committees in the lower house can employ 18 professional and 12 clerical staff. Staff may arrange committee meetings, conduct research, assist in drafting legislation, provide expert advice, etc. The minority party may hire One third of the staff. In contrast, in the Legislative Assembly of **Argentina**, each committee has access to a secretary, an administrative secretary and two clerical assistants.

For a comparison of committee leadership and staff, see Table III: Chair and Staff of Committees.

Why Strong Committees?

Committees provide several benefits for the internal organization of a legislature:

- There are increasing demands on modern legislatures and committees serve as an important mechanism for division of labor.
- Committees allow members to discuss issues informally and to develop relationships with colleagues from other parties. They provide forums for compromise and agreement.
- Committee members (and committee staff) provide continuity, stability, historical knowledge and can develop expertise on certain matters.
- Committees can hold public meetings to disseminate information to the media and public and to gain feedback for legislative decisions.
- Committee hearings allow civil society leaders and experts to present their views. Committee hearings can also serve as the forum where members of the executive branch are questioned.
- Committees provide an opportunity for members of opposition parties to have a say in the policy-making process.

Criticism of a strong committee system usually revolves around the differences in the design of parliamentary systems vs. presidential ones. For example:

- In a strong parliamentary system, the focus should be on the political parties because they are the bodies more directly responsible to the voters and strong party discipline is required. Strong committees tend to reduce the distinctions between parties.

- In many parliamentary systems, executive branch ministries are responsible for drafting legislation. An extensive committee system is redundant or is a threat to the constitutional powers of the executive.
- Each legislator may give special attention to narrow areas of interest on his or her committee, at the expense of other issues.

Strong Committee Systems (US)	Weak Committee Systems (UK)
Committee jurisdiction is defined by subject matter, which tends to parallel the structure of the administrative agencies.	Committees are formed for the purpose of reviewing particular bills and then are disbanded.
Membership/tenure on a given committee tends to last the entire legislative term and often during a number of terms -- committee leaders may have more experience in a given area than the relevant Cabinet Minister or Secretary.	Membership/tenure on a committee is temporary and doesn't encourage particular members to gain expertise. Expertise lies in the Cabinet Ministries.
Chairmanships tend to go to the committee members with long experience on the committee.	The membership and leadership of committees is constantly changing.
There are a number of permanent, or standing, committees.	Most committees are ad hoc.

Table 1: Committees

The following table was reprinted with the permission of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs from their document: *Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labor*.

Country & House(s)	Number of Permanent Committees	Appointment of Committee Members	Restrictions on Multiple Memberships
ARGENTINA Senate Chamber of Deputies	41 38 Bicameral: 4	Both Houses: Delegate power to appoint committee members to the President. Composition proportional to party strength.	Both Houses: No
BULGARIA National Assembly	18	Composition proportional to party strength.	No more than 2.
CANADA Senate House of Commons	13 20 Joint: 3	By Committee of Selection (9 Members appointed at beginning of session). For Standing Committees: On adoption of report of the Striking Committee; for Special Committees: By House.	No
COSTA RICA Legislative Assembly	6	Composition proportional to party strength.	No more than one permanent committee.
EL SALVADOR* Legislative Assembly	14	Composition proportional to party strength; party faction decides.	No
FRANCE Senate National Assembly	6 6	Both Houses: Composition proportional to party strength.	Both Houses: No more than one permanent committee.
GERMANY Federal Diet Federal Council	Select: 24 Select: 24	Both Houses: Composition proportional to party strength.	Both Houses: No

* Information for these committees is from the IPU 1986 study.

Country & House(s)	Number of Permanent Committees	Appointment of Committee Members	Restrictions on Multiple Memberships
HUNGARY National Assembly	Standing: 11 Special: 6	Composition proportional to party strength.	No
INDIA House of the People* Council of States	12 9 Joint committees: 7 Department Related: 17 (Standing Committees)	Both Houses: Appointed or elected by the House on a motion made, or nominated by the Presiding Officer under the rules.	Both Houses: No
IRELAND Senate Dail	Select committees: 2 3 Joint committees: 2	By the Committee of Selection of the House, taking account of the strength of parties and non-party groups.	Both Houses: No
JAPAN House of Councillors House of Representatives	17 20	Both Houses: Places are allocated by the Presiding Officer proportional to party strength.	Limited to 2 standing committees. At least 1 standing committee (but those holding other office may refuse). Special Committees unrestricted.
JORDAN Senate House of Deputies	Permanent: 4 Temporary & Ad Hoc: 8	Elected by secret ballot.	House: Not more than 2.
NAMIBIA National Assembly	Permanent: 4	Nominated by the parties and announced by the speaker.	No
PORTUGAL Assembly of the Republic	Permanent: 12	Composition proportional to party strength.	Restricted to 2 permanent committees, or 3, if a group is too small to be represented on all committees.
ROMANIA House of Deputies	14	Composition proportional to party	Both Houses: Restrict

