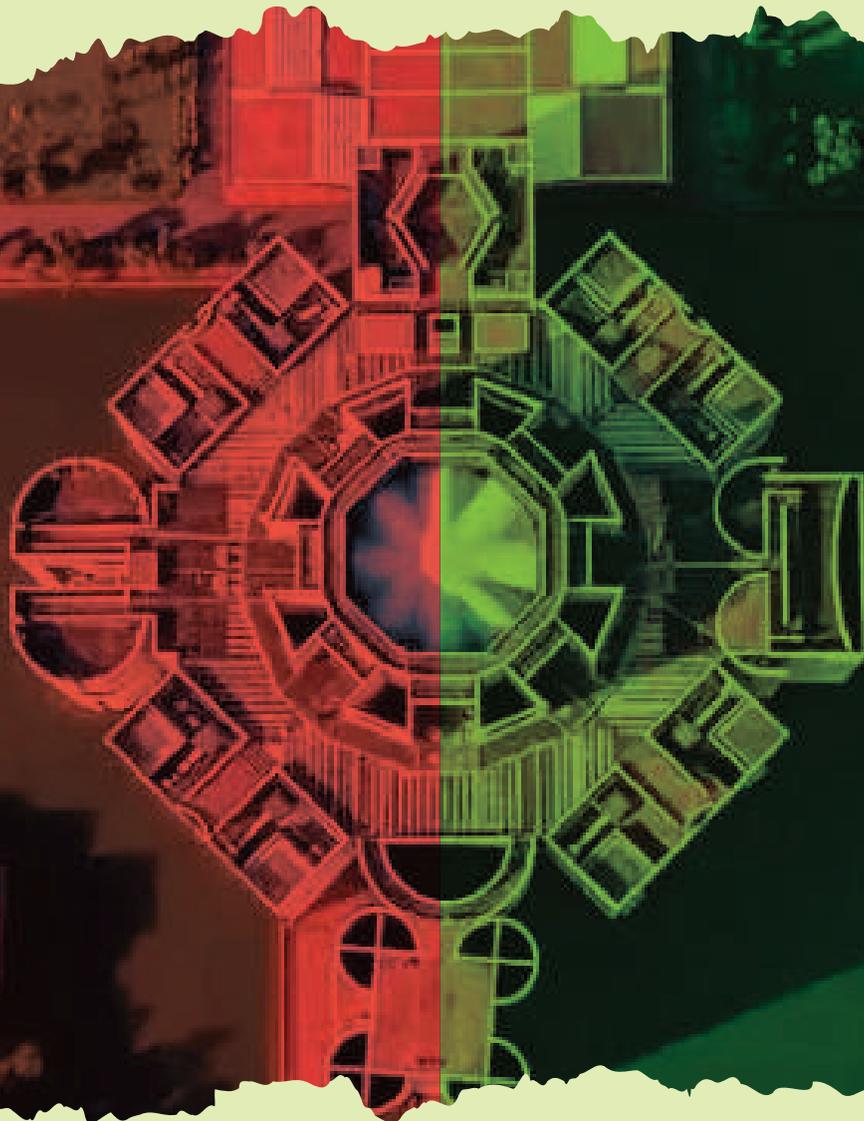


Ensuring Accountability of the Majority Party in the Parliamentary System of Bangladesh

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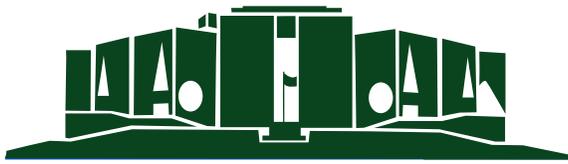
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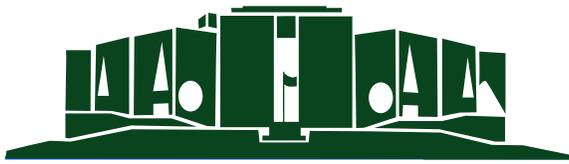
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Executive Summary

The study examines the problem of weak accountability of the majority party within the parliamentary system of Bangladesh and explores whether structural reform, particularly the introduction of a bicameral legislature could address this challenge. It is written in the context of Bangladesh's post-2024 political transition, where public demand for stronger checks and balances on executive power has intensified. The paper notes that the current unicameral parliament has increasingly failed to function as an effective forum for representation and oversight, largely due to the concentration of power in the office of the Prime Minister, partisan domination of legislative processes, and erosion of institutional independence. Against this background, the Interim Government has initiated multiple reform commissions to recommend constitutional, electoral, judicial, and parliamentary reforms aimed at rebuilding democratic accountability.

The analytical framework of the study identifies four core instruments necessary for parliamentary accountability: the legislature, the judiciary, the executive structure, and the electorate. It argues that effective accountability depends not only on constitutional design but also on the practical functioning of parliamentary procedures such as legislative scrutiny, committee oversight, and budgetary control. By comparing unicameral and bicameral systems, the paper evaluates key performance dimensions including representation, stability of law, quality of decision-making, concentration of power, and responsiveness to citizens. The analysis suggests that while a unicameral system can be efficient, it is vulnerable to domination by a single party when countervailing institutions are weak.

A major portion of the report evaluates the actual performance of Bangladesh's Parliament since independence. Evidence presented shows that legislative activity is overwhelmingly controlled by the government, with private members playing an extremely limited role in initiating laws. Parliamentary committees, although formally empowered, often conduct superficial and hurried scrutiny of bills, rarely challenge executive decisions, and operate with strong partisan bias. Oversight mechanisms such as question time and committee inquiries exist but have limited effectiveness due to boycotts by opposition parties, rigid party discipline, and lack of transparency. Budgetary oversight is also described as largely ceremonial, with Parliament having minimal influence over financial planning and post-expenditure review.

The study reviews reform proposals put forward by various commissions and political parties. These include reducing the absolute power of the Prime Minister, strengthening the independence of the Election Commission and judiciary, decentralising governance, expanding fundamental rights, and creating an upper house of Parliament. Political parties have also proposed measures such as term limits for the Prime Minister, changes to floor-crossing rules, greater opposition representation in committees, and reforms to the caretaker government system. The report observes that while many proposals aim to improve accountability, they often reflect partisan interests rather than a coherent institutional vision.

On the specific question of bicameralism, the study offers a cautious assessment. It recognises that an upper house could potentially provide additional scrutiny, represent diverse interests, and dilute the dominance of

the majority party. However, it warns that simply creating a second chamber would not automatically solve accountability problems if electoral processes remain flawed and political culture unchanged. There is also a risk that a poorly designed bicameral system could create legislative deadlock or further weaken the lower house. The paper therefore stresses that the effectiveness of any upper house would depend on its method of selection, powers, and independence from partisan control.

The report concludes that improving accountability in Bangladesh requires a comprehensive package of reforms rather than a single structural change. Strengthening parliamentary committees, ensuring credible elections, enhancing judicial independence, decentralising administration, and empowering oversight institutions are identified as essential steps. The authors argue that Bangladesh may be able to achieve substantial improvement within the existing unicameral framework if these reforms are properly implemented. At the same time, they recommend careful and context-specific consideration of bicameralism as one possible option among several for restoring balance, transparency, and democratic governance.



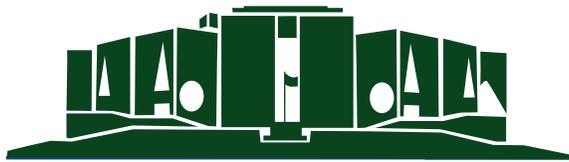
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The authors wish to express their profound gratitude to the international and national parliamentary experts and professors who participated in the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and expert group meetings. Their specialised knowledge and critical insights were instrumental in navigating the complexities of bicameralism and legislative accountability. We are also deeply thankful to the political leaders and various stakeholders whose active participation in the Dialogue provided a crucial understanding of the motivations and perspectives driving ongoing reform proposals for institutional change.

A special note of recognition is due to the study consultant, *Mr. Nizam Ahmed*, for his invaluable support and scholarly contributions. His expertise was vital in shaping the core sections of this study and ensuring the analytical rigor of the report. The collective wisdom of these contributors has been essential in addressing the systemic challenges of the Jatiya Sangsad and charting a path toward a more accountable and resilient parliamentary framework.

The research team also gratefully acknowledges the valuable support received from *Mr Avra Bhattacharjee*, Additional Director, Dialogue and Outreach, CPD, and *Mr H M Al Imran Khan*, Publication Associate, CPD.



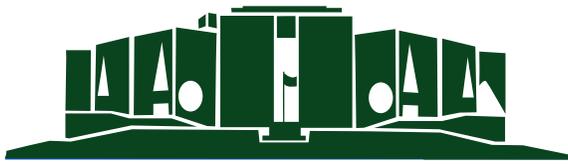
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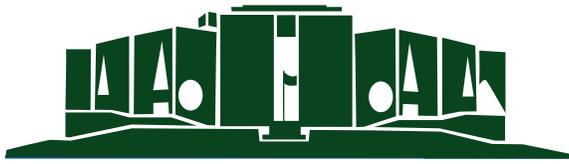
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Acronyms

ABP	Amar Bangladesh Party
AL	Awami League
BAMU	Budget Analysis and Monitoring Unit
BIWTC	Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation
BJI	Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
C&AG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CoS	Council of States
CPB	Communist Party of Bangladesh
EC	Election Commission
EC	Estimates Committee
FATA	Federal Administered Tribal Areas
FPTP	First-Past-The-Post
HoP	House of the People
HoR	House of Representatives
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
JS	Jatiya Sangsad
JSD	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal
KII	Key Informant Interview
LG	Local Government
MP	Member of Parliament
NCC	National Consensus Commission
NCP	National Citizen Party
PAC	Public Accounts Committee

PM	Prime Minister
PMQT	Prime Minister's Question Time
PR	Proportional Representation
PUC	Public Undertaking Committee
ROP	Rules of Procedure
SCM	Standing Committees on Ministries
STV	Single Transferable Vote
TCB	Trading Corporation of Bangladesh



Bangladesh's political transition in 2024 is marked with people's demand for accountability of the majority party in the parliament which formed the government without proper way of people's mandate towards developing a political system and parliamentary practice which will be accountable to the people's demand, will work for ensuring good governance, human rights, and inclusivity for all sections of the people. A major demand is to ensure 'checks and balance' of the power of the majority party, particularly the prime minister's authority in the both legislative and executive branches. Given the weak functionality of the existing parliamentary system, a new form of parliamentary system by introducing an upper house has been in the discussion both within and outside the government.

Considering the demand for undertaking major reforms including those related to the reform in the parliamentary system, the Interim Government took proposals from different reform commissions especially constitution reform commission, electoral reform commission, judiciary reform commission, local government reform commission etc. Based on six reform commissions' reports, a total of 166 reform proposals has been shortlisted including those related to the parliamentary reform. (Karim, 2025). These proposals are in active consideration of the Consensus Commission (February 2025) which is formed as part of consensus building on key structural reforms on constitution, judiciary, electoral, local government and other issues. After a long-eight-month discussion, the consensus commission reached with a short list of reform proposals which political parties are by and large agreed to implement during the period of Interim Government and after the national election in 2026.

During the discussion at the consensus commission, political parties have discussed an upper house under the proposed system which could act as a house for 'checks and balance' in the power played by the majority party and its leader both in the Parliament as well as in operating the government. It is argued that the existing unicameral system allows concentration of power (through the 15th amendment of the constitution). However, political parties have different opinions regarding its formation and implementation of bicameral parliament. Whilst agreement on reform gained some positive responses, disagreements on the formation process and the lack of detailed discussion about its scope of work, extent of authority, balance of power between two houses roles of an upper house continue to create tensions.

There are debates over whether introduction of upper house in the parliament could ensure the accountability of the majority party given the weak democratic institutions and electoral process. In other words, does the weak state of the lower house in ensuring accountability of the majority party and its leadership could be improved through formation of upper house? In extreme sense, does the formation of an upper house could further weaken the functioning of the lower house? Finally, is there any alternative which could be considered to better address the accountability issue of the legislative branch of the state.

Under these circumstances, this study seeks to explain whether necessary reforms in the existing unicameral parliament and other statutory bodies can ensure accountability of the majority party, or whether an upper house is the appropriate means to achieve this goal. Against this backdrop, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has

undertaken this study to critically assess the feasibility of bicameral reform to ensure the checks and balances of the 'supreme' power of the head of the government and ruling party, examine alternative mechanisms, and propose context-specific recommendations for strengthening accountability, transparency, and democratic parliamentary practices in Bangladesh. Further objectives of this study are-

- (a) To examine the weaknesses of the existing parliamentary system in ensuring the accountability of the majority party and its leader in the parliament as well as in their executive roles.
- (b) To review different proposals related with the parliamentary reform especially those linked with formation of upper house in the Parliament.
- (c) To review the cross-country experiences on accountability related issues in the parliamentary systems of South Asia and other regions.
- (d) To analyse the advantages and disadvantages of different proposals related to parliamentary reform under the given political system in Bangladesh.
- (e) To put forward a set of alternative proposals for ensuring accountability of the majority party putting emphasis on a better functional parliamentary system.

The study has been carried out based on primary and secondary data and information on the parliament and factors for guiding the comparison between two systems. Several key informant interviews (KIIs) have been carried out with political scientists, academics, political party leaders. A detailed literature review has been carried out regard with countries' experiences of parliamentary system, reasons for transitions. Secondly, the study looks at the recommendations and proposal of political parties to analyse the reform and how they may affect the accountability of the majority party. Thirdly, the challenges of current parliament in Bangladesh are reviewed. Cross country experiences of both parliamentary systems in South Asia are analysed to assess their strengths and weaknesses in terms of accountability, transparency and checks and balances. Finally, this study evaluates whether Bangladesh should strengthen its current parliamentary system or shift to the counterpart. The study also explored the alternative reforms to improve checks and balances without changing the current structure.



