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Balancing Diversity with Democracy: The Logic Behind India's Parliamentary Choice

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The Parliamentary system has been deeply rooted in the turbulent history of the Indian sovereign. A place where there are almost 15 distinct religions, 2,500 castes, 30,000 sub-castes, and about 2,000 ethnic groups, it is not feasible to have an authoritarian government with a state head exploiting this diversity and inviting monarchy in its prudent sense. India has valued responsibility and accountability more than stability, coordination, and harmony in the system, and places more importance on swift and prompt decision-making. As a state, we prefer long and structured discussions over biased opinions by leaders claiming the benefits of numerous plans while ignoring their larger impact on less focused areas. The presidential system is known to be one of the best democratic forms of government, with more stable and fixed executives exercising their power at the centre, but it still falls short in being less inclusive and more rigid in nature. This article aims to examine the constitutional, judicial, and political justifications for why India adopted the parliamentary system of government, rather than the presidential system, which was ideally suited to past scenarios. Leveraging the Westminster model, the study emphasises the ideals of collective responsibility, majority rule, and executive accountability, which are juxtaposed with the fixed-tenure and rigid separation of powers in presidential systems like the United States. The paper concludes that India's parliamentary democracy, imperfect as it is, continues to offer a dynamic system for accommodation between executive power, legislative oversight, and popular participation, thereby maintaining constitutional harmony more effectively than presidential systems.

Keywords: majority rule, coalition politics, no-confidence motion, impeachment, executive accountability.

INTRODUCTION

India's embrace of the parliamentary system of government attests to its desire to create a stable, responsible, and representative democratic government capable of withstanding its extensive social diversity. The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, provided for a bicameral legislature constituted by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, with the President as the constitutional head functioning on the advice of the Council of Ministers led by the Prime Minister. The parliamentary system based on the Westminster model emphasises collective responsibility, power fusion, and responsibility of the executive to the legislature so that governance remains continuously monitored and responsive. The Indian parliamentary system attempts to balance political stability and executive accountability against the socio-political realities of the nation while seeking to avoid authoritarianism through diffusing power among elected representatives.

PARTITION, PRINCELY STATES, AND THE BIRTH OF INDIA'S PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

The partition of India at the time of independence plunged the country into an unprecedented communal holocaust, which led to the large-scale migration of Hindus and Muslims to their chosen homelands - India or Pakistan. It was really a gigantic task to build the newly born state from scratch. The most serious and urgent problem was the integration of six hundred Princely States, which posed a serious threat to the very survival of India as a nation-state. The British had taken the plea that they were the Paramount Powers of the Princely States, and after granting independence to these two newly created nations, their paramountcy had lapsed, and as a consequence, the native states were free to retain their independent status or could join either India or Pakistan.¹ India had, though, inherited a crippled economy with a stagnant agriculture and an underdeveloped industry, yet it soon moved on the path of nation building and framing a constitution which could usher in a vibrant political system based on democratic principles.² India got its exposure to the parliamentary system due to a series of events like India's colonial history, freedom

¹ 'Cabinet Mission's Memorandum, May 12, 1946' *India News Network*

<<https://www.indiannewsnetwork.com/20191207/cabinet-mission-s-memorandum-12-may-1946>> accessed 17 November 2025

² Reena Nand, 'THE DYNAMICS OF INDIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM' (2010) 71(2) Indian Journal of Political Science 413 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42753705>> accessed 17 November 2025

movements, dating from the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny to the 1942 Quit India Movement, comprising an array of satyagraha movements, followed by the ultimate revolution of constitution making.