Country & House(s)	Number of Permanent Committees	Appointment of Committee Members	Restrictions on Multiple Memberships
Senate	14 Joint on Intelligence Service: 1	strength and the party then selects who will serve on each committee.	membership to 2 committees. If on joint Intelligence Service Committee then can serve on no others.
<i>RUSSIA</i> State Duma	23	Both Houses: Composition proportional to party strength.	Both Houses: No more than 1.
Council of the Federation	13		
<i>SENEGAL</i> National Assembly	11	Appointed by the Assembly following proposals from the group chairman.	Limited to 3 committees. Bureau members may not serve on parliamentary committees.
<i>THAILAND</i> House of Representatives*	15	Both Houses: Elected members relative to party strength.	Limited to 2 committees.
Senate	13		Limited to 1 committees.
<i>UNITED KINGDOM</i> House of Commons	30	Committee of selection nominates standing committees and proposes members of 14 select departmental committees for appointment by the House. Other select committees are appointed by the House on motion of Government Whip after discussions between the parties.	Both Houses: None
House of Lords	14 (with 10 permanent sub committees)	On recommendation of the Committee of Selection except Ecclesiastical Committee and the Joint Committee on Consolidation Bills whose members are recommended by the Lord Chancellor.	
<i>UNITED STATES</i> Senate	Standing: 16 Select committees: 3 Special committees: 1	Both Houses: Elected by each House proportional to party strength.	Usually 3 Standing committees plus 1 Select committee.
House of Representatives	Standing: 19 Select Permanent: 2		Limit to 1 or 2 with certain exceptions by

Country & House(s)	Number of Permanent Committees	Appointment of Committee Members	Restrictions on Multiple Memberships
	Joint: 4		party rules.

Table 2: Attendance at Committee Meetings

The following table was reprinted with the permission of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs from their document: *Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labor*.

Country & House(s)	Can Government Officials a) Be summoned by committees b) Be committee members	Can MPs Not Members of a Committee Attend, Speak at its Meetings	Right to Summon Witness	Right to Request Documents from the Government
ARGENTINA Senate Chamber of Deputies	Both Houses: a) Yes b) No	Both Houses: No provisions, but customary practice permits MPs to attend and speak.	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Committees may request documents but request can be refused.
BULGARIA National Assembly	a) Yes b) No	Yes, MPs not members of a committee can attend and speak, but not vote.	Yes, but relates more to experts.	Yes
CANADA Senate House of Commons	Both Houses: a) Yes b) No	Both Houses: They may attend and speak unless otherwise stated by the House.	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Yes
COSTA RICA Legislative Assembly	a) No, but they may be heard. b) No	May attend, but only speak with chairman's permission.	No	Yes
EL SALVADOR Legislative Assembly	a) Yes b) No	Each committee can decide its internal practices.	Yes	Yes
FRANCE Senate	Both Houses: a) Yes b) No	Only the proposers of the bill or amendments being considered, or the rapporteur of another committee considering the same bill for advice or the special rapporteur of	No, but consultation is possible except in Committees of Inquiry which can summon witnesses and take testimony under oath.	Both Houses: Only for public documents, by investigative committees and by special rapporteur with investigative powers of the