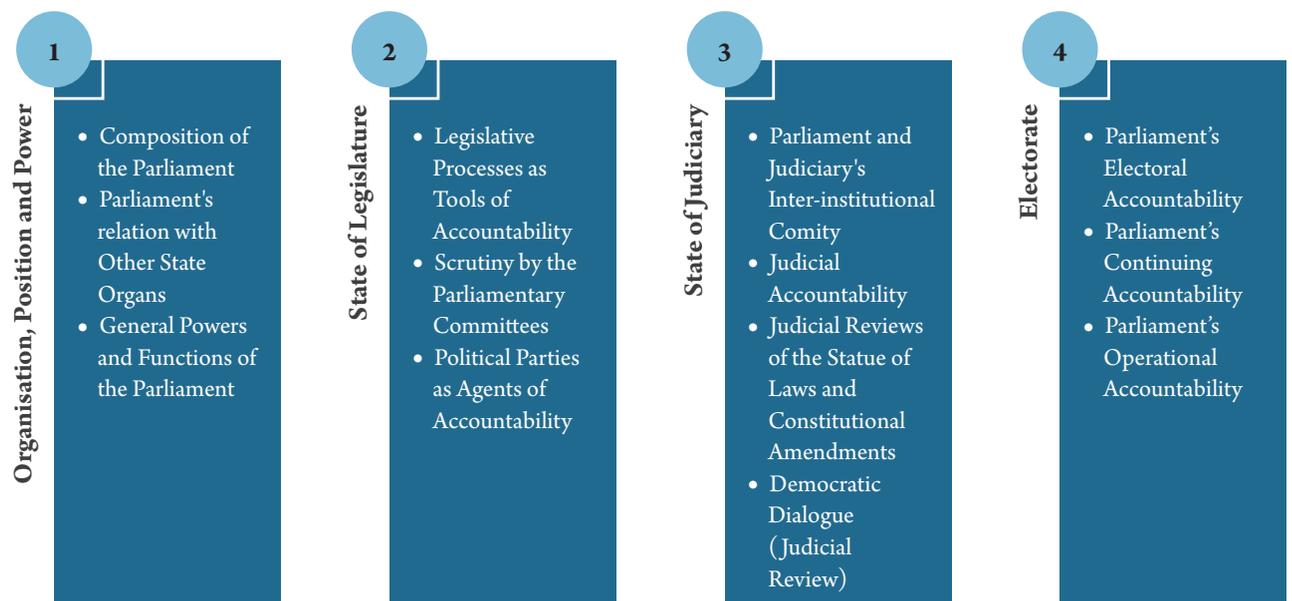
Analytical Framework for Reviewing Accountability of the Majority Party in the Parliamentary System

2.1 Key Instruments for Accountability in the Parliamentary System

This study adopts a parliamentary analytical framework to critically assess the institutional performance of the unicameral system and the potential merits of transition towards another structure for ensuring accountability and controlling one party dominance. The framework first interrogates four core institutional instruments that currently operationalise checks and balances within the parliamentary setting. Thereafter, it evaluates the capacity of a parliamentary arrangement to institutionalise stronger counterweights against executive dominance by comparatively analysing eight parliamentary performance factors essential for ensuring transparency, accountability, and efficiency under both arrangements.

In its present form, Parliament functions as the supreme organ of representation and accountability, entrusted with both legislative and oversight responsibilities. Its effective performance depends upon institutional transparency in deliberation, mechanisms of vertical and horizontal accountability, and procedural efficiency in enacting legislation (Chowdhury, 2025). Four structural instruments form the core basis of this architecture.

Figure 1 Instruments for Ensuring Accountability, Transparency and efficiency of Unicameral Parliament



Source: (Chowdhury, 2025).

2.1.1 Organisation, Position and Power

In most parliamentary systems, the legislature (or parliament) holds a critical position in representing the people, creating laws, and holding the government accountable. It acts as a check on the executive by ensuring transparency, debating policies, and holding ministers accountable through mechanisms like votes of confidence, question times, and committee investigations. The relationship between the legislature and other state organs, such as the executive and judiciary, forms the basis of a constitutional framework that seeks to balance power and avoid concentration in a single branch.

In Westminster-style systems, the legislature is typically seen as the most important institution in representing the will of the people. The executive is drawn from the legislature, with ministers and the head of government (e.g., prime minister) being elected from within it. This fusion of powers contrasts with presidential systems where the executive is separate from the legislature.

A legislature may be unicameral (one chamber, e.g., Finland) or bicameral (two chambers, e.g., the United States or the UK). The first typically offers greater efficiency in passing laws, while the second is designed to provide checks and balances by having different chambers representing different interests or regions (Chowdhury, 2025).

2.1.2 State of Legislature

The most fundamental role of the legislature is to create, amend, and repeal laws. This process involves proposing, debating, amending, and ultimately voting on bills that shape the legal and policy landscape of the country. In some systems, the legislature also plays a role in setting the budget and allocating public resources. Legislatures hold the executive accountable by questioning its actions, policies, and the implementation of laws. Mechanisms for oversight include question times, debates, hearings, and the establishment of committees that can scrutinise the actions of the executive branch. Legislators are elected to represent the interests of their constituencies or political parties. As per normative framework, the legislature reflects the diverse views of the electorate, ensuring that various social, economic, and political interests are represented in decision-making processes. In many systems, however, the actual functioning of the legislature may be undermined by factors like party discipline, executive dominance, or lack of meaningful opposition. Legislators may become more focused on party loyalty rather than representing the diverse interests of their constituents (Chowdhury, 2025).

2.1.3 State of Judiciary

The judiciary in many democratic systems is often intended to function as an independent arbiter that ensures justice, protects fundamental rights, and interprets the constitution. Its relationship with legislature and executive are crucial in maintaining a balance of power. One of the most critical functions of judiciary in modern democracies is the power of judicial review, examining the constitutionality of laws and executive actions. Strong judicial review powers ensure that laws passed by the legislature or decisions made by the executive do not violate the constitution or fundamental rights.

Ideally, the judiciary should remain autonomous from the executive, although in practice, political influence may still play a role, particularly when the executive controls judicial appointments or when the judiciary is tasked with interpreting laws that favour executive policies. Judges should be independent from political pressures but also accountable to ensure fairness in their decisions. However, the balance between judicial independence and democratic accountability is complex. In some systems, the judiciary may be overly powerful, leading to judicial overreach, whilst in others, the judiciary may be subordinate to the executive or legislature, limiting its role in upholding democratic values (Chowdhury, 2025).

2.1.4 Electorate

The electorate plays a critical role in democratic systems, primarily through its ability to vote, hold elected officials accountable, and engage in political decision-making. Voting in free, fair, and regular elections allows citizens to express their preferences and select representatives who will advocate for their interests in the legislature and

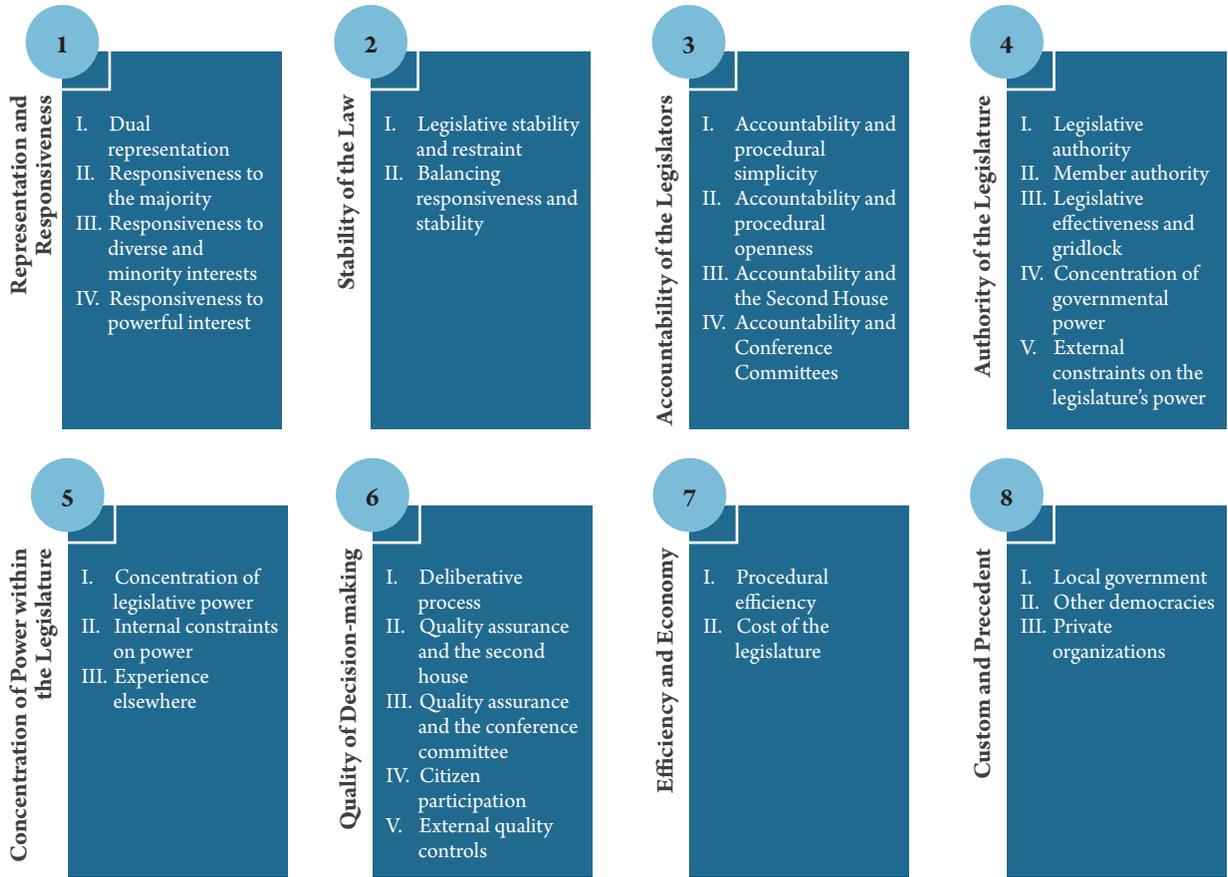
executive. Through the act of voting, the electorate also serves as an accountability mechanism, rewarding or punishing elected officials based on their performance. Beyond voting, citizens can participate in the political process by engaging in campaigns, public consultations, and interest groups, which is essential for ensuring the system remains responsive to public needs. The legitimacy of the system is largely dependent on the electorate's trust in the fairness of the electoral process, as disillusionment can lead to political apathy and disengagement.

Different electoral systems, such as First-Past-the-Post (FPTP), Proportional Representation (PR), and Mixed-Member Systems, affect how the electorate's choices are translated into political power. In FPTP systems, commonly used in the UK and US, larger parties tend to dominate, sometimes distorting the will of the electorate by enabling a party to form a government without a majority of votes, which can limit representation for smaller parties. In contrast, PR systems (e.g., the Netherlands) provide a more accurate representation of voter preferences, allowing smaller parties to gain legislative seats in proportion to the votes they receive, leading to greater diversity in government representation (Chowdhury, 2025).

2.2 Different Instruments for Ensuring Accountability in Unicameral and Bicameral Systems

Assessment of the unicameral system alone is insufficient to guide institutional reform. The prospective bicameral system must be evaluated against eight critical dimensions identified by Todd (1999), each of which provides benchmarks for enhancing checks and balances.

Figure 2 Substantial Conditions to be Analysed Before the Shift



Source: (Todd, 1999).

2.2.1 Representation and Responsiveness

The unicameral system puts an end to dual representation, since both houses come from equal population districts and only duplicate voice. It provides for a single chamber that is simple, open, and more responsive to majority will. Minority and diverse interests to be protected not by two houses but by a good electoral system and careful, extended debate in one chamber. In addition, it secures scope for transparency in one legislature, which reduces the hidden influence of powerful interests and lobby groups.

Whereas the bicameral system provides for maintaining dual representation (Figure-2), because senators and representatives differ in term, committee, and constituency size, and this gives citizens more contact and access. Advocates of bicameral system supports it for limiting simple majority rule, since two chambers balance rival interests and create more inclusive decisions. It demands stronger protection of minorities and diversity, because two houses with different customs, outlooks, and leadership bring more space for many interests. Finally, it necessitates divided authority, which makes it harder for lobbyists to control outcomes, since they must persuade more members and committees in both chambers.

2.2.2 Stability of the Law

Unicameral legislature ensures stability in lawmaking through internal structural mechanisms. Members are directly elected by the citizen, and the system minimises volatility by fostering continuity within a single body. Nebraska's model illustrates this balance, where legislators serve four-year overlapping terms, allowing half of the assembly to face re-election during each biennial session whilst the remaining members provide institutional memory and a longer-term perspective in legislative decision-making.

In a bicameral legislature, stability is achieved through the interplay of two chambers that collectively moderate the legislative process. The lower house, with shorter terms and smaller constituencies, is more responsive to immediate shifts in public opinion. Whereas the upper house, with longer terms and larger constituencies, introduces deliberation and restraint. This dual structure sustains continuity in governance, ensuring that law-making reflects both short-term responsiveness and the stability necessary for consistent policy outcomes.

2.2.3 Accountability of Legislators

Unicameral system holds the legislators accountable before the electorate as their conduct is constantly under scrutiny. They remain alert to constituent concerns and interests, since the proceedings of the House are open to public view. They cannot yield, nor distort their decision-making by shifting blame, for the actions are theirs alone. Members of a unicameral legislature cannot hide behind conference committee actions

Given that, bicameral system empowers enhanced accountability through sustained citizen vigilance and comprehension. Yet in practice, legislative decision-making is shifted away from the standing committees and the chamber floor and placed within negotiations between the two Houses. This procedure enables a few leaders and conference committee members to determine the most important measures in privacy and obscurity. Rank-and-file legislators, absent from these pivotal committees have the scope to disclaim responsibility by placing the burden upon the conference committees. Inter-house negotiations are concealed from the public view and resistant to comprehension, indicating less accountability to the electorate.

2.2.4 Authority of the Legislature

A unicameral system gives full legislative power to one chamber. Law-making is unified and fast. The legislature can respond quickly to policy needs and negotiate strongly with the executive or federal level. Individual legislators gain more autonomy and influence. Their proposals do not need approval from a second chamber, allowing direct action.

A bicameral system splits authority between two chambers. This creates tension that requires negotiation and compromise. Policies face multi-layered scrutiny before passing. Larger memberships and committees build expertise and memory. This strengthens oversight of the executive and complex issues. The aim is to prevent

impulsive laws and reflect wider interests. In the US, the Senate's role in treaties and appointments balances power. In Germany, the Bundesrat ensures state consent and federal balance. Bicameralism stresses procedure, internal checks, and shared power within the legislature (Todd, 1999).

2.2.5 Concentration of Power within the Legislature

Power in a unicameral system is widely shared. Members elect leaders and committee chairs. Rules limit leadership powers to avoid dominance. Committees and legislators together shape policy outcomes. Nebraska shows this model, with open participation and decentralised control. It prevents concentration of authority without a second chamber.