Important legislation like the *Government of India Act 1919* promoted the dyarchy system, where important matters were under British control with a limited legislative council and restricted political autonomy.³ The *Government of India Act 1935* abolished this biased system and opened doors for new India-centric, authentic ideas, which happened in the closed chambers of the Constituent Assembly in 1935.⁴ The assembly was inspired by peculiar and firm ideas to embrace the parliamentary system. Familiarity was one of them. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, the chief maker of the holy grail, our rulebook, mentioned in his speech, "*The Indian Constitution has been created after ransacking all the constitutions in the world.*" Furthermore, the prevailing system followed by the British set a benchmark for the Indians, as they found similarity in circumstances and found that the democratic republican would well accept the parliamentary system.⁵ Other personalities like Jawaharlal Nehru, K. Munshi, Krishna Swamy Iyer ardently supported the broad idea of Cabinet government.⁶ Though the word parliamentary democracy is not mentioned in the Constitution of India⁷, there is absolutely no doubt that India has accepted a parliamentary system of government. Moreover, the parliamentary system envisages a majority government, which, in turn, is based on the game of numbers.⁸

MERITS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

Unlike in the presidential system of government, where the executive, that is, the president, is elected independently through direct vote and holds office for a fixed term, the parliamentary system reflects an open system of continuous political accountability. This openness results from the constitutional imperative that the Council of Ministers, headed by

³ Government of India Act 1919

⁴ Government of India Act 1935

⁵ Meera Emmanuel, “If hereafter things go wrong, we will have nobody to blame”, Dr Ambedkar’s final speech in Constituent Assembly’ *Bar & Bench* (14 April 2018) <<https://www.barandbench.com/columns/dr-ambedkar-1949-constituent-assembly-speech>> accessed 17 November 2025

⁶ Kanan Gahrana, ‘PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM AND UNITARIANISM IN INDIA: IS A SYSTEMIC CHANGE NEEDED?’ (1990) 51(3) Indian Journal of Political Science 348 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41855502>> accessed 17 November 2025

⁷ The Constitution of India 1950

⁸ Nand (n 2)

the Prime Minister, have the confidence of the lower house of Parliament (Lok Sabha) at all times. A failure to gain this confidence can lead to their dismissal via processes such as a no-confidence motion, thus rendering the executive constantly responsive and accountable to the legislature, and by extension, to the people.⁹ This makes executive authority subject to legislative control and not able to act in immunity from representative political will.

We Swim Together, Drown Together: One of the distinguishing characteristics of the parliamentary system is the blending of executive and legislative authority, clearly distinct from the formal separation of the presidential system.¹⁰ The Prime Minister is the actual executive head of the state, while being a member of the parliament, giving access to the legislature. With such duality, the Prime Minister takes part in debates and discussions revolving around legislative matters, unaccomplished plans and policies, and governance of the state. The executive is answerable to the legislature, hence leaving no room for dispute, which might further lead to the fall of the government. In a presidential system, the president is the actual head, and all powers are in one hand. The cabinets are neither elected nor drawn from a political background but must be appointed by the president, as per his acceptance and preference. In fact, the presidential system is a *one-man show* where there is no responsibility, but stability is found in the procedures. Such a governmental arrangement ensures sound governance through simple communication and executive accountability to the legislature. Furthermore, the *doctrine of collective responsibility* makes the whole Council of Ministers accountable to the Lok Sabha collectively; if the house passes a *vote of censure* or *no-confidence* on a minister or the whole council, the government has to resign, resulting in instability and fallout of the entire political system, leading to havoc in the state.¹¹

Flexibility over Stability: The parliamentary system's flexibility is one of its main strengths, allowing governments to be replaced quickly without causing constitutional crises whenever they lose support from the majority. This flexibility enables the political system to respond

⁹ Kazuyuki Takahashi, 'CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACY IN A PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM' (1990) 53(1) Law and Contemporary Problems <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1191830?origin=crossref>> accessed 17 November 2025

¹⁰ Young-Choul Kim and Sangmook Lee, 'CONSTITUTIONAL DESIGNS AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE THIRD WORLD' (2009) 26(1) Journal of Third World Studies <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/45198833>> accessed 17 November 2025