Country & House(s)	Can Government Officials a) Be summoned by committees b) Be committee members	Can MPs Not Members of a Committee Attend, Speak at its Meetings	Right to Summon Witness	Right to Request Documents from the Government
National Assembly		the Finance and Budget, may attend and speak. Yes	No, but consultation possible.	Finance Committee.
GERMANY Federal Diet Federal Council	a) Yes b) No	Can attend but speak only when a bill from this MP is discussed.	Yes, only for the committee of inquiry; No for normal select committees.	Yes
HUNGARY National Assembly	a) Yes b) No	Public: Can attend with a special permit of committee. Private: Only if invited.	Yes	Yes
INDIA Council of States House of the People	Both Houses: a) Yes, but not Ministers b) No	Both Houses: Varies with committee. Members admitted may not participate in deliberations or vote.	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Yes, but the Government may claim privileges where State interest or safety could be prejudiced.
IRELAND Senate Dail	Both Houses: a) Yes, if the committee has power to send for persons b) No	Both Houses: Yes, if terms of reference permit.	Both Houses: At present attendance is voluntary; however, legislation is being prepared to allow for compelling witnesses to attend.	Both Houses: Yes, if terms of reference permit.
JAPAN House of Councillors House of	Both Houses: a) Yes b) No	Can attend. Attend but not speak	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Yes

Country & House(s)	Can Government Officials a) Be summoned by committees b) Be committee members	Can MPs Not Members of a Committee Attend, Speak at its Meetings	Right to Summon Witness	Right to Request Documents from the Government
Representatives		unless invited.		
JORDAN Senate House of Deputies	a) Yes b) No	No, except the Presiding Officer who can attend and speak.	Yes	Yes
NAMIBIA National Assembly	a) Yes b) No	On invitation or request.	Yes	Yes
PORTUGAL Assembly of the Republic	a) Their attendance may be requested. b) No	No, unless it is the author of draft bill before committee or committee authorizes.	Yes	No specific provision but MPs in general can request government documents.
ROMANIA House of Deputies Senate	Both Houses: a) Yes, with certain exceptions for higher ranking government officials. b) No	Both Houses: Yes but can't vote.	Both Houses: Can invite but not legally obliged to attend.	Both Houses: Can request but not legally force to produce.
RUSSIA State Duma Council of the Federation	a) Yes b) No a) Yes b) Yes, if the government official is a deputy in the Council.	Both Houses: Can attend but not speak.	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Yes
SENEGAL National Assembly	a) They may be consulted with consent of the relevant Minister b) No	Yes, but not vote.	Yes	No
THAILAND Senate	a) Yes, with the	Yes, with permission of		

Country & House(s)	Can Government Officials a) Be summoned by committees b) Be committee members	Can MPs Not Members of a Committee Attend, Speak at its Meetings	Right to Summon Witness	Right to Request Documents from the Government
<p>House of Representatives</p> <p><i>UNITED KINGDOM</i></p> <p>House of Lords</p> <p>House of Commons</p>	<p>permission of the Chairman of the Committee. b) Yes, by the resolution of the Senate.</p> <p>a) Yes b) In ad hoc committees only</p> <p>a) Yes b) No</p> <p>a) Yes, for Select committees but not Standing committees unless specially empowered. b) No</p>	<p>the chair of the committee.</p> <p>Those submitting a motion or an amendment may attend and speak. Persons assigned by Ministers may observe, requiring chair permission if involves national security.</p> <p>Yes, when evidence is being taken, but not in deliberative meetings.</p> <p>Attend but not speak.</p>	<p>Both Houses: Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes, for most select committees.</p>	<p>Both Houses: Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes, for most select committees.</p>
<p><i>UNITED STATES</i></p> <p>Senate</p> <p>House of Representatives</p>	<p>Both Houses: a) Yes b) No</p>	<p>Both Houses: Attend but not speak, except with Chair's permission in Senate committee, or at discretion of House committee.</p>	<p>Both Houses: Yes, both the majority and minority parties have a right to summon witnesses of their choice.</p>	<p>Both Houses: Yes</p>

Table 3: Chair and Staff of Committees

The following table was reprinted with the permission of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs from their document: *Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labor*.

Country & House(s)	Appointment of Chair	Distribution of Chair among Parties	Committee Secretariat	Secretariat Functions: A) Administrative B) Research C) Document Preparation
ARGENTINA Senate Chamber of Deputies	Both Houses: Elected by members of each committee.	Both Houses: Chairs awarded proportional to party strength.	Both Houses: Each committee appoints a secretary. The administration provides an administrative secretary, typist and stenographer.	Both Houses: A) Yes B) No C) No
BULGARIA National Assembly	Consultations with political forces.	Chairs are elected by the assembly from a list formulated by each party. Opposition parties may decline to nominate chairs and are rewarded by the majority with Deputy Chairs.	1 technical secretary and 1 expert plus consultants depending upon the budget of the committee.	A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes
CANADA Senate House of Representatives	Both Houses: Elected by members of each committee.	Both Houses: Chair is in principle member of ruling party. In the Commons, the Committee on Public Accounts is an exception.	Committee clerk is designated by the Chief of Committees and Private Legislation Branch of each Chamber. Research officers from the library are assigned to committees on request.	Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes B) Yes
COSTA RICA Legislative Assembly	Appointed by the President of the Assembly.	None	Each committee has a secretariat attached to it drawn from the administrative personnel of the	A) Yes B) Yes C) No