Power in a bicameral system is divided between two chambers. Each has leaders, committees, and bill authors with influence. The second chamber serves as a formal check. Rules set committee powers, scope, and deadlines. This structure spreads influence and ensures collective decision-making. It guards against control by one leader or faction and builds balance into lawmaking.

2.2.6 Quality of Decision-Making

Decision making process in unicameral system has directness and simplicity that gives the ideas of legislators more thorough airing and exact consideration. A successful bill takes a straightforward path from committee hearing to the floor then to the governor. Unicameral system encourages broad public participation in legislative decisions and channels the energy of citizens and organisations effectively on the activities of one house.

Whereas in bicameral system, a successful bill must go through duplicate committee hearings, floor debates in two houses, then often go through a conference committee proceeding and additional floor debate. Thus, it slows down hasty decision making by creating opportunities for public debate through the conference committees.

2.2.7 Efficiency and Economy

Unicameral systems are smaller and less costly. Nebraska's experience shows a reduction in legislative costs by roughly one-half when it adopted a single-house system. Fewer legislators, staff, and committees reduce payroll, administrative overhead, and duplication of legislative resources. Even with low total operating costs, Nebraska provides more resources per legislator than some bicameral counterparts. It indicates that savings are systemic rather than compromising legislative support. Economically, a unicameral system consolidates resources, limits redundancies, and channels expenditures directly into legislative operations rather than maintaining parallel structures.

Bicameral legislatures are structurally costlier, given duplicated committees, overlapping staff, and additional administrative functions. Nevertheless, their higher operating costs are often marginal relative to total state budgets (e.g., potential USD 20 million savings represent less than 0.2 per cent of a state's budget). Cost reductions can be achieved within bicameral systems through joint staff offices or committee consolidation without eliminating the benefits of dual-house scrutiny.

2.2.8 Custom and Precedent

In the US, unicameralism has historic roots. Early legislatures in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Vermont, and the Continental Congress used it. Nebraska has used a unicameral system for over 60 years with success. Local governments also use single boards, replacing old bicameral forms. This shows efficiency and clarity. Other democracies have also moved from bicameral to unicameral systems. Corporations and non-profits follow the same model, with single boards. This reflects a cultural preference for one decision-making body.

Bicameralism has dominated US governance for over two centuries. Nebraska is the only state with a unicameral legislature, making it an exception. Local boards like schools or counties are not sovereign and set little precedent. Globally, bicameralism supports balance between legislatures and executives. Unicameral examples abroad cannot be directly applied due to different traditions and systems. In business, corporations have single boards, showing bicameral structures are rare outside government (Todd, 1999).



State of Accountability of National Legislature in Bangladesh

03

Bangladesh has a 350-member unicameral parliament called Jatiya Sangsad. Of the total members, 300 are elected on popular votes; they, in turn, elect 50 women members who, like their male counterparts, enjoy similar privileges and facilities. No major change in the structure/organisation of the legislature has taken place over the last 50 years. But some major changes have been made in parliamentary procedures which have created opportunities for the members of Parliament (MPs) to play proactive role, especially in making of the legislation and keeping surveillance over the executive. The extent to which they have used their permissive powers in lawmaking and in exercising oversight is discussed in the following subsections.

3.1 Legislative Initiation and Government Dominance

Theoretically, the supreme law of the country grants the 'supreme' authority for lawmaking to the Jatiya Sangsad (JS), as the parliament is called in Bangladesh. However, the extent to which the JS can exercise this power depends upon many factors some of which remain outside of its control. These will be explored in a subsequent section. The next examines the actual role of JS in lawmaking (Jahan & Amundsen, 2012).

Bangladesh has a 350-member unicameral parliament called Jatiya Sangsad. Of the total members, 300 are elected on popular votes; they, in turn, elect 50 women members who, like their male counterparts, enjoy similar privileges and facilities. The women seats are distributed among the parties having representation in parliament. No major change in the structure/organisation of the legislature has taken place over the last 50 years.

3.1.1 Initiation of Legislation

Available data show that the government apparently monopolises the legislative process. Almost all bills passed by the successive parliaments have been initiated by the government. Of the total bills passed between 1973 and 2013, only 9 were moved by private members. The domination of the government is, however, not a peculiar Bangladeshi characteristic; it can be noticed in almost all parliamentary democracies patterned on the Westminster model, where the difference is most evident is in legislative outputs. The number of bills passed by the Bangladesh parliament is very low (Table 1). It trails behind many parliaments in producing legislative outputs.

Table 1 Comparative Account of Laws Enacted by Different Parliaments (1973-2013)

Parliament	Total Bills Passed	Government bills	Private members' bills
First	154	154	-
Second	65	63	2
Third	39	38	1
Fourth	142	142	-
Fifth	173	172	1
Sixth	1	1	-
Seventh	191	190	1
Eighth	185	184	1
Ninth	271	268	3
Total	1221	1212	9

Source: (Ahmed, 2020).

3.1.2 Scope for Private Bill Initiation

The widespread domination of the government in the legislative process does not automatically imply that private members inherently lack interest in lawmaking. The legislative record of different parliaments shows that private members often move legislative measures, although rarely are they being enacted into laws. The number of bills initiated by private members in Bangladesh is exceptionally low; indeed, the average does not compare favourably even with some smaller democracies.

Many reasons account for a low level of MP activism in the legislative field, of which two deserve special mention – party political restrictions and procedural constraints. In a system of government dominated by parties, it is unlikely that members will have the liberty to behave in an independent manner. In particular, the governing party often does not allow its members to move bills. Secondly, private members encounter more procedural difficulties in moving bills than ministers. Thirdly, in those cases where the government fails to resist the introduction of bills by private members, it adopts several strategies including the initiation of what Weiss and Brichta call 'parallel' bills (1969) to delay their consideration for adoption or passage.

Table 2 Status of Private Members' Bills (1991-2011)

Status of private members bills	Parliament			
	Fifth N=71	Seventh N=51	Eighth N=54	Ninth N=21
Bills introduced	24	23.5	18.5	66.7
Bills awaiting introduction	-	9.8	24.0	-
Bills refused the first reading	10.8	25.5	1.9	4.7
Bills rejected by CPMBR	4.0	7.8	3.7	4.7
Bills under committee scrutiny	6.8	7.8	38.9	4.7
Bills returned	1.4	0.0	-	0.0
Bills withdrawn	22.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bills becoming redundant	5.4	2.0	3.7	19.2
Others	24.4	23.6	9.3	-
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: (Ahmed, 2013).

Note: N=Number of private members' bills submitted to Parliament Secretariat.

Experience shows that backbenchers in recent parliaments can be seen as more active than their counterparts in the earlier parliaments in moving private members' bills. One of the important reasons accounting for a high level of activism of the MPs, for example, of the fifth Parliament (1991-1995), in the legislative field was that it was more representative in partisan composition than the parliaments elected in the past (Table-2). Nearly half of the MPs (48.18 per cent) in the fifth parliament initially belonged to different opposition parties; in contrast, the earlier parliaments were mostly dominated by the ruling party. However, the number of bills introduced by private members in Bangladesh cannot be seen as significant, especially in terms of international comparison. Nor do many majoritarian democracies allow private members to play any proactive role in the legislative process.

In India, for example, only 14 private members bill have been passed by both Houses and become law in the history of Indian Parliament. The last such bill was passed in 1970. In Australia, only 30 private members' bills have been passed since 1901; whilst in New Zealand, only two private members' bills have been passed in the last 40 years. Overall, the scope for lawmaking by private members in majoritarian democracies is very limited. Yet, whatever attempts private members make in lawmaking, serve several important purposes, although they often fail to produce the intended outcome. Private members' bills are useful mechanisms to serve citizens regardless of whether the bill passes or not. They can serve as a catalyst for generating the discussion and motivation required to achieve the policy end.

Undermined legislative process falling short in ensuring accountability

The legislative process is largely monopolised by the government, with private members rarely initiating bills, as seen in the period between 1973 and 2013, when only 9 bills by private members were passed. This domination reflects a common feature of Westminster-style parliamentary systems. However, the limited role of private members is largely due to party political restrictions and procedural obstacles, such as the requirement for private members' bills to undergo more rigorous scrutiny compared to government bills. Whilst Westminster parliaments offer multiple opportunities for opposition and backbench MPs to influence legislation, through mechanisms like the 'politics of procedure' as discussed by Robert Blackburn (2017) and Russell et al. (2016). Bangladesh's parliamentary procedures lack these avenues. In Westminster, the opposition can utilise legislative stages and committee scrutiny to challenge the government's agenda, but in Bangladesh, the limited use of these practices weakens the Parliament's ability to hold the government accountable, limiting its legislative output.

3.2 Scrutiny of Legislation

In the past, bills introduced in the JS were passed into laws without much deliberation. Rarely did bills undergo any committee-stage scrutiny, although the ROP (Rules of Procedure) provides for an elaborate procedure for the review of legislation. For example, article 77 of the ROP provides that after the introduction of a bill, the sponsoring member may move one of the following four motions: that it is taken into consideration immediately, that it is referred to a select committee, that it is referred to a standing committee, or that it be circulated for the purpose of eliciting public opinion. In the past, ministers mostly used to ask for the consideration of bills at once; thereby denying the scope for any informed scrutiny. Nor did any member-in-charge (minister) generally propose for referring bills to committees after the principles of a bill were discussed. The time taken to pass a bill was stubbornly low. It was not unlikely to find many bills passing different stages – first reading, second reading, and third reading meaning introduction, consideration and passage – within the same day.

But things have changed in recent years, obviously for better. One can notice a definite trend towards greater parliamentary scrutiny of government bills, especially through committees since 1996, although the extent to which it can help perfect legislation is difficult to specify. The parliament has set a tradition of sending bills to committees after the first reading almost as a routine matter. This tradition, established first by the then government of Sheikh Hasina in 1996, has survived the change in government. Parliamentary committees in Bangladesh have better scope to deal with legislation than many other Westminster-derived parliaments including the British House of Commons.

As stated in an earlier section, bills in the JS are referred to committees after the first reading than after the second reading followed by most of the parliaments patterned on the Westminster model. This gives better scope for scrutiny for reasons stated earlier. Committees thus have better scope to amend bills the way they want, although the extent to which they will suggest measures that radically differ with proposals embodied in the original legislative proposals initiated by the government is difficult to specify.

3.2.1 Nature of Committee’s Scrutiny Of Legislation

Table 3 provides a summary account of the committee scrutiny of government bills in Bangladesh. It shows that until the election of the seventh Parliament, bills did not generally have any committee-stage scrutiny. The number of bills scrutinised by committees also decreased in the eighth parliament. Part of the reason was the delay in the formation of standing committees on different ministries. The eighth parliament took nearly two years to form different committees. There was considerable delay in the formation of committees in the seventh Parliament. But the (then) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina proposed the formation of a special committee to scrutinise bills moved in the House until the standing committees on ministries were formed. The House agreed to her proposal, although the BNP expressed reservation about the way the committee was formed. No such initiative was taken by the BNP government, which had two-thirds majority of members in the eighth parliament.

The practice of referring bills to committees represents a major improvement over the past when bills were passed in haste. This could be considered as an important step towards empowering parliament to undertake in a more effective manner its traditional function of lawmaking. The number and particularly the nature of amendment suggested by committees can also be considered as critically important. Available evidence, however, suggests that no uniform pattern can be noticed in the committee scrutiny of bills. Whilst some bills undergo major changes during committee scrutiny, others may remain unchanged.

Table 3 Parliamentary Scrutiny of Government Bills

Parliament	Government Bills Passed (% of total)	Bills referred to Committees (% of total)	Amendments Moved (Per bill)	Amendments passed (Per bill)
First	100	2.0	0.7	0.5
Fifth	99.4	4.0	4.0	1.1
Seventh	99.5	100.0	2.2	2.2
Eighth	99.5	62.7	5.9	5.9
Ninth	100	87.6	5.6	5.6

Source: (Ahmed, 2020).

The types of amendment suggested by different committees, as Table 4 shows, range from proposals for insertion and deletion to replacement and renumbering of clauses and/or sections in a bill. It is, however, more common for committees to propose replacements rather than insertion or deletion. In the case of several bills, committees in the eighth Parliament suggested many major amendments such as inserting new clauses and/or sections and the House readily agreed to pass those amendments. Significant amendments suggested by committees, as a natural rule, relate to new bills than to amendment bills. The nature of proposals suggested to amend existing laws does not appear to be very significant.

One of the important drawbacks of legislative scrutiny is that committees have apparently a tendency to scrutinise bills in haste. In other words, the scope for committee deliberation is limited not because of time constraint set by the House but because of the tendency of committees to report in a hurried manner. In the eighth parliament, for example, nearly 63 per cent of the reports on bills were prepared after deliberation only in one meeting. In some cases, decisions on three to four bills (of different nature) were taken in one meeting, although many committees took more time to finalise their recommendations. More importantly, reports are mostly produced in a casual manner. There is no scope for public participation in the legislative process.

Table 4 Committee Scrutiny of Government Bills

Variables	Committee Recommendations	Parliaments		
		Seventh N=190	Eighth N=184	Ninth N=201
Bills scrutinised by committees (%)	-	65.8	60.8	79.6
	Bills be passed as introduced in the House	32.0	21.6	32.4
Variables	Committee Recommendations	Parliaments		
	Bills be amended and passed	68.0	78.4	67.6
Committees' reports prepared unanimously (%)	-	99.0	96.8	99.3
Amendments proposed (per bill)	-	5.6	6.2	13.7
Total amendments proposed	-	709	668	1983
Nature of amendments proposed (%)	Insertion	17.6	13.6	15.6
	Deletion	10.5	13.6	6.6
	Replacement	59.2	64.4	59.3
	Addition	4.8	2.9	2.6
	Renumbering	7.8	5.5	15.9
	Date Change	-	-	-
	Others	0.1	-	-
	Total	100	100	100

Source: Ahmed (2013)

Note: *Until December 2012; **Excludes (23.7%) bills scrutinised by a special committee.

Overall, the legislative process has several serious defects. The general tendency of the government to monopolise the legislative process often produces dysfunctional consequences. The opposition rarely gives any legitimacy to laws passed by government following the majoritarian principle. There are not many instances when bills have been passed in a consensual way. The members mostly divide along party lines. Such divisions can be found not only in the legislative fields but extend to almost every other of parliamentary activity. One of the important reasons is the lack of scope for the opposition to be proactive. Almost all committee chairs are usually chosen from the ruling party. The Rules accord special recognition to the Leader of the House/Prime Minister in the organisation of the House business/activity, whilst the role of the Leader of the Opposition is very often underemphasised.