¹¹ Ashish Kumar Daga, 'Collective and Individual Responsibility in the Parliamentary Form of Government' (Academike, 09 October 2024) <<https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/collective-and-individual-responsibility-in-the-parliamentary-form-of-government/>> accessed 17 November 2025

effectively to shifting public attitudes, new crises, or party realignments. Unlike presidential systems, which have fixed executive terms that can lead to prolonged deadlocks during political stagnation, parliamentarism provides channels for political renewal and realignment through confidence votes and coalition adjustments. Bicameralism also formalises democratic authority in this system. Parliamentary practices like Question Hour, Zero Hour, debates, adjournment motions, and standing committees empower legislatures to question ministers, hold the government accountable, oversee public expenditure, and set legislative agendas.

Notably, the framers of the Constitution supported the focus on executive responsibility rather than rigid stability, advocating that a democratic government should be responsible and accountable to the people via their elected representatives. Parliamentary democracy exemplifies this principle by subjecting the executive to continuous scrutiny, in contrast to the secure and stable tenures typically found in presidential systems.

The President is just a Nominal Head in a Parliamentary System: In a parliamentary system, the ultimate power lies with the Prime Minister, the executive head. The Council of Ministers work under him and is appointed by the President. Articles 74¹² and 75¹³ highlight the true nature of the parliamentary system at the Union level, according to which the President makes the appointment of all these deemed officials.¹⁴ But the President does not get access to supreme power. Dr Rajendra Prasad expressed concern that the President's role had become merely ceremonial, limiting independent action in exceptional circumstances. Yet, he supported the parliamentary system for ensuring accountability and stability. A classic application of his words can be seen in the upcoming years since the 42nd Constitutional Amendment 1976¹⁵, where Article 74 was interpreted to have an obligation over the President to consider the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers to give an assent to any matter.¹⁶ The same was amended in the 44th constitutional amendment, 1978, where the president could give the advice back for reconsideration, once using his veto power. This

¹² The Constitution of India 1950, art 74

¹³ The Constitution of India 1950, art 75

¹⁴ 'The Nominal Head of India: President' (KSG India) <<https://www.ksgindia.com/blog/the-nominal-head-of-india-president.html>> accessed 17 November 2025

¹⁵ The Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act 1976

¹⁶ The Constitution of India 1950, art 74

amendment gave the president some discretion, which was emphasised in Dr Prasad's ideologies.

LOSING YOUR VOICE TO AUTHORITARIANISM

The presidential system is known for decisiveness in decision-making. Since the president of the state exercises independent authority, they can respond swiftly and decisively in crises without delays from coalition negotiations, which are often experienced in parliamentary regimes. A classic example of this would be the former U.S. President Harry Truman's decision to use nuclear weapons to end World War II decisively. This decisiveness is backed by the president's order to appoint and dismiss the cabinet members who are neither elected nor chosen by the general public.¹⁷ Another advantage of the presidential system is the stability and fixed tenure. The president is directly elected by the people of the state or an electoral college for a set term, usually four or five years, and cannot be dethroned by the legislature or the people except through the impeachment procedure, which has a quite tedious application.¹⁸ For example, the U.S. presidential system has demonstrated notable stability even amid intense political polarisation.

While praised for its strengths, the presidential system also exhibits notable disadvantages that raise concerns about democracy and political stability. One significant drawback is the chances of authoritarianism and power centralisation. Since executive power resides in a single individual, it can prove to be disastrous as the office may become more dominant, lacking strong institutional checks.¹⁹ Political deadlock is another major issue. When the people directly elect both the executive and legislature, disagreements can lead to legislative paralysis, delaying essential laws and policies. The U.S. history of government shutdowns over budget disputes between Congress and the president highlights this challenge. In such cases, government inefficiency and public frustration tend to grow.