Country & House(s)	Appointment of Chair	Distribution of Chair among Parties	Committee Secretariat	Secretariat Functions: A) Administrative B) Research C) Document Preparation
EL SALVADOR Legislative Assembly	Elected by plenary.	Chairs awarded according to relative strength of parties; majority party decides which committee it chairs.	Assembly. Each committee has 1 technical assistant and 1 secretary.	A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes
FRANCE Senate National Assembly	Both Houses: Elected by each committee.	Concerted attempt to distribute between the political groups. Distributed among the groups forming the parliamentary party.	Both Houses: Permanent secretariat of several people for each committee.	Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes
GERMANY Federal Diet Federal Council	Both Houses: Appointed according to agreements by the parliamentary groups.	Both Houses: According to their relative strengths.	Both Houses: Permanent with 1 secretary and assistant as well as clerical staff as needed.	Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes
HUNGARY National Assembly INDIA Council of States House of the People	Elected by the plenary. Both Houses: Appointed from among the committee members by the respective Presiding Officer.	Proportional, ad hoc bargaining. Both Houses: Effort is generally made to accommodate maximum number of parties and groups in proportion to strength.	Permanent, independent from caucus, hired by Parliament Administration. Both Houses: Provided according to the requirements of each committee. The House Secretary is secretary to all committees but is	A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes Not applicable.

Country & House(s)	Appointment of Chair	Distribution of Chair among Parties	Committee Secretariat	Secretariat Functions: A) Administrative B) Research C) Document Preparation
	The Presiding Officer is ex-officio Chair of some committees.	However, a practice exists in which Chair of the Public Accounts Committee is from the opposition.	assisted by the Joint Secretary.	
<p><i>IRELAND</i> Senate Dail</p> <p><i>JAPAN</i> House of Councillors House of Representative</p>	<p>Both Houses: Elected by each committee except for Joint Committee on a Private Bill where chair is jointly appointed by Chair of each House and committee on Procedure and Privileges of both houses have ex officio chairs.</p> <p>Both Houses: Elected by House from committee members or House may delegate nomination to Presiding Officer for standing committees. Special committees elect their chair.</p>	<p>Both Houses: By agreement in the committee or by majority decision.</p> <p>According to relative group strength.</p> <p>Practice allocates to ruling party.</p>	<p>Both Houses: Provided from parliamentary staff.</p> <p>Both Houses: Each committee has a professional advisor and researchers and can draw on parliamentary staff.</p>	<p>Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes</p> <p>Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes</p>
<p><i>JORDAN</i> Senate House of Deputies</p>	Elected by each committee.	Not Applicable.	One secretary for each committee.	A) No B) Yes

Country & House(s)	Appointment of Chair	Distribution of Chair among Parties	Committee Secretariat	Secretariat Functions: A) Administrative B) Research C) Document Preparation
				C) Yes
NAMIBIA National Assembly	Elected by Committee.	Depending on election.	Comprised of the Civil Service.	A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes
PORTUGAL Assembly of the Republic	Elected by each committee.	Proportional to their strength in the Assembly.	Generally civil servants provided by the Assembly Committee Service. 1 to 4 depending on committee.	A) Yes B) Exceptionally C) Yes
ROMANIA House of Deputies Senate	Both Houses: Party elects but the plenary has a right of refusal.	Both Houses: Proportional among the parliamentary factions.	Both Houses: Hired by Secretary General of both Chambers and Committee Chairs select from a pool of 1 to 3 per committee.	Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes
RUSSIA State Duma Council of the Federation	A complex situation of weighed committee chairs and bargaining occurs which results in a balanced chair distribution among parties. Chair & Deputies elected by committee. Only Chair confirmed by the whole council.	Both Houses: The chairs are weighed according to their power and the parties bid on which chairs they want.		Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes
SENEGAL National Assembly	Elected by each committee.	Proportionally to their strength in the Assembly.	A Member is elected Secretary. The Financial and	A) Yes B) No C) Yes