Partisan and faulty scrutiny by committees endangering accountability

Described as its 'eyes and ears', committees do three important jobs for parliament. They oversee executive accountability continuously. They facilitate public participation in the parliamentary process (Chowdhury, 2025) They offer expertise and alternative career prospects to the backbench MPs. In a Westminster Parliamentary system where a part and cabinet is dominant, committee activism is relatively hard to achieve. Bangladesh has shown similar evidence, while recent reforms have improved the referral of bills to committees, the process often remains rushed and superficial. Bills are frequently scrutinised hastily, with many reports produced after just one meeting, limiting the depth of analysis. There is also a lack of meaningful public participation in the legislative process, despite provisions for it. Moreover, the dominance of the ruling party in committee leadership further weakens the committees' ability to challenge the government's agenda, as the majority party can push bills

through with minimal opposition. This combination of rushed scrutiny, limited public engagement, and party control undermines the committees' effectiveness in providing checks and balances, allowing the government to bypass meaningful oversight.

3.3 Parliamentary Oversight of the Government

The Parliament of Bangladesh, as in other countries, can exercise three types of oversight in the chamber. These can be referred to as legislative oversight, budgetary oversight, and oversight of general activities of government. Reference to legislative oversight has been made in the last subsection; whilst the scope and limits of budgetary will be described in a subsequent section. This subsection mostly focuses on the oversight of general activities of government.

3.3.1 Scope of Oversight in the Chamber

The Parliament has traditionally used a number of techniques to exercise general oversight, the most important of which is questions. Questions provide the mainstay of accountability in a parliamentary system patterned on the Westminster model. Questions also have a better prospect of being accepted and answered in Bangladesh. The first hour of every sitting day (except the budget day) is exclusively used for questions and answers. Following the British pattern (UK Parliament, 2011), a half-hour prime minister's question time (PMQT) was introduced in 1997. Besides questions, a member can use some other techniques such as call-attention motions, adjournment motions, and motions for half-hour discussion to require the government to account for its activities.

3.3.2 Nature of Use of Oversight Techniques

Table 5 provides a summary account of the nature of use of different techniques by members of five parliaments. It reveals that no significant differences can be noticed in the level of activism of the recent parliaments, especially in respect of moving call attention motions and adjournment motions or holding short discussion or half-hour discussion. They have performed more or less in a similar manner in these respects. Most of the parliaments, however, lagged behind the 9th Parliament in respect of raising questions. Part of the reason accounting for this difference is that answers to a large number of oral questions in the 9th Parliament were supplied to the members; ministers answered only 9 per cent of the oral questions in person.

However, when their performance is compared with the first Parliament, which was also patterned on the Westminster model, some major differences can be noticed. The first Parliament lagged behind the others in almost every respect for the main reason that it was essentially a one-party legislature. Almost all MPs (97.8 per cent) belonged to the (then) ruling Awami League (AL). As a natural rule, the Parliament could neither voice the grievance of the electorate; nor project alternative agenda before the public. Parliamentary sessions, as Jahan (1980) argues, were rather dull affairs. On the other hand, balance in partisan composition of the parliaments elected since the early 1990s have turned out to be helpful from several standpoints. In particular, strong inter-party competition has led to a surge in the scale of MP activism in recent parliaments.

Table 5 Comparative Performance of Parliament (1991-2006)

Parliament Held	Average (per sitting day)				
First	41.8	0.2	0.03	-	-
Fifth	22.0	0.8	0.1	0.01	0.004
Seventh	21.5	1.1	0.02	0.0	0.0
Eighth	30.1	1.1	0.01	0.0	0.0
Ninth	56.8	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: Ahmed (2002)

Note: CAM: Call -Attention Motions; SD: Discussion for Short Duration; AM: Adjournment Motions; and HHD: Half-an-Hour Discussion.

3.3.3 Limits of Oversight Techniques

The different oversight techniques do not appear to be very effective in securing administrative compliance with political intent. The parliament members attending a Bangladesh Parliament/UNDP-sponsored orientation programme on rules of procedure (ROP) in 2009 expressed serious concern about the effectiveness of questions and call attention motions in making the government accountable. Many members complained that ministers often abuse the question time by making long-winded replies; whilst many members also take more time than necessary to frame questions often as a strategy to denying time to other members. They thus suggested that the Speaker should enforce rules strictly so that neither ministers nor members could misuse parliamentary time while asking/answering questions.

Partisanship (in questions) is an important drawback that is widely evident during question time. This particularly characterises the Prime Minister's question time (PMQT). Those raising questions during PMQT often do it more to attack the opposition than to require the Prime Minister to account for her actions. Part of the reason is that the main opposition, as experience shows, generally boycotts the PMQT allowing government members to take the opportunity of asking questions to the Prime Minister. Several other problems characterise the PMQT in Bangladesh. Unlike the selection of questions (to ministers) by balloting, questions addressed to the Prime Minister are formally selected by the Speaker, but in practice by the Prime Minister herself. The latitude given to the Prime Minister to select the questions for answer, rather than selecting questions through ballot as in Britain, is inherently defective. There is a risk that she or he might use the opportunity to counterattack the opposition more than to account for the actions of the government. Another drawback is that the MPs in Bangladesh, as in the UK, are inclined to ask more 'open' questions rather than substantive questions during PMQT. Thus, although the rules (made by the Business Advisory Committee) require that members ask only those questions which involve substantive issues of government policy during PMQT, the practice deviates from the ideal. It has been noticed that a large number of questions asked of the Prime Minister could easily be addressed to departmental ministers.

3.4 Committee Oversight of Government

One of the important sources of the contemporary strength of parliament lies in its committee structure. The more organised and strengthened the committee structure, the greater the scope for a parliament to be resilient. In most countries, committees now serve as the main organising centre of both legislation and parliamentary oversight of government. Reference has already been made to the scope of committee oversight of legislation in Bangladesh. The following subsections focus on the committee oversight of general and fiscal activities of government.

3.4.1 Scope of Committee Oversight

Like most parliaments of its type, the Parliament of Bangladesh has traditionally set up three types of committees: standing committees, select committees, and special committees. Standing committees are relatively permanent; they are set up for the duration of the Parliament. On the other hand, select and special committees are ad hoc bodies; they cease to exist when their job is completed and they have reported to Parliament. Standing committees are categorised into four groups: standing committees on ministries (SCMs), financial committees, scrutinising committees, and house committees. The first two categories of committees are mostly concerned with exercising oversight and will be given special consideration in this paper. As observed in an earlier section, the parliaments elected since the early 1990s have adopted several measures to strengthen the committees. Both SCMs and financial committees, especially the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the Public Undertakings Committee (PUC), now have the power to inquire into the irregularities and lapses of different government organisations and to suggest corrective actions. Rule 248 of Rules of Procedure of Parliament now requires each SCM to meet at least once a month, failing which the Speaker can call meetings of the defaulting committee. Previously ministers used to chair different SCMs, but now these are headed by backbenchers. In the ninth Parliament, two opposition members were made chairmen of two SCMs Committees of the Bangladesh Parliament have considerable scope to influence government action and decision making. They can regulate their

own proceedings and the conduct of the inquiries that they undertake. They enjoy powers to send for persons, papers and records. The constitution authorises the Parliament to confer on committees' power for enforcing the attendance of witnesses, examining them on oath and for compelling the production of documents.

3.4.2 Nature of Committee Oversight

Table 6 below provides a summary account of the nature of activism of the SCMs. With the multiplication of ministries, the number of SCMs has also increased. Each SCM is concerned with scrutinising the administration, policy, legislation and expenditure of the ministry it parallels. Available evidence shows that the SCMs in recent years have used their permissive powers in a balanced way. As observed earlier, they are more involved in the legislative process now than before. They can be seen as equally active in scrutinising the administration of different ministries. In particular, many SCMs have frequently used their deterrent power of inquiring into the allegations of corruption and mismanagement of the departments/agencies they have shadowed. They also meet and report to the house more regularly than before.

Table 6 Activities of Standing Committees on Ministries

Nature of Activism	Parliament			
	Fifth N=37	Seventh N=35	Eighth N=37	Ninth N=37
Average number of meetings held (per year)	7.8	8.6	8.2	12
Average number of bills scrutinised (per committee)	-	3.3	2.7	2.5
Average number of inquiries made/underway	1.1	3.0	2.7	0.5
Total number of reports submitted*	13	11	33	27

Source: Hasanuzzaman (1994-95).

Note: * Excludes reports on bills

N= Number of SCMs

3.4.3 Limits of Committee Scrutiny of Government Activities

There remains a major gap between what the ROP says and the ways members of committees behave. In general, the level of committee activism is very low. Most of the committees do not meet regularly. Nor do meetings last long, whenever held. Whilst committees report regularly on bills, they are extremely irregular in informing the House about their other activities. Only a few committees reported to the House in the past. Members, especially those of the SCMs, have a tendency to focus more on the breadth than on the depth of scrutiny. Important issues are very often referred to subcommittees, half of which did not report back to the main committees in the eighth Parliament. Such actions by sub committees or by committees themselves risks the committees losing focus on their primary role and function which is to undertake the work allocated by Parliament and report back to it. Partisan issues, which committees used to avoid in the past, now find prominence in committee behaviour.

3.5 Parliament Boycott and Accountability

3.5.1 Boycott and Walkouts by Opposition Parties

One of the important factors accounting for the limited effectiveness of parliament in the making of the laws and exercising oversight is the tendency of the members of the main opposition party to boycott parliament sittings (Table 7). In general, adversarial relations between the two benches lies at the heart of the crisis that each of the four parliaments elected between 1991 and 2009 faced. The crisis led to frequent walkouts and boycott of parliaments by the opposition (see Table 7 below). The three parliaments elected in 2014, 2018 and 2024 lacked not only opposition representation; more importantly, they lacked legitimacy mostly needed to be effective as the three elections were alleged to have been seriously rigged.

Table 7 Parliament Walkouts and Boycotts in Bangladesh

Indicator	Parliament/Walkout and Boycotts			
	Fifth	Seventh	Eighth	Ninth
Total sitting days	400	382	373	370
Opposition's walkouts	76	61	N/A	N/A
Opposition boycotts of sittings	135 (34%)	163 (43%)	223 (60%)	316 (84.5%)
Boycott by leader of the opposition	265 (66%)	345 (93%)	328 (88%)	362 (98%)

Source: (Ahmed, 2013).

In a functioning Westminster model, accountability is reinforced by competitive and credible elections, where voters evaluate both the ruling party's policy performance and individual MPs' responsiveness to constituency interests. The system's first-past-the-post structure often prioritises party over individual candidate choice, fostering partisan cohesion but still allowing meaningful legislative scrutiny and debate when democratic norms and institutional checks are strong.

In Bangladesh, however, these mechanisms are distorted. Rigged elections undermined both public trust and the ex-post accountability loop, as citizens lack the ability to reward or punish representatives in a genuinely competitive environment. The rigid party control over MPs, reinforced by the presidential tendency of the electoral system, transforms legislators into partisan loyalists rather than independent actors. Consequently, opposition parties, finding little room for meaningful participation, resort to boycotts and walkouts, further delegitimising parliamentary proceedings. This cycle, coupled with weak institutional checks and an absence of credible avenues for deliberation, reduces Parliament to an instrument of executive dominance, eroding its role as a forum of representation and accountability.

What is needed most, among others, is to hold elections to the parliament (and other elected bodies also) in a credible manner, create better scope for the opposition to play a proactive role in the parliamentary process, ensure accountability of the government (to parliament), encourage public participation in the legislative process, and provide some kind of check and balances so that the parliament behaves in a responsible manner (not in a partisan way).

3.6 Budgetary and Post-budgetary Oversight

3.6.1 Budgetary Oversight on the Floor

The 'power of the purse' in Bangladesh, as in other democracies, is vested in the Parliament. Article 83 of the Constitution provides that no tax can be levied or collected except by or under the authority of an Act of Parliament. Nor can any expenditure be incurred without its approval. No money bill passed by the Parliament can be challenged in the court; nor can the President withhold assent to it. Theoretically, it is in the area of control over public finance that the so-called sovereignty of Parliament can be noticed in Bangladesh. In practice, the role of the Parliament in the budgetary process is limited. The Parliament does not have any role in the making of the budget, which is the responsibility of the executive. It is only after the budget is presented in the House that the Members of Parliament (MPs) have a formal scope to deliberate over proposals embodied in it. The budget in the Parliament follows a number of steps: presentation of the budget, general discussion on the budget, discussion and vote on demands and appropriations, and enactment of appropriation bill and finance bill.

Although the *Rules* provide for elaborate mechanisms to scrutinise the budget, several deficiencies still characterise the process. For example, the budget, as a whole, cannot be referred to any committee. There did not exist any specialised unit/agency within the Parliament Secretariat which could provide support to the MPs to have an effective scrutiny of the budget. The Parliament, however, set up a Budget Analysis and Monitoring Unit

(BAMU) during the tenure of the eighth parliament. With support from CPD over the last few years, BAMU has succeeded, up to a certain extent, in providing valuable services to the MPs during the budget session. Provisions also now exist for submitting quarterly reports on the implementation of the budget by the finance minister. But the MPs rarely use information contained in these reports whilst deliberating on the budget. Another major drawback of budgetary oversight is that the time allowed for scrutinising the budget is extremely short. Around three weeks are available for parliamentary deliberation of the budget prepared by the executive with the help and support of thousands of government staff over a long time.

Budget is also rarely discussed in any party forum; excessive party control over MPs makes their behaviour quite predictable. These drawbacks actually make the budget process in parliament a mere ‘formality. This, however, does not imply that the deliberation on the budget is something like a *tamasha* (fun). To the contrary, many issues of national importance—economic, political and social—frequently come up for discussion during the budget discussion. One of the important advantages of such debates is that many information that are otherwise not available or are extremely difficult to collect, become public during the budget debate. Discussion on the general budget has at least publicising effects, if not much operational effects (Ahmed, 2006). The budget debate, like other debates, is also capable of moulding public opinion which may, in the long run, cause serious embarrassment to a ‘head strong’ government that remains unresponsive to the ‘logical’ opinion and suggestion of lawmakers. The importance of the budget debate thus cannot be ignored altogether.