¹⁷ 'Harry Truman's Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb' (National Park Service)

<<https://www.nps.gov/articles/trumanatomicbomb.htm>> accessed 17 November 2025

¹⁸ Sergio Fabbrini, 'The American System of Separated Government: An Historical-Institutional Interpretation' (1999) 20(1) International Political Science Review <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3451623>> accessed 17 November 2025

¹⁹ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (ECPR Press 2016)

Rigidity in Impeachment Procedures: In India, it is found that removal and impeachment are synonymous with each other. Article 56(1)(b)²⁰ and Article 61²¹ of the Constitution embody a constitutional mechanism designed to ensure accountability while safeguarding the dignity and stability of the highest constitutional office. The sole ground for impeachment is 'violation of the Constitution,' a broad term, quite flexible in nature, and clarified by the respectful framers of the Constitution. This term also involves treason, bribery, or serious constitutional breaches.²² The Indian context proves to be more expansive and covers all the grey areas prevalent in any normal circumstance than the constitutional teachings engraved in the American history of impeachment, which consists only of 'treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanours' as grounds for an impeachment of the president.²³

The presidential system is seen to have an opposing idea for impeachment in the presidential system. According to the American procedural law, removal and impeachment are two different scenarios resulting in different outcomes. Removal is seen as a mere false accusation on a respected personality, whereas impeachment is a grave situation that is equal to dethroning a ruler from his majestic position. The impeachment process is quite complicated yet stringent. It is a system where impeachment by the House of Representatives is a formal accusation, and removal occurs only upon conviction by a two-thirds majority in the Senate, often complicated by partisan politics. India's mechanism thus prevents prolonged deadlocks and enhances timely accountability.²⁴

Favouritism in the Cabinet System: In many presidential systems, cabinet members and executive secretaries are appointed solely by the president and are not elected legislators. This practice can reduce executive accountability to the legislature and public since these officials owe their position only to the president and do not have electoral legitimacy or direct parliamentary oversight. This can diminish transparency and weaken checks on executive power. This also gives power to the president to act and make decisions of his/her own

²⁰ The Constitution of India 1950, art 56(1)(B)

²¹ The Constitution of India 1950, art 61

²² Dr Syed Asima Refayi, 'President of India' (University of Kashmir) <https://law.uok.edu.in/Files/5ce6c765-c013-446c-b6ac-b9de496f8751/Custom/President_of_India.pdf> accessed 15 October 2025

²³ Astha Tripathi, 'Comparative Analysis of Impeachment Procedure of President of India and the US' (Manupatra, 03 February 2021) <<https://articles.manupatra.com/article-details/Comparative-Analysis-of-Impeachment-Procedure-of-President-of-India-and-the-US>> accessed 15 October 2025

²⁴ 'About Impeachment' (United States Senate) <<https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/impeachment.htm>> accessed 15 October 2025

choice and place people who share amicable relations and have a polite background associated with the person in power, giving room for familial relations to come to office and enjoy their own rewards.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO SHIFT TO A PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM NOW?

The debate whether India can transform its government system from parliamentary to presidential is a hotly contested issue sporadically brought up by scholars, politicians and leaders since independence. Although the Constitution currently establishes parliamentary democracy as the fundamental model, amendments are theoretically possible. This transformation can, however, be complicated and needs extensive agreement at the political level and among citizens, coupled with proper deliberation on India's specific socio-political landscape. In 1935, the All-India Congress defended the parliamentary ideology by categorising it as more cooperative and inclusive in nature. Likewise, others argued that India's pluralistic and populous society could benefit from the parliamentary structure, which could make way for simultaneous elections and eliminate frequent government turnover.

On the other hand, critics emphasise that India's federal nature and diversity call for coalition politics made possible by parliamentary democracy. A presidential system could lead to an over-centralisation of power, exclusion of minority voices, and initiate governance gridlocks due to India's multiplicity of regional and caste groups.²⁵ Transition would also involve wholesale constitutional engineering, raise legal problems in respect of the basic structure doctrine, and require political and public consensus across the country, a complicated process liable to transient instability. Gradual reform within the framework of the parliamentary system, consolidated in existing institutions and processes, is at present favoured by key stakeholders.