Country & House(s)	Appointment of Chair	Distribution of Chair among Parties	Committee Secretariat	Secretariat Functions: A) Administrative B) Research C) Document Preparation
			Economic Affairs Committee also appoints a General Rapporteur.	
<p><i>THAILAND</i> Senate</p> <p>House of Representatives</p> <p><i>UNITED KINGDOM</i> House of Lords</p> <p>House of Commons</p>	<p>Both Houses: Elected by each committee.</p> <p>Selected by the House, or in default, by the committee.</p> <p>Elected by each committee.</p>	<p>No</p> <p>Members of government party.</p> <p>No party distribution.</p> <p>Varies, some are allotted on a party basis by convention.</p>	<p>Staff provided by Secretariat of the Senate.</p> <p>A secretary and other staff provided by parliament.</p> <p>A clerk and one or more specialist advisers as suitable and a secretary.</p> <p>A clerk, one or more assistants, a secretary and part-time specialist advisers.</p>	<p>Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes</p> <p>A) Yes B) To a limited extent C) Yes</p> <p>A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes</p>
<p><i>UNITED STATES</i> Senate</p> <p>House of Representatives</p>	<p>Traditionally committee members nominate the longest-serving member. The nomination is ratified in full party caucus before election by Senate resolution.</p> <p>Formally elected by the House but appointed by the majority party.</p>	<p>Both Houses: All Chairs are members of the majority party.</p>	<p>Standing committee staff ranges from 22 to 153.</p> <p>Staff varies from 30 to 140 with an average of about 70 per committee.</p>	<p>Both Houses: A) Yes B) Yes C) Yes</p>

Table 4: Meetings of Committees

The following table was reprinted with the permission of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs from their document: *Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labor*.

Country & House(s)	Public or Private Meetings	Meetings During Sitting of House	Meetings Outside of Parliament	Quorum for Deliberations
<p>ARGENTINA Senate</p> <p>Chamber of Deputies</p>	Both Houses: In general meetings are held in public.	Both Houses: No	<p>Meetings must be held on Congress premises.</p> <p>No provisions.</p>	<p>Standing committees: 3 or 4 members; special committees: absolute majority.</p> <p>Absolute majority and, after 30 minutes, 1/3 of membership (Budget and Finance Committee 1/4). At the subsequent meeting, members may draft a minority report even when quorum is not present.</p>
<p>BULGARIA National Assembly</p>	Generally closed but members of the public can attend with invitations.	During parliamentary sessions but not plenary sessions.	In most cases meetings are held at offices outside of parliament because there are few meeting rooms in parliament.	Meet with more than 1/2 of members, but after 30 minutes if quorum is not present can hold session with present members if 1/3 of members are present.
<p>CANADA Senate</p> <p>House of Commons</p>	Both Houses: Both public and private.	Both Houses: Both during sittings of House and when not in session.	Both Houses: Yes	<p>4</p> <p>Majority of members (except when authority to witness without a quorum).</p>
<p>COSTA RICA Legislative Assembly</p>	Public unless otherwise decided by committee.	No		2 to 7 depending on size. Majority forms committee.
EL SALVADOR				

Country & House(s)	Public or Private Meetings	Meetings During Sitting of House	Meetings Outside of Parliament	Quorum for Deliberations
Legislative Assembly <i>FRANCE</i> Senate National Assembly	Usually public. Both Houses: Private	No Both Houses: Yes, both, but when House is sitting, only when required by order of the day.	Yes Both Houses: No	Majority No, in theory 1/3 call for quorum at time of votes, but, in reality never occurs.
<i>GERMANY</i> Federal Diet Federal Council	Both Houses: Usually private.	Both Houses: Only with an exemption and allowance of the speaker.	Both Houses: By allowance of the speaker.	Both Houses: No
<i>HUNGARY</i> National Assembly	Public, but with practical limits on numbers. A majority decide to convene privately in order to protect state secrets or confidential information.	Yes, suspend parliament until committee deliberations are over.	Yes	1/2 of membership.
<i>INDIA</i> Council of States House of the People	Both Houses: Private	Usually when the House is not sitting. When House is sitting and when not, but not after a sitting starts and before 15.00 hours without the Speaker's permission.	Both Houses: With the Presiding Officer's permission.	Both Houses: 1/3 of membership.
<i>IRELAND</i> Senate Dail	Both Houses: At discretion of the committee.	Both Houses: Both when the House is sitting and when not.	Both Houses: Possible, but not frequent.	Both Houses: As specified in committee's terms of reference.
<i>JAPAN</i> House of Councillors	Both Houses: Private, but visitors including	Both Houses: No, except with	Both Houses: No	1/2 membership.