3.6.2 Budgetary Oversight by Financial Committees

The Parliament has traditionally set up three financial committees – Committee on Public Accounts (PAC), Committee on Public Undertakings (PUC) and Committee on Estimates (EC) – to oversee the spending of public funds. Several changes have been made since the election of the fifth Parliament in the permissive powers of these committees. Whilst the remit of the PAC remains confined to the scrutiny of public expenditure after the money has been spent (post-expenditure review), the EC can continue the examination of estimates from time to time throughout the financial year and report to the House as its examination proceeds. The PUC examines the reports and accounts of public undertakings and also reports on public undertaking (if any) prepared by the C&AG. The following subsections provide details of the organisation and working of financial committees in the Parliament.

Committee on Public Undertakings (PUC)

During the tenure of the 11th parliament, the Public Undertaking Committee conducted 21 meetings, with 12 of them addressing public institutions and the remaining 9 reviewing reports of 19 organisations sent by the Comptroller and Auditor General, which were outside the list of public institutions declared in the schedule. Throughout this parliamentary period, the committee produced only one report, incorporating 81 recommendations derived from the 11 meetings. The public institutions covered in this report include the Water Development Board, Civil Aviation and Movement Authority, Bangladesh Bank, Bangladesh Sugar and Food Corporation, Milk Vita, Dhaka WASA, Rajuk, TCB, BIWTC, River Protection Commission, and Madrasha Education Board. The discussions reveal that the Public Undertaking Committee delved into matters beyond its assigned functions. Firstly, the committee addressed institutions not included in the 4th schedule, which typically have permanent standing committees assigned to them.

The section office of the Public Undertaking Committee is also currently involved in tasks beyond its originally assigned duties. As discussed earlier, the section collaborates with other offices, leading to an increase in the volume of work. Unfortunately, the section is currently experiencing a shortage of sufficient manpower, which includes positions such as administrative officers, data entry operators, committee officers, and senior committee officers. Notably, the 11th Parliament in Bangladesh has conducted a lower number of meetings compared to the Indian Lok Sabha, which holds three meetings monthly. The Public Undertaking Committee in Bangladesh has published only one report during the current parliament’s tenure (Moazzem & Mohiuddin, 2024).

Committee on Estimates (EC)

The Public Estimate Committee in the current parliament (the 11th) has issued two reports summarising the discussions and decisions made during committee meetings. Analysis of the decisions from different meetings shows that the committee has delved into the activities of various public institutions. These include, among others, the Health Services Division, the Ministry of Health, the Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED), WASA and Dhaka City Corporation, etc. The committee addressed various management and operational issues of these public institutions.

Analysis of these recommendations shows that the Estimate Committee has made decisions extending beyond the jurisdiction of activities assigned by the rules of procedure. Whilst the committee has taken numerous decisions and provided recommendations, it has not engaged in discussions or recommendations regarding administrative reforms in the concerned public institutions. Similarly, the committee has not discussed whether these decisions align with government policy or explicitly addressed alternate policies (Moazzem & Mohiuddin, 2024).

3.7 Post-Expenditure Review: Role of Committee on Public Accounts (PAC)

The Public Accounts Committee is assigned to perform five types of functions. But now the activities of the committee are limited to examine the audit reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General, arrange hearings, and make recommendations. The committee is not taking initiatives to perform other four duties. These include: (a) examining the financial irregularities of the autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies and redressing those, (b) examining the annual financial accounts and appropriation accounts prepared by the Controller General of Accounts, (c) examining excess grants (d) examining other accounts presented in the parliament.

The Public Accounts Committee is currently engaged in the review of audit reports from the Comptroller and Auditor General, along with those presented in the parliament. The committee's focus lies on both new reports and follow-up reports, but there exists a backlog in processing audit reports. Reports dating back to 2015 and more recently in 2021 are pending consideration, contributing to the existing backlog.

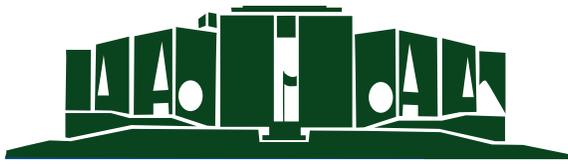
One notable challenge is the inability to convene meetings on the Finance Accounts and Appropriation Accounts due to their prolonged outstanding status. There has been only one meeting on Appropriation Accounts for 2015-16 during the tenure of the 11th parliament. The absence of subsequent Appropriation Accounts in parliament has hindered discussions.

In Public Accounts Committee meetings, not all members participate equally; some remain actively engaged, while others may contribute to discussions that go beyond the context, diluting the focus on the subject matter. This diversity in participation sometimes leads to hurried agenda-wise discussions due to time constraints (Moazzem & Morshed, 2023)

Committees' incapacity leads to poor accountability and transparency

The committee faces challenges due to a lack of cooperation from the ministry, hindering the timely acquisition of necessary working papers. The ministry's reluctance impacts the successful organisation of meetings, which should ideally occur in an exclusive environment. The committee struggles to hold monthly meetings. Additionally, there is a suggestion to streamline minutes by focusing solely on recommendations, reducing the time burden on committee officials. The mainstream media often neglects covering these press releases, given their lack of specific information and failure to reflect the comments of the chairman and members. Consequently, citizens miss out on important discussions and decisions.

Proposals for Constitutional and Parliamentary Reform An Overview



04

As mentioned in the introduction, the interim government has made different commissions with a view to getting the long-term structural reform proposals including those related with the parliament. Several commissions including the Election Reform Commission, the Judicial Reform Commission, Local Government Reform Commission and Public Administration Reform Commission have made specific recommendations on different issues which are directly and indirectly related to the National Parliament. A few of the suggested measures have direct implications on parliament's accountability point of view. Hence, a comprehensive focus is required on the reform proposals made by different commissions.

4.1 Proposals From the Reform Commissions

A major focus of the proposals made by the reform commissions is to target the problem of excessive executive control (Table 8). Hence, they propose reducing the prime minister's absolute power and limiting the president's pardon authority with a view to stop abuse of office and bring stronger checks and balances. The Election Commission's independence and power to suspend polls are meant to hold fair elections. Candidate restrictions and the 'no-vote' option are designed to block individuals with past records of abuse of political power from entering parliament again. Decentralisation through provinces, local courts, and direct VAT allocation would reduce Central's monopoly and shift power closer to citizens. Judicial reforms like a separate supreme court Secretariat and stricter standards for judges aim to insulate courts from politics. An upper house and increased seats may improve representation but could also create political deadlock. These measures are built to distribute power, increase transparency, and make leaders answerable. But their success depends on whether political elites are willing to give up control. It should also be monitored whether political elites accept limits on themselves. It must also be checked that these reforms are not co-opted by parties as new tools for political gain or power accumulation.

Table 8 Recommendations of Five Reform Commissions

Commission	Recommendation
Constitution Reform Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of institutional balance of power • Reduction of the absolute power of the office of the prime minister • Clear proposals for the structure of the Interim Government • Decentralisation of the judiciary • Ensuring a robust local government system • Expansion of fundamental rights (food, education, internet, vote) with constitutional protection and enforceability.

(Table 8 Contd.)

(Table 8 Contd.)

Commission	Recommendation
Election Reform Commissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disqualifying candidacy for fugitives, severe violators, enforcers of disappearance and human rights violators and those submitting false affidavit information • Enhancing Election Commission's autonomy • Election of the President via elected representatives • Revising Prime Ministerial tenure • Increasing the number of seats to 400. • Authority of EC in suspending elections in case of malpractice • Publication of the party members online • Banning political parties maintaining foreign branches • Parliament candidates must have at least 3 years of party membership • 'No-vote' option for voters to reject all candidates in a constituency • Introduce upper house in parliament.
Judicial Reform Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up a separate SC Secretariat • Form commission with majority senior judges for appointing judges based on merit • Appointment of Chief Justice • Amendment to Article 49 to restrict the president's power to grant pardons, reprieves, and commutations of sentences • Set standards for discipline and post-retirement restrictions (no political or profit roles) • Strengthening the judiciary's insulation from executive pressure • Disciplinary mechanism for judges.
Local Government Reform Commissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate one-third of national VAT directly to local government bodies • Bring all district-level public offices under elected district councils • Establishing local courts, • Establishing city governmental model, • Local government commission, • Enable local government bodies to collect taxes and fees independently • Non-party local government polls, • Simultaneous local government elections, • Women representation in LG executive bodies
Public Administration Reform Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abolition of the unified cadre system and creation of 13 services based on the nature of their work and specialisation. • Merit-based recruitment in public service, reorganisation of the PSC and change in the syllabus of the BCS written examinations. • Creation of a Superior Executive Service. • Line promotion for each service • Cabinet Committee to recommend promotions of additional secretaries to secretaries and secretary to principal secretary. • Renaming DCs and UNOs • Reducing the number of ministries and grouping them into five clusters • Abolition of Zila Parishad • Strengthening the office of C&AG • Creation of the office of Ombudsman • Introduction of new performance management system in government offices. • Creation of four provinces as part of decentralisation

Source: Authors' compilation.

4.2 Proposals of Political Parties for Parliamentary Reform

Debates among political parties on parliamentary reform reveal more about their struggle for influence than about genuine concern for accountability (Table 9). Topics under discussion include the creation of an upper house, floor crossing by parliament members, appointment of standing committee chairpersons, female representation, referendums, constitutional amendments (e.g., caretaker government), independent appointments, the appointment of the Chief Justice, and term limits for the Prime Minister.

Table 9 Political Parties' Proposal and Their Stances

Issues	BNP	BJI	NCP	IA	ABP	CPB
Limiting PM's term to 10 years	Supports	supports	Supports	-	Supports	Supports
Prohibition of Floor Crossing (exception to no-confidence motion and financial bill)	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports
Chairperson of 4 standing committees will be opposition MPs	Supports it	Support it	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports
Presidential Clemency power regulated through law	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports
Permanent HC benches in every division	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports
President election through secret voting by both houses	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports	Supports
Issues	BNP	BJI	NCP	IA	ABP	CPB
Equity, human dignity, social justice, democracy and religious freedom- to be added as basic principles	-	support for rights framed in religious-moral terms but pressed for implementation assurances	-	-	-	opposed changes that they saw as diluting or reordering the fundamental principles
Selection of CA of CG	objected to the Commission's proposed selection panel composition and expansion, support selection by wider party consensus	-	proposed alternative implementation routes (a constituent assembly)	-	-	-
PR system for a 100-member upper house	opposes	Supports	supports	-	-	opposes
Most senior judge of SC to be Chief justice	objected to retain flexibility	-	-	-	-	Supports merit-based appointment
Ban on Party Chief as PM	Opposed	Opposed	-	-	-	-
Women representation in Parliament	opposed	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Authors' compilation.

Regarding the creation of an upper house, political parties mainly debate the method of selecting its members—whether it should reflect the proportion of seats in the lower house (as proposed by BNP) or be based on the

total votes of the political parties. BNP's stance simply reproduces the existing seat dominance into a new chamber, undermining the purpose of bicameralism, whilst a vote-based formula could open the door for wider representation but is resisted because it dilutes party control.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Bangladesh Jaamat-E-Islam (BJI), Amar Bangladesh Party (ABP), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and National Citizen Party (NCP) support floor crossing. It reflects their interest in weakening rigid party control over MPs. But the proposal to protect finance bill, no-confidence bill-from floor crossing is an indicator that they support this amendment while keeping their interests secured from complication.

Similarly, female representation in parliament is supported by the BNP, BJI, ABP, and CPB, but each party has a different view on how the female representatives should be selected. BNP's preference to continue the nomination system shows little intent to create competitive women leaders. Nomination keeps women MPs dependent on party bosses for securing position in parliament, leaving representation symbolic instead of substantive.

On the issue of banning party chief as Prime Minister (PM), BNP and BJI have negative stance on it, showing their will to oppose the arbitrary power of party leader. On the caretaker government system, BNP, NCP, JP push strongly for its return, pointing to the need for electoral neutrality. On term limits for the Prime Minister, BNP wants lifetime limit for PM's term. This directly shows their resistance for reducing PM's absolute power. BJI demands 10 years limit which can also create scope for power holding.

Taken together, the debate on these reforms shows that most parties are viewing these reforms as tools whether they would strengthen or weaken their control. Demanding reforms with own separate criteria within these, shows their little to no concern for genuine transparency or accountability.



Critical Analysis of Reform Proposals for Ensuring Accountability in the Parliamentary System

05

Table 8 and Table 9 present the list of proposals made by reform commissions and political parties. It is clear from those proposals that when scrutinising the parliamentary system, the critical variables are clear: the concentration of executive prerogative, the degree of judicial independence, the robustness of the legislature and the stability of constitutional norms. These abstract issues are the determinants which indicate whether accountability either thrives or collapses.

The reform commissions have positioned their recommendations precisely along these fault lines. Proposals to curtail the Prime Minister's sweeping discretion, to decentralise authority to the judiciary and local governments, and to broaden fundamental rights are not ornamental; they are aimed at refining institutional equilibrium. Their electoral recommendations-ranging from disqualification clauses against corrupt candidates to a 'no-vote' option and stronger autonomy for the Election Commission-seeks to restore the electorate's autonomy over political actors. Similarly, judicial reforms to establish meritocratic appointments and disciplinary oversight directly challenge the culture of political patronage in the courts. Local government reforms, by mandating fiscal autonomy and democratic participation at the grassroots, strike at the chronic over-centralisation that undermines accountability.

Political parties engage with these same institutional variables in more selective terms. Their advocacy for caretaker governments, bicameral legislatures, prime ministerial term limits, referendums, and ban on Party Chief as PM- reflect an overlap with commission agendas but also a clear partisan calculus. These proposals are advanced as accountability safeguards, yet they simultaneously serve to constrain rivals and secure electoral advantage. The debate, therefore, is not simply whether reform is needed-on that point, consensus exists but whether reform is pursued as a structural corrective or as a partisan instrument.

This raises the central parliamentary dilemma: will reforms generate genuine checks and balances, or will they produce new mechanisms of executive and party dominance under the guise of accountability? Reform commissions argue for systemic equilibrium across the three branches and the electorate. Political parties push for issue-specific remedies that often tilt the balance in their favour. The contest is between institutional optimisation and partisan gains. Table 10 presents recommendations and proposals under the analytical framework of the study.