²⁵ José Antonio Cheibub et al., 'Beyond Presidentialism and Parliamentarism' (2014) 44(3) British Journal of Political Science <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43821632>> accessed 17 November 2025

PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM FEATURES INDIA COULD ADOPT

Though the parliamentary system is best suited to Indian dynamics, a few features of the presidential system can be adapted and thought over by scholars, policy-makers, and leaders.

Stronger Separation of Powers: The three structural domains - legislature, executive, judiciary - must work in their distinct spheres, with complete autonomy, abiding by the provisions of the law. Independent functioning would create more transparency and would lead to less chaos and misuse of power by people in positions of power. It would be easier to make decisions democratically without the pressure of allied units or parallel systems with conflicting opinions.

Fixed Executive Term with Stability: As witnessed throughout the political history of India, fallouts in the ruling government have been disastrous and unacceptable. Implementing fixed terms for the Prime Minister or a system to cope with recurring government fallouts may enhance political through decreasing dislocations brought by changing coalition majorities. Such a structured procedure would help gain immense accountability and stability at the same time.

Increased Executive Decision-Making Authority: The presidential system provides faster decisions through a single, answerable executive. The role of the president must not be limited to being a nominal leader, but some discretion must be granted. India can introduce more sophisticated decision-making processes or measures to give the executive enhanced powers for bold action while ensuring parliamentary monitoring.

Individual Ministerial Responsibility: Currently, in India, ministers operate under the principle of collective responsibility, meaning that the entire Council of Ministers stands or falls together based on the confidence of the Lok Sabha, and individual ministers are not held solely accountable publicly for their departments. In the presidential system, cabinet members are individually accountable to the president, rather than collectively to the parliament. Incorporating elements of this system would enhance ministerial accountability in India by giving more definitive responsibility for departmental performance.

CONCLUSION

India's adoption of the parliamentary form was an educated decision after careful consideration of its multi-faceted socio-political ground realities, focusing on responsibility in the form of legislative accountability, accommodation of various interests, and adaptability to deal with coalition politics. The parliamentary system ensures inclusivity, accountability, and durability, achieving stability and responsiveness. Though the presidential system has ideal features that inspire the Indian model few alterations can be made to the existing mechanism, as a complete transformation would invite ambiguity and would require an ample amount of time to adjust to such a humongous change. Considering India's democratic maturity and pluralism, enhancing and remodelling the parliamentary system pragmatically incorporating some presidential innovations may be the most prudent way forward, protecting democratic ideals, promoting effectiveness in governance, and preserving national cohesion. Continuous scrutiny holds the government responsible before the legislature, and indirectly before the electorate, to be democratically responsive. The doctrine of collective responsibility makes the ministers act collectively. If the actions of any minister or the actions of the government as an institution are disapproved of by the legislature, resignation is compulsory. This system keeps the executive under scrutiny and eliminates the threat of authoritarianism, which can happen in a presidential system where the authority is more centralised.

Furthermore, India's parliamentary form of government is more appropriate for dealing with the nation's large-scale social, cultural, and religious diversity. With 15 distinct religions, several linguistic and ethnic groups, coalition governments function as a means to ensure inclusive governance. Negotiation, bargaining, and compromise in coalition politics avoid the concentration of power in one party or one person. This inclusivity ensures representation of minority interests and government stability despite societal complexities. By contrast, while presidential systems promise stability from fixed executive tenures, they are unable to cope with such pluralism.

Although the presidential system is widely acclaimed for its decisiveness, policy stability, and unambiguity of tenure, it can form structurally flawed structures in the Indian system. Centralising power in one executive can form a recipe for authoritarianism if there are poor institutional checks. Legislative-executive deadlocks, characteristic of presidential forms of

government, can block law-making as well as administrative promptness, as witnessed in the recurring U.S budget stalemates. India, on the other hand, addresses such challenges through its parliamentary system, viewing them as legislative issues to be resolved first on political and moral grounds, only later involving the judiciary.