Country & House(s)	Public or Private Meetings	Meetings During Sitting of House	Meetings Outside of Parliament	Quorum for Deliberations
House of Representatives <i>JORDAN</i> Senate House of Deputies	journalists may be admitted with permission of chair. Both Houses: Normally private, but exceptions made to representatives from affected groups.	permission of the Presiding Officer. No	 No	 Not Applicable.
<i>NAMIBIA</i> National Assembly	Private	Yes, with approval of all members.	Yes	Majority of committee may call.
<i>PORTUGAL</i> Assembly of the Republic	Private, unless otherwise decided by the committee.	Both when the House is sitting and when not.	Exceptionally	More than 1/2 of members must be present.
<i>ROMANIA</i> House of Deputies Senate	Private but may invite an outsider or someone may request to attend. Private	No Yes	No No	Both Houses: Simple majority.
<i>RUSSIA</i> State Duma Council of the Federation	Both Houses: Public and private. Decision to close is made by committee chair.	Both Houses: No, meetings are only held on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday while the House sits on Wednesday and Friday.	Both Houses: Generally no.	Both Houses: No, decisions made by a majority of those present.
<i>SENEGAL</i> National Assembly	Private	In session only, except during a state of emergency.	No	None specified.
<i>THAILAND</i> Senate House of	Both Houses conduct plenary sessions in public, although private meetings are	Yes No	Both Houses: Yes	1/3 of members of the committee. Majority

Country & House(s)	Public or Private Meetings	Meetings During Sitting of House	Meetings Outside of Parliament	Quorum for Deliberations
<p>Representatives</p> <p><i>UNITED KINGDOM</i></p> <p>House of Lords</p> <p>House of Commons</p>	<p>allowed. The Senate requires 1/4 of the members to request private meeting.</p> <p>Public when evidence taken, but committee may close meeting at its discretion.</p> <p>Each committee decides own rules, but normally public when counsel addresses committee or witnesses examined and private during deliberation.</p>	<p>Both Houses: Both when House is in session and when it is not.</p>	<p>Select committees may be given power to sit outside parliamentary premises.</p> <p>If authorized by the House.</p>	<p>House requires each select committee have 1/3 members present. However, standing committees require fewer members.</p> <p>Usually 3 members.</p>
<p><i>UNITED STATES</i></p> <p>Senate</p> <p>House of Representatives</p>	<p>Both Houses: Usually public unless committee decides otherwise. Grounds for closing are limited such as national security and criminal prosecution. Also the vote to close must be a public vote. Generally, meetings have television and or press coverage.</p>	<p>Only during the first 2 hours of a sitting and before 2 pm otherwise Senate permission required.</p> <p>No committee of the House (except the Committees on Appropriations, Budget, Rules, Standards of Official Conduct, and Ways and Means) may sit, without special leave, while</p>	<p>Both Houses: Yes</p>	<p>Both Houses: Set by each committee not less than 1/3 membership except lesser number may constitute a quorum take testimony and receive evidence.</p>

Country & House(s)	Public or Private Meetings	Meetings During Sitting of House	Meetings Outside of Parliament	Quorum for Deliberations
		the House is reading a measure for amendment under the five-minute rule.		

Table 5: Role of the Committee in the Legislative Process

The following table was reprinted with the permission of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs from their document: *Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labor*.