Table 10 Recommendations, Party Proposals

Factors	Issues Covered
Organisational Structure and Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of institutional balance of power. • Reduction of PM's term • Caretaker Government structure. • Bicameral legislature (Upper House/Senate with PR and reserved seats) • Dual deputy speakers • Separation of roles in two houses • Creation of four provinces as part of decentralisation.
State of Legislature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ban on foreign branches. • PR membership requirements. • President elected via MPs. • 400-member Lower House (300 direct + 100 women by direct vote).
State of Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralisation of judiciary. • Separate Supreme Court Secretariat • Commission of senior judges for merit-based appointments. • Appointment of Chief Justice. • Standards for post-retirement restrictions • Stronger insulation from executive pressure • Disciplinary mechanism for judges
Electorate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disqualification of fugitives, Human Rights violators, false affidavit submitters. • Election Commission's (EC) authority to suspend elections • PR-based election of Senate members. • 30% women representation • Publication of party members online • Non-party LG polls • Simultaneous local government elections • Membership requirements (3 years)
Representation and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in local government bodies • 30% women seats. • 5 disadvantaged community seats in Senate • floor crossing by MPs
Stability of the Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger insulation from executive pressure. • Expansion of fundamental rights. • EC's power to suspend elections. • Upper House can only delay bills for 2 months, not block permanently. • emergency powers and the retention of fundamental rights.
Accountability of Legislators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ban on foreign party branches. • Requirement for PR/non-partisan Senate representation. • selection of chairpersons for parliamentary standing committees
Authority of the Legislature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance of institutional powers. • Interim Government framework. • Senate reviews bills, except money bill • Bicameral oversight
Concentration of Power within the Legislature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction of PM's absolute power • Reduction of PM's term • Bicameral legislature with PR-based Senate oversight
Custom and Precedent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VAT allocation directly to LG. • District councils' control over offices • Independent tax collection by LG. • Amendment to Article 49 to restrict presidential pardons.

Source: (Choudhury,2025), (Todd,1999) , and authors' compilation.

5.1 Path Dependence in the Parliamentary System of Bangladesh: Unicameralism

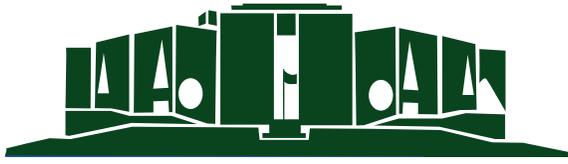
Bangladesh formed a unicameral parliamentary system in 1972 immediately after independence. This was the result of a long history of legislative demand by the people of this region since the British era. After annexing Bengal, the British expanded control over the Indian subcontinent. In 1773, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act. It created the legal framework for the Governor-General's Council. In 1784, the Board of Control was set up to manage British authority in India. This marked the start of a bicameral system with checks and balances like the British Parliament. In 1833, the British Parliament passed laws to create both provincial and central councils. The Bengal Legislative Council was formed at the provincial level and the Indian Legislative Council at the central level; both ruled from Bengal. In 1861, the Indian Council Act was passed. It set up councils with nominated and elected members to govern British India. The 1905 partition of Bengal changed politics. In 1906, educated Muslim leaders formed the All-India Muslim League to secure representation in the East Bengal Legislative Council and the central assembly. In 1909, the British introduced separate electorates for Muslims. Still, Bengali Muslim dominance continued. This led to the cancellation of the Bengal Partition in 1911, and Bengal was reunited.

The demand for self-rule grew stronger. The Government of India Act of 1935 gave provincial autonomy and introduced a federal system with a bicameral central parliament. After the World War II, the Allied victory weakened British power. The Indian Independence Act of 1947 ended British rule and created India and Pakistan. But Pakistan's rule over East Bengal was centralised and discriminatory. The people of this region resisted and fought the Liberation War in 1971. Bangladesh became independent and chose a unicameral parliamentary system. This reflected the long struggle of the people for one identity. That identity was dominated by Bengali Muslims but also included minorities and ethnic groups. It carried a common vision for a homogenous nation after years of British and Pakistani control.

Bangladesh, being a small and mostly homogeneous country, continued with a unicameral parliamentary system after independence. The practical choice of one chamber was enough to represent the people and ensure efficient decision-making in a state that has limited ethnic or regional divisions. However, two major political turning points - the fall of the autocratic regime in 1990 and the election crisis of 2007 - exposed weaknesses in this system. In both cases, the problem arose from the unchecked use of power by ruling parties and their leaders. Instead of reforming the parliament to hold those in power accountable, the political response was to bring in the caretaker government system. This was a temporary external solution, meant to manage political deadlock, but it did not fix the root problem—the lack of accountability within the parliament itself.

In Madisonian logic, such political junctures signify moments of institutional choice: either to preserve the existing route through reform, or to alter the structure altogether. Bangladesh's choice to retain the unicameral parliamentary route legalises its underlying institutional logic- structural change was unnecessary in a society with concentrated political power in one hand. The dysfunction of the Jatiya Sangsad lies not in the form of the legislature but in its operational character. This institutional weakness stems less from constitutional design than from political practice and the concentration of authority in the executive-party nexus. Therefore, the rational path is not to abandon the unicameral framework but to reform it, to make it functionally autonomous, procedurally transparent, and institutionally resilient.

When viewed through Lijphart's perspective of consensus democracy, one might argue for a broader power-sharing model - more chambers, regional autonomy through federal structure, and stronger minority representation. Following Lijphart's model in Bangladesh's political reality has limited implication in a sense that, the main challenge is not underrepresentation of diverse groups but overconcentration of power in the executive and ruling party. Building another institutional layer would not solve this. What Bangladesh needs is to ensure inclusive and consensus-based decision making through fair party nominations, compromising mindset, reserved seats, and stronger local representation.



During the post-independence period of Bangladesh, the need for a bicameral parliament in Bangladesh was first raised by a few left-oriented parties, particularly JSD (Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal), as early as in 1972. However, no vigorous campaign had been made during that time. None of the mainstream parties or others have demanded a second chamber until now. Nor has the issue been debated in public fora. Part of the reason is the homogeneity of the country. Most of the people of the country share similar cultural characteristics. Divisions along ethnic/communal lines are rare, if not totally non-existent. Academic interest in bicameralism is virtually non-existent.

One minor exception is Islam (2024) who has argued for the introduction of a bicameral system. He has observed that bicameralism will enhance both ethnic and minority representation in addition to ensuring the main traditional advantage generally attributed to bicameralism - improving legislation. He has argued that 'if there were a bicameral legislature and the upper house was formed in a manner the purpose or which was to provide for a greater level of representation of different minority communities in Bangladesh so as to stop a potential tyranny of the majority, then ethnic minorities would secure greater voice in the parliament of Bangladesh' (2024). Islam has also emphasised the need for better representation of distinct physiographic regions of Bangladesh, arguing that such territorial representation can be achieved without the need for adopting a federal state system.

6.1.1 Ensuring Representation and Accountability by Parliamentary System Change

Although the Constitution Reform Commission recommended the creation of bicameral parliament which is also endorsed by the political parties in the discussion of the Consensus Commission, given historical context as well as considering the essential factors to for a bicameral parliament, Bangladesh is not ready for such a commission. More importantly, critical need for ensuring accountability of the majority party in the parliament as well as in the legislative process including its leadership would hardly ensure through crating a second chamber.

6.1.1 Structure and Composition Issues

The Constitution Reform Commission (GoB, 2025) has recommended the creation of Bicameral Parliament to focus on two main criteria of representation and reflection. The Commission's recommendation also argued for proportional representation in ensuring representation of smaller parties which is sidelined under the FPTP (First-Past-the-Post) system. The Commission also suggested the formation of 105-member upper house, of whom 100 are to be elected by political parties having representation in the lower house in proportion to the percentage of secured votes and the rest (5) are to be nominated by the President from public. It further recommended that the five of the 100 members to be nominated by parties should represent socially and economically backward communities for enriched representativeness to diverse and majority interest. It also provided that eligibility for claiming seats in upper house will come from receiving at least 1 per cent of votes cast in lower requirement.

It is comprehended from the KIIs of national and international experts and politicians that the upper house formation and its functions are not sufficient to realise the goal of ensuring accountability and checks and balance. Expert opinions refer that Bangladesh's unitary structure and cultural-linguistic homogeneity reduce the natural need for a second chamber. Scholars pushing for bicameralism are influenced by experiences in countries with long-established bicameral traditions (e.g., UK, USA). It is argued by the experts that reform agenda in Bangladesh often follows a 'Wishlist' approach rather than long-term structural planning. They also added that Indian subcontinent's tendency towards provincial autonomy influences thoughts on federalism and bicameralism. It is evident in countries like the UK, bicameralism functions effectively due to entrenched conventions and limited powers of the upper house. However, systems like that of the USA suffer from overrepresentation of smaller states in the Senate, leading to legislative inequality and inefficiencies.

6.1.2 Representation Issues

The Commission's recommendation for the selection of upper house members on the basis of proportional representation appears to be theoretically logical. In Bangladesh, it is intended more to ensure the representation of political parties than those who have remained marginalised. Usually, parties in Bangladesh are dominated by white collar people. It is unlikely that they will readily agree to encourage the representation of the marginalized unless specific rules exist. Moreover, if previous elections are any guide, the threshold requirement that a party must secure at least 1 per cent of votes cast in an election to secure representation is likely to cause problems for fringe parties. In the first four elections held under caretaker government, four parties - AL, BNP, JP and JIB - dominated electoral politics in Bangladesh. According to one estimate, besides these four parties, only three - BKSAL, CB, and ZP (out of 71) could secure more than 1 per cent of votes in 1991, one - IOI (out of 77) in 1996, and one - JP(N) (out of 50) in 2001. None of the parties except the dominant four could gain 1 per cent of votes in the 2008 elections (Ahmed, 2013).

6.1.3 Issue of Pervasive Dominance of Responsiveness to Power Interest

The nature of political contests is unlikely to change much in the future indicating the pervasive dominance of responsiveness to power interest. New parties, with the possible exception of parties patronised by the state, are unlikely to establish any secure support base among the electorate. Those who have remained at the forefront of politics in the past are unlikely to lose their dominance, although the nature of such domination may change. In particular, parties oriented to the 'left' and left of centre' politics can rarely expect to have any sizeable representation unless they contest elections as part of an alliance and use the election symbol of the main alliance partner. Proper regional representation is also unlikely to occur as no major party has equal support base across different regions.

The BNP, in its 31-point programme, has set some criteria for the selection of people from diverse backgrounds as members of the upper house. Point 6 specifies that: 'the upper chamber will include eminent citizen, educationists, professionals, scientists, journalists, socialists and individuals with a remarkable track record, all contributing their expertise and integrity to the governance of the country'. Without having the representation of the specific constituencies and lack of direct accountability to the constituents, the upper house members would most likely serve the purpose of the party which it represents or would act as representatives of non-political agencies of home and abroad, as observed in other developing countries. Hence, the intention to get an 'independent' voice on critical parliamentary issues may turn out to be voice of different interest groups.

6.1.4 Issue of Selecting Non-Partisans for the Upper House

The Election Reform Commission recommended for a half of a party's upper house seats to be filled by party members whilst the other half by non-partisan representatives from civil society, academia, science, humanitarian service, labour, women rights' activists, cultural figures and marginalised communities (GoB, 2025; Karim, 2025). It also suggested that 30 per cent of upper house members must be women. Both these proposals address responsiveness to diverse and majority interest.

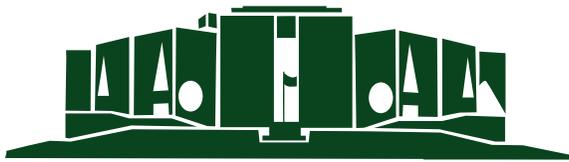
The Constitutional Reform Commission did not propose any reservation for women. If accepted, Election Commissions would lead to depoliticisation and make politician vulnerable to influence and manipulation by so-called non-partisans. In standard democracies including India, non-partisans maintain informal links with parliament in informal ways. Rarely are they nominated for upper house seats. They often submit memoranda on issues considered by parliament and/its committees, appear before committees as expert witnesses and attend public hearings on bills or other parliamentary activities organised by committees providing specialist advice. There is little scope for their direct involvement in politics. So, citizen's participation is partially addressed in maintaining the quality of decision making. The recommendation of the Electoral Commission for reserving half of the seats for 'non-partisans' thus seems to be premature.

6.1.5 Authority of Legislature for Checks and Balances/ Imbalance in Inter-House Relations

The Constitution Commission did not recommend for giving any power to the upper house for legislative initiation. Its power and authority would be confined in reviewing and analysing referred bills. The lower house will be required to submit all bills except money bills to the upper house. The lower house will be required to submit all bills except money bills to the upper house. If the upper house passes the bills referred to it by the lower house, these will be sent to the President for assent. Although it is not mandatory for the upper house to pass bills. It can review and revise/amend a bill and even can reject it. But it cannot delay giving its opinion for an unlimited period. If it takes more than two months to review a bill, it (bill) will be considered as approved by the upper house. This points out the legislative restraint of the upper house.

The Constitution Commission has argued that the upper house will have the right to return bills to the lower house with proposals for amendments and, this will, in turn, encourage discussion and cooperation between two chambers (GoB, 2025). This argument seems to be illogical. In the absence of any formal mechanism to promote dialogue and discussion, members are unlikely to be interested to be proactive undermining their accountability to the legislature. The Commission has referred to the usefulness and activities of committees in different parliaments to promote collaboration in lawmaking. Yet, paradoxically, it falls short of suggesting any such mechanism to resolve deadlock or/and promoting inter-party engagement in the legislative process. This is where the weakness of the Commission is widely evident.

The upper house, however, will enjoy the power to pass international treaties by a majority vote. This seems to be a positive step. It is, however, not clear if the lower house, as in the case of legislation, will have the power to override the decision of the upper house in this respect. The upper house will also have similar power as the lower house to pass constitution amendment bills by two-thirds of majority of votes. Whilst most of the bicameral legislatures follow this practice, there are exceptions. In fact, several variations can be noticed in different bicameral systems, as observed in a subsequent section.



7.1 Restraints on the Power of Prime Minister

Two major constraints that discourage good governance, to be more appropriate, encourage tyranny, as Bangladesh's recent history shows, are: overconcentration of power in the prime minister, and overcentralisation of power in Dhaka. Over the years, the dysfunctional consequences of such concentration/overcentralisation of power have become evident. Nowhere in the region does any head of government appoint heads of different constitutional agencies alone; this power is very often shared with the legislature and the judiciary. The main drawback of the original proposal was that it provided for granting the majority of membership to the opposition, a step that, if implemented, would have certainly caused serious government instability (Ahmed, 2025; Chowdhury, 2025).

In the face of disagreement of political parties, the Commission has now proposed an alternative. It has now recommended the formation of a committee called Constitutional and Statutory Appointments Committee to be comprised of seven members - the PM, Leader of the Opposition, Speaker, of the lower house, Speaker of the upper house, one member to be chosen by fringe parties in parliament (parties other than the ruling party and the main opposition), a nominee of the President and a nominee of the Chief Justice. The new composition shows that that the opposition is still likely to have a majority of elected members (3 out of 5). According to the interviews of the academic and political party leaders, some of the main parties holding dialogues with the Consensus Commission have rejected the idea, observing that it will jeopardise the working of the executive branch of the government, an argument that requires critical scrutiny and observation.

7.1.1 Limiting Terms of PM and Sharing of Power Between the Prime Minister and the President

The National Consensus Commission (Consensus Commission) has recommended that no one be allowed to serve as Prime Minister (PM) for more than 10 years. It has also recommended the sharing of power by the President and the PM. Formally, these can be seen as a safeguard against the rise of prime ministerial despotism. In practice, limiting the terms of the PM to a maximum of 10 years and/or the creation of an upper chamber cannot provide any safeguard against unbridled exercise of power by the executive, especially the PM. No one can guarantee that that future PMs will behave in a different way if things remain the same as in the past. There is, thus, the need for change. But the change proposed by the Commission is defective. Nowhere in a parliamentary democracy patterned on the Westminster model, does the head of the state enjoy any executive responsibility; everywhere he/she works as a figurehead. Bangladesh thus cannot be an exception. Proposal for the sharing of power between the President and PM, if implemented, will certainly turn out to be counterproductive. It will lead to divided government in the long run (Ahmed, 2025a).

What is needed most is the sharing of power between the executive and the parliament, between the government and opposition, between the front-benchers and the backbenchers, between the PM and the ministers; and not between the PM and the President. The BNP has proposed for such a balance in its 31-point programme. Point

4 specifies that: ‘the authorities, responsibilities and duties of the executive, judiciary and the legislature will be calibrated to create a robust system of checks and balances in exercising state power.’ However, it has not yet proposed any detailed plan outlining how to ensure such checks and balances. What is generally recognised is that the greater the balance between different organs, the better the prospect of the institutionalisation of democracy. Granting executive powers to the President will certainly jeopardise this balance. It might cause uncertainty/crisis in governance; this, in turn, might threaten the foundation of democracy (Moazzem, 2025).

7.2 Operational Reform of Three State Organs

The Constitution Reform Commission recommended decentralisation of the judiciary, ensuring a robust local government system, and expansion of fundamental rights (food, education, internet, vote) with constitutional protection and enforceability. Similarly, the Judiciary Reform Commission recommended setting up a separate SC Secretariat, forming a commission with majority senior judges for appointing judges based on merit, appointment of Chief Justice, amendment to Article 49 to restrict the president’s power to grant pardons, amnesties, and commutations of sentences, setting standards for discipline and post-retirement restrictions (no political or profit-seeking jobs) for strengthening the judiciary’s insulation from executive pressure, and a disciplining mechanism for judges. Such measures, if implemented would contribute reducing the power of the majority party including its leader. The judiciary has, in fact, adopted several measures for its independence. In fact, according the Chief Justice, the judiciary has achieved nearly 100 per cent of its targets. But the other sectors lag far behind the judiciary.

7.2.1 Electoral Reform

The Election Reform Commission recommended several reforms in the electoral process. These include establishing mandatory ID for fugitives, severe violators, enforcers of disappearance and extrajudicial killings, and commanders of fundamentalist parties by enhancing Election Commission’s authority. It also suggested ensuring election of President via elected representatives, revising Prime Ministerial tenure, increasing women’s representation in parliament, banning political parties attempting to suspend elections and ratifying public uprising against undemocratic regimes, prohibiting cabinet appointments for suspended members of parliament, ensuring constitutional recognition of party members’ right to free voting, separation of party branches, curtailment and checks on party domination over all branches, and no banning of political parties under foreign command. The above-mentioned initiatives would create space for better representation of people’s representatives who could better represent their constituencies and not fully dominated by the party stances/ideologies.

7.2.2 Autonomy of Local Government and Decentralisation

The Local Government Reform Commission recommended allocation of one-third of national VAT directly to local government bodies, bringing all district-level public offices under elected district councils, establishing local courts, establishing a city government model, creating a local government commission, enabling local government bodies to collect taxes and fees independently, holding non-party LG polls, holding simultaneous local government elections, and ensuring women representation in local government executive bodies. A functional local government would gradually establish power balance between local level representatives and parliament representatives. However, no noteworthy measures have yet been taken to operationalise the recommendations of the Commission.

7.2.3 Reforming the Public Administration System

The public administration system of the country has long remained unreformed. The successive governments have failed to make any change in the system. In fact, during her long autocratic rule, Sheikh Hasina used the bureaucracy more for oppressing the people, particularly political opponents, than for providing services to the public. In fact, Sheikh Hasina made the bureaucracy a ‘party-political’ institution, promoting the interests of her loyalists, and taking unjust disciplinary actions against those who did not toe her line. The Public

Administration Reform Commission has recommended several measures that have the potential to make the bureaucracy efficient, effective, accountable and people-oriented. But no effort at reforming the bureaucracy is visible. Whatever measures have been taken tend to be counterproductive. The main parties also appear to be more interested in constitutional issues over substantive concerns. In the case of bureaucracy, they appear to be keen to conquer it than to reform it. This has been confirmed by one of the advisers of the interim government. Moreover, the government appears to be helpless in the face of the resistance of the bureaucracy to any measures aimed at its reform. As an example, reference can be made to the ‘combined’ resistance of 64 DCs to some proposals for reform as suggested by the Commission. The interim government does not have sufficient political ‘clout’ to overcome the resistance by the bureaucracy to proposals for reform.

7.2.4 Making the Parliamentary Standing Committees Functional

The proposals for strengthening the accountability of the majority party recommended making the parliamentary standing committees functional and effective, ensuring better public access to debates, and involving media for transparency. They also suggested making the Parliament media centre operational, holding the executive accountable, and keeping certification powers of standing committees limited. Further recommendations included maintaining the balance between Parliament and the judiciary, ensuring vertical accountability through free and fair elections, reducing MPs’ engagement in local government affairs, and promoting autonomy of local government. The proposals also emphasised creating space for citizen participation in agenda-setting, maintaining the Rules of Procedure in parliamentary operations, and introducing a dialogue process between Parliament and the judiciary.

7.3 Issues Beyond Bicameralism

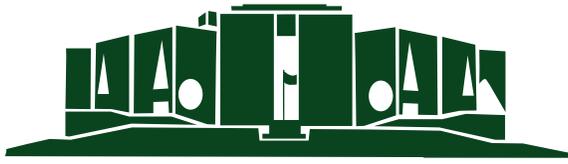
As per IPU data (Table-11), bicameralism must be considered from a financial perspective, as it typically incurs higher costs due to the need to fund two separate legislative bodies, including salaries, staff, infrastructure, and operations. Countries with bicameral systems, like India, Nepal, and Pakistan, face significant financial commitments, with India’s Parliament costing over USD 537 million PPP for both chambers. In contrast, Bhutan’s smaller bicameral system costs around USD 9.5 million PPP. Bicameral systems also require more administrative overhead and provide a chamber of review to ensure quality law-making, justifying the additional expense. Unicameral systems, such as those in Bangladesh and Iran, have lower costs, operating with a single legislative budget.

Table 11 Budgetary Allocation for Chambers in South Asian Countries

Countries	Chamber	Budget per Year in PPP
Bangladesh	Parliament	N/A
India	House of the people	349,192,492
	Council of States	188,109,996
Nepal	National Assembly	N/A
	House Of representatives	N/A
Bhutan	National Assembly	5,557,276
	National Council	4,024,768
Sri Lanka	Parliament	N/A
Maldives	People’s Majlis	N/A
Pakistan	Seante	N/A
	National Assembly	N/A
Iran	Islamic Parliament of Iran	N/A

Source: IPU Database, 2025.

Analysis of Accountability in Different Parliamentary Systems: Lessons for Bangladesh



08

This section deals with cross-country experiences of bicameralism in different countries and compares its performance with unicameral system. Transition between bicameral and unicameral legislatures may occur due to multiple rationales. Evaluating the practical performance of both models provides evidence-based assessment rather than abstract preference. Examining substantive factors before shift, through existing practices of lawmaking, accountability, responsiveness, and efficiency of two system is compulsory. This will allow reformers to judge strengths and weaknesses, weigh trade-offs, and ensure that institutional change is being facilitated exploring lessons drawn from established cases. Comparative analysis ensures that any shift is guided by tested mechanisms and not only by political expediency.

A total of eight different factors has been identified which are found to be responsible for countries' selection of unicameral and bicameral parliamentary system. These are: size of the population, size of the country, law and order situation, authority of legislature, legislative decision-making, concentration of power within legislature, efficiency and economy of legislative structure, legislative tradition, and colonial legacy and institutional precedents (Passaglia, 2018; Todd, 1999). The comparative argument on legislative structures underscores that both unicameral and bicameral systems carry context-dependent strengths and limitations. Cross-national evidence demonstrates that adoption reflects historical, political, and socio-institutional factors rather than universal efficiency. No system emerges as inherently superior. Effectiveness is contingent on institutional design, political culture, and citizen engagement. Hence, debates on legislative reform must move beyond prescriptive norms toward nuanced, context-sensitive evaluation. In Bangladesh, the future of parliamentary transition must begin by examining how far the unicameral system can be strengthened and whether bicameralism could provide better checks and balances. The unicameral parliament has some clear strengths but also substantive weaknesses in the aspects.

Based on the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) data, a cross-sectional analysis has been carried out on different aspects of unicameralism and bicameralism regarding its structure, formulation and different issues of the parliament members. South Asian countries have been considered as the evidence for detailed analysis where Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives practise unicameral parliamentary system; on the other hand, Afghanistan, Bhutan, India and Pakistan practise the bicameral Parliamentary system. In the following sections, a broader analysis will examine these variations in depth. This analysis will explore how representation and responsiveness, the stability of laws, the accountability of legislators, legislative authority, and the concentration of power interact in each country. It will also assess the role of external actors, institutional reforms, and political practices that shape how transparency and accountability are experienced in these unicameral systems.

8.1 Unicameral Parliamentary Practices: Comparison Between Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka

Although Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives has similar parliamentary system, but their mechanism for ensuring accountability are different in some aspect. Proper implication of mechanism is requisite for such goals.

Table 12 Political Parties' Proposal and Their Stances

Factors	Issues	Bangladesh	Maldives	Sri Lanka
Representation and accountability- dual representation & responsiveness to the majority	Principal mode of designation of members	Directly Elected	Directly Elected	Directly Elected
	Compulsory voting	No	No	No
Stability of the law- legislative stability & restraint	Parliamentary Terms	5	5	5
Accountability of the legislators- Accountability & procedural openness	Committee meetings are open to public	No	No	No
	The agendas of plenary meetings are published online in advance	All	All	All
	The agendas of committee meetings are published online in advance	Some	All	All
Authority of legislature – legislative authority	Parliament has a specialised unit to conduct budgetary analysis	Yes	No	No
	Parliament has the power to carry out inquiries	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Parliament has the power to summon members of the govt	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Parliament has the power to approve key govt appointments	No	Yes	Yes
	Parliament's power to amend the budget	Parliament may only decrease existing expenditures/revenues (i.e. Parliament cannot increase existing items or create new ones)	Parliament has unrestricted powers	Parliament may modify the total deficit/surplus proposed by the Executive
	Responsibility for preparing the proposal for the parliamentary agenda	Parliament & The executive together	The Executive	Parliament
	The parliamentary administration is independent from the govt	Yes	Yes	Yes
Quality of decision making- Citizen's participation	Citizens can submit comments on draft legislation on the parliamentary website	No	Yes	No
Concentration of Power within the Legislature- Internal constraints on power	Members of the government must also be members of Parliament	Ninety per cent cabinet members must also be members of Parliament, 10% reserved for technocrats	Cannot be an MP	Cannot be an MP

Source: IPU database-2025.

8.1.1 Electoral System and Representation Issues

Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka all use direct election of members. The risk is when electoral processes are not free or fair. In Bangladesh, recent elections saw dramatic rises in wealth among MPs, raising suspicions about fairness and elite capture. It scored 5.87/10 on the Democracy Index 2023. Sri Lanka's last national elections were viewed as competitive and credible. It scored 6.09/10. Maldives continues with direct elections that maintain voter trust. Its Democracy Index score was 5.42/10 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024). It indicated that Sri Lanka is more forward in fair electoral practice.

8.1.2 Compulsory Voting for Better Representation

Table 12 shows that none of the three countries enforce compulsory voting. This protects individual freedom but risks low participation. In Bangladesh, high voter turnout has become common in recent years, limiting the accountability of the ruling party. Maldives and Sri Lanka also face the risk of selective participation, though recent elections in Sri Lanka still drew significant engagement. All three remain weak on this issue.

8.1.3 Parliamentary Terms for Stability of Law

All three parliaments have five-year terms. This provides predictability but also gives ruling parties long control even if governance is poor. In Bangladesh, this has allowed the ruling party to remain entrenched without strong checks during the term. In Sri Lanka and Maldives, political competition and protests have created mid-term accountability outside elections. None is structurally better, but Sri Lanka shows more active political challenge within the cycle.

8.1.4 Committee Meetings Open to the Public to Provide Transparency

Committee meetings are closed in Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. This leaves no scope for citizens to see how draft laws and budgets are discussed. In Bangladesh, this has led to decisions being taken without public knowledge. Maldives and Sri Lanka also keep these meetings private but compensate partly with agenda disclosure. Still, all three countries remain weak here.

8.1.5 Members Required to Declare Income to Ensure Legislators' Accountability

Only Maldives requires MPs to declare their income and obtained a score of 40/100 (Higher scores mean less corruption). In Bangladesh, many MPs were found to have accumulated extreme wealth in a short time, but no declaration is required, leaving suspicions unchecked. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2023, Bangladesh scored 24/100. Sri Lanka also does not require full disclosure, leaving gaps in accountability. It scored 34/100. Maldives is more forward here, using declarations to improve openness (Transparency International, 2024) (IPU-2025).