Country & House(s)	Is Committee Stage Prerequisite for Adoption of Bill	Are Any Bills Automatically Referred to Committees	Are There Provisions for External Consultations at Committee Stage
ARGENTINA Senate Chamber of Deputies	Both Houses: Yes, except very occasionally when the House decides on immediate consideration.	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: No provisions but possible.
BULGARIA National Assembly	Yes	President of parliament decides which committees review legislation.	Yes and is done from time to time.
CANADA Senate House of Commons	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: All bills.	Both Houses: Standing Orders empower committees to send for persons, papers, and records required to discharge their mandate.
COSTA RICA Legislative Assembly	Yes	Not Applicable.	Committee may invite oral and written comments from interested parties.
EL SALVADOR Legislative Assembly	Yes	Some go directly to committees (<i>i.e.</i> , budget)	Yes, the Rules of Procedure state that committees may

Country & House(s)	Is Committee Stage Prerequisite for Adoption of Bill	Are Any Bills Automatically Referred to Committees	Are There Provisions for External Consultations at Committee Stage
		and others are assigned.	consult individuals to clarify issues and requisition documents from the government or a private organization.
<i>FRANCE</i> Senate National Assembly	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Referral to appropriate permanent committee, except when special committee is created.	Both Houses: No
<i>GERMANY</i> Federal Diet Federal Council	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: No	Both Houses: Yes, hearing experts.
<i>HUNGARY</i> National Assembly	Yes	All	Not obliged yet possible and used.
<i>INDIA</i> House of the People Council of States	Both Houses: No, committee stage is only motion of House or if referred to the Committee by the presiding officer of the respective house.	Both Houses: No	Both Houses: Oral and documentary evidence as considered necessary.
<i>IRELAND</i> Senate Dail	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: All Bills referred, usually to committee of whole House.	Both Houses: Select Committees may send for persons and documents, and may take evidence upon any Bill. Special reports may be made of any matters thought fit to bring forward.
<i>JAPAN</i> House of Councillors House of Representatives	Both Houses: Yes, except by urgent request of the proposer and House resolution may the committee stage be omitted.	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Generally no, but on important matters a committee can hold open hearings and if necessary it may hear from witnesses.
<i>JORDAN</i> Senate			

Country & House(s)	Is Committee Stage Prerequisite for Adoption of Bill	Are Any Bills Automatically Referred to Committees	Are There Provisions for External Consultations at Committee Stage
House of Deputies	Yes	All bills.	Standing Orders provide for committee to invite any person it wishes to hear.
NAMIBIA National Assembly	No	No	No
PORTUGAL Assembly of the Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes, certain legislation requires consultation with NGOs such as labor laws and committees are entitled to consult experts and NGOs on any matter.
ROMANIA Senate House of Deputies	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Yes	Both Houses: Not prohibited.
RUSSIA State Duma Council of the Federation	Yes Yes	Submitted first to Duma then automatically to committees. Yes	Both Houses: Yes.
SENEGAL National Assembly	Yes	If requested by the representative of the President of the Republic or the relevant committee.	Yes
THAILAND Senate House of Representatives	No Yes, normally by ad hoc committee.	No, referred to committee by the resolution of the Senate. Not Applicable.	Both Houses: Yes
UNITED KINGDOM House of Lords House of Commons	All Bills are referred to a committee except by agreement otherwise. All Bills except those authorizing government expenditures.	Public Bills referred to standing committees unless the House orders otherwise.	Yes, but only in those rare cases of bills referred to a select committee. Yes, but only in those rare cases of bills referred to a select committee. Recent experiments have allowed standing committees to take

Country & House(s)	Is Committee Stage Prerequisite for Adoption of Bill	Are Any Bills Automatically Referred to Committees	Are There Provisions for External Consultations at Committee Stage
			evidence.
<p><i>UNITED STATES</i> Senate</p> <p>House of Representatives</p>	Both Houses: Committee consideration usual but not mandatory.	<p>Usually, House passed bills not referred to the Senate committee if a Senate bill or related subject has already been referred.</p> <p>No, at the Speaker's discretion. Speaker rarely refers one bill to several committees and sets time limits for committee action.</p>	Both Houses: Yes

Further Reading

Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parliaments of the World, Geneva, IPU. (see website below)

Kurian, George Thomas, ed., World Encyclopedia of Parliaments and Legislatures, Volume II, 1998.

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National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, *Committees in Legislatures: A Division of Labor*, Legislative Research Series, Paper # 2, 1996.

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Olson, David M., Democratic Legislative Institutions: A Comparative View, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, London, England, 1994.

Websites

www.ipu.org – PARLINE database provides links to sites of various parliaments, some include a description of committee systems.

www.frankcass.com/jnls/jls.htm – Publishers of The Journal of Legislative Studies. Includes article abstracts and subscription and ordering information.

Organizations focusing on this area:

International Republican Institute – www.iri.org

Inter-Parliamentary Union – www.ipu.org

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs – www.ndi.org