8.1.6 Agendas of Plenary Meetings Published Online in Advance for Ensuring Legislator's Accountability

Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka all publish plenary agendas online. This is a step for transparency, as citizens can see what will be debated. The weakness is when agendas are vague, which has been observed in Bangladesh. Maldives and Sri Lanka generally provide full information, making them more effective in this practice.

8.1.7 Agendas of Committee Meetings Published Online in Advance as Transparent Practice

Bangladesh publishes only some committee agendas, whilst Maldives and Sri Lanka publish all. This difference means Bangladesh's practices keep some areas hidden from citizens. Maldives and Sri Lanka ensure fuller access, making their systems more transparent. Maldives is stronger, since this practice is combined with income declarations.

8.1.8 Budgetary Unit to Exercise Legislative Authority

Bangladesh has a parliamentary budget analysis unit, whilst Maldives and Sri Lanka do not have such units. This provides Bangladesh with stronger technical oversight over finances. However, in practice this has not stopped the government from consolidating control over spending decisions. In Sri Lanka, new anti-corruption laws were introduced to improve oversight, but a technical analysis unit is still lacking. Bangladesh is stronger in structure, but weaker in application (IPU-2025).

8.1.9 Legislative Authority to Ensure Accountability

In Bangladesh, although inquiries are formally permitted, they are frequently shaped by political considerations, undermining the credibility of the process and signalling a weak exercise of legislative authority. According to the Parliamentary Powers Index (Fish & Kroenig, 2009), Bangladesh scores 0.59 (on a scale where higher means more parliamentary powers). In Sri Lanka, recent constitutional reforms have enhanced the legislature's inquiry powers, particularly targeting corruption and executive overreach, although gaps in enforcement limit their full effectiveness. Sri Lanka's score on Parliamentary Powers Index is 0.50 (Fish and Kroenig, 2009). The Maldives maintains the formal authority to investigate, but persistent political instability has constrained consistent and impactful use. Overall, whilst all three legislatures possess similar structural powers, Sri Lanka and the Maldives demonstrate stronger functional authority, translating formal provisions into meaningful oversight more effectively than Bangladesh (IPU-2025).

8.1.10 Power to Summon Members of the Government

In Bangladesh, whilst the provision to summon ministers is constitutionally guaranteed, it is rarely exercised with rigor; ministers often evade substantive questioning, reducing the process to a formality and signalling a weakened parliamentary hold over the executive. In Sri Lanka, the tool has been deployed more assertively, particularly during periods of political crisis, reflecting a legislature that can challenge and scrutinise executive actions when the stakes demand it. The Maldives stands out by coupling the summoning power with institutionalised public input, creating a more transparent environment where ministerial accountability is both parliamentary and participatory. This contrast underscores how structural powers gain real meaning only when exercised effectively, leaving Maldives and Sri Lanka with visibly stronger functional authority than Bangladesh (IPU-2025).

8.1.11 Power to Approve Key Government Appointments

In Bangladesh, however, the absence of such authority leaves the legislature structurally weak, as appointments to influential positions are made unilaterally by the executive, bypassing any form of parliamentary vetting. This imbalance entrenches executive dominance and further erodes the practical autonomy of the legislature. In Sri Lanka, constitutional reforms have strengthened parliamentary oversight, allowing the legislature to scrutinise and approve key government appointments, thereby curbing excessive presidential control and reinforcing legislative independence. The Maldives maintains a similar practice, where parliamentary approval acts as an institutional check, ensuring that critical executive positions are subject to legislative scrutiny (IPU-2025).

8.1.12 Parliament's power in Amending the Budget Using Legislative Authority

In Bangladesh, the parliament holds only a limited legislative authority, restricted to reducing proposed expenditure items without the ability to reallocate or expand budgetary provisions. This narrow authority renders the legislature largely subordinate to the executive in fiscal policymaking, weakening its influence over national priorities. In Sri Lanka, the legislature exercises a moderate level of authority, with the power to modify the deficit or surplus, granting it some leverage in shaping fiscal directions, though still within a controlled framework. The Maldives, by contrast, grants its parliament unrestricted authority over the budget, allowing comprehensive engagement in financial policymaking. This places the Maldivian legislature in the strongest position in terms of legislative authority, even though such wide-ranging power carries the risk of politicisation and fiscal instability if not balanced by institutional checks (IPU-2025).

8.1.13 Legislative Authority for Preparing the Parliamentary Agenda

In Bangladesh, agenda-setting is shared between parliament and the executive, but in practice, the executive dominates due to strong party discipline and centralised political control. This results in a legislature that often functions as an extension of the ruling government, limiting its independent authority. In the Maldives, agenda-setting rests entirely with the executive, leaving the legislature structurally dependent and significantly constrained in initiating or shaping the legislative agenda. Conversely, in Sri Lanka, the legislature retains full control over agenda-setting, enabling it to operate as a more autonomous and authoritative body. This institutional design enhances parliamentary oversight, fosters more balanced lawmaking, and positions Sri Lanka as the strongest among the three in terms of exercising genuine legislative authority (IPU-2025).

8.1.14 Parliamentary Administration Independent from Government for Checks and Balances

In Bangladesh, despite the constitutional framework granting formal authority to the Jatiya Sangsad, the executive dominance over the legislature dilutes this autonomy. The parliament often operates in alignment with the ruling party, reducing its capacity to independently scrutinise, amend, or block executive proposals. Conversely, in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, the legislative administration has been more actively respected, allowing parliaments to exercise their authority with greater institutional integrity. Thus, while all of them share similar structural provisions, Bangladesh demonstrates weaker practical authority, whereas Maldives and Sri Lanka maintain relatively stronger operational independence, ensuring a more balanced separation of powers in practice (IPU-2025).

8.1.15 Quality of Decision making and Responsiveness

In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the legislative process remains highly centralised and elite-driven, where citizens have no formal channels to provide input on draft legislation. Decision-making is confined within the closed circles of political leadership and bureaucratic actors, limiting transparency and public engagement. In contrast, the Maldives maintains an institutional mechanism that allows citizens to submit comments on draft laws through online platforms, integrating a visible layer of participatory governance. This practice does not necessarily ensure policy influence but signals a more inclusive approach compared to the top-down structures prevailing in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is among top 25 per cent globally in Civic Engagement and Electoral Participation in the IDEA's Global State of Democracy (International IDEA, 2025) (IPU-2025).

8.1.16 Ensuring Checks and Balances Through Parliamentary Membership of Government Official

The concentration of power within the legislature in Bangladesh is heavily influenced by its fusion of the executive and legislative branches, where government ministers simultaneously serve as Members of Parliament (MPs). This institutional arrangement erodes internal checks and balances, as the legislature becomes largely subservient to the executive, undermining its oversight capacity and fostering conflicts of interest. Legislative scrutiny of executive actions is therefore minimal, with party discipline and patronage politics reinforcing this imbalance. In contrast, the Maldives and Sri Lanka enforce a stricter separation of powers, where ministers cannot hold parliamentary seats. This institutional design strengthens the internal constraints on legislative power, enabling independent oversight, more robust debate, and a healthier equilibrium between branches of government. Consequently, while the Maldives and Sri Lanka exhibit greater institutional resilience and accountability.

8.2 Bicameral Parliamentary Practices: Comparison Between India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bhutan and UK

This section deals with the cross-country experience of bi-cameralism in different countries and compares its performance with the unicameral system. Based on the Inter-parliamentary Union (IP) data, a cross-sectional analysis was carried out on different aspects of bicameralism regarding its structure and formation, different issues concerning the parliament members and accountability and transparency issues of the parliament

Table 13

Bicameral Parliamentary System in South Asia: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and UK

Issues	Bhutan		India		Pakistan		Nepal		United Kingdom	
	Assembly/ majority (FPTP)	Council Plurality/ majority (FPTP) (non- partisan)	CoS	HoP	Assembly	Senate	Assembly	HoR	HoC	HoL
Principal mode of designation of members	Yes	Yes	Indirectly elected	Directly elected	Directly elected	Indirectly elected	Indirectly elected	mixed	Directly elected	Indirectly elected
Parliament/ chamber has the power to summon senior government officials	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	No
Committee meetings are open to public	No	N/A	No	No	No	Yes	N/A	No	Yes	Yes
The agendas of plenary meetings are published online in advance	No	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	Some	Yes	Yes
Parliamentary powers to amend the budget	N/A	N/A	May only decrease existing expenditures/ revenues	May only decrease existing expenditures/ revenues	Unrestricted powers to amend the budget	Unrestricted powers to amend the budget	May not make any changes	May not make any changes	May only decrease existing expenditures/ revenues	May only decrease existing expenditures/ revenues
The agendas of committee meetings are published online	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	N/A	Some	Some	Some
Parliament has a specialised unit to conduct budgetary analysis	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

(Table 13 Contd.)

(Table 13 Contd.)

Issues	Bhutan		India		Pakistan		Nepal		United Kingdom	
	Assembly	Council	CoS	HoP	Assembly	Senate	Assembly	HoR	HoC	HoL
Bill initiation	May initiate any bill	May initiate any bill except money bill	May initiate any bill except money bill	May initiate any bill	May introduce any bill	Cannot introduce bill	May initiate any bill except money bill and security bill	May introduce any bill	May initiate any bill	May initiate any bill except money bill
Responsibility to prepare proposal for parliamentary agenda	The executive	The executive	Other	Other	The executive & parliament together	The executive & parliament together	The executive	The executive	Parliament	Parliament
Parliamentary Administration is independent from government	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Citizens can submit comment on the draft legislation on the parliamentary website	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	No	No
Members of the govt must also be members of parliament	Can be an MP	Cannot be an MP	Must be an MP	Must be an MP	Must be an MP	Must be an MP	Must be an MP	Must be an MP	Must be an MP	Must be an MP

(Table 13 Contd.)

(Table 13 Contd.)

Issues	Bhutan		India		Pakistan		Nepal		United Kingdom	
	Assembly	Council	CoS	HoP	Assembly	Senate	Assembly	HoR	HoC	HoL
Outcome when the two chambers cannot agree on a piece of draft legislation	A Joint Sitting of the Parliament is conducted	A Joint Sitting of the Parliament is conducted	Joint sitting for any bill except money bill	Joint sitting for Any bill	A Joint Session of both Houses and the decision of the majority prevail.	A Joint Session of both Houses and the decision of the majority prevail.	A joint sitting of both houses	a joint sitting of both houses	If the two Houses do not agree on the text of the legislation the House of Commons can decide to apply the Parliament Acts under which the House of Commons can apply for Royal Assent for its text of the legislation without the agreement of the House of Lords.	If the two Houses do not agree on the text of the legislation the House of Commons can decide to apply the Parliament Acts under which the House of Commons can apply for Royal Assent for its text of the legislation without the agreement of the House of Lords.

Source: (IPU database, 2025).

members. These issues can be reviewed from the aspects of representation and responsiveness, authority of legislature, decision making – to ensure accountability and checks and balances. At the same time, similar issues have been reviewed in the context of the unicameral parliamentary system. In this context, South Asian countries have been considered as the evidence for detailed analysis where Bhutan, India and Pakistan practise the bicameral parliamentary system, on the other hand, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka practise the unicameral parliamentary system (Table 13).

8.2.1 Representation in the Upper House to Balance Power

In India, the Rajya Sabha is meant to represent the states in the Union Parliament, with its members elected indirectly by the elected representatives of the State Legislative Assemblies. The system of proportional representation through Single Transferable Vote (STV) ensures that the distribution of seats reflects the number of members each state has in its legislative assembly. Larger states, like Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, have a higher representation in the Rajya Sabha due to their population, making the system responsive to the majority within each state. Whilst the Rajya Sabha ensures state-level representation, it also serves to balance majoritarian rule, particularly in a system where the Lok Sabha, directly elected by the people, can be swayed by popular opinion. The Rajya Sabha's design gives a voice to smaller states that might otherwise be overshadowed in a purely majoritarian setup (Narain, 2007).

Pakistan's Senate is composed of representatives from the provinces, ensuring territorial equality, with each province electing 23 members regardless of its population size. This structure is meant to safeguard the interests of smaller provinces, such as Balochistan, by giving them an equal number of seats compared to larger provinces like Punjab. This results in a counter-majoritarian system, where the larger provinces do not dominate the decision-making process in the Senate. Additionally, the Senate includes reserved seats for women, technocrats, and non-Muslims, further promoting diverse representation. The inclusion of these groups ensures a broader spectrum of voices within the legislative process. Four members are directly elected from FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), representing the interests of the tribal regions that were previously under direct federal control. Although Pakistan continues to keep an upper house due to tradition and path-dependence, it is highly criticized for horse-trading, bidding, foul play, power-politics, and malpractices (Gilani, 2021). The vested-interest version of path-dependence has created monopolised power by the status quo's beneficiaries using the Senate (Alexander, 2001) (Collier, 1997).

Nepal employs a unique system for its National Assembly, where members are elected through an electoral college composed of members from the provincial assemblies and local government leaders, such as mayors and deputy mayors. This method gives both provincial assemblies and local governments a significant role in selecting members of the upper house. Each of the seven provinces elects eight members to the National Assembly, whilst the President can appoint three additional members based on government recommendations. The dual role of local and provincial leaders in electing National Assembly members ensures that the local and regional interests are represented at the national level. However, this system is less responsive to the national majority since it focuses on local and provincial representation instead of a purely direct national vote. By incorporating both levels of governance, Nepal ensures that no single group or region is left out, but it may dilute the influence of a national popular majority.

In the United Kingdom, the House of Lords is the upper chamber of Parliament, and its members are appointed. These members include life peers, bishops, and hereditary peers. Life peers are appointed by the monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister, often from various sectors such as law, business, education, and public service. Many life peers are appointed based on their expertise or public service rather than their political affiliations. However, some members have previously held political office or served as members of political parties, and many life peers are affiliated with the major political parties -Conservatives, Labour, and Liberal Democrats. The House of Lords serves as a revising body, where bills passed by the House of Commons are scrutinised, debated, and sometimes amended.

8.2.2 Authority of Legislature for Checks and Balances

Legislation in India can begin in either the Lok Sabha (lower house) or the Rajya Sabha (upper house). Once one chamber passes a bill, it must go to the other for approval. However, money bills can only be introduced in the Lok Sabha. When such a bill is passed, it is sent to the Rajya Sabha, which may make recommendations within 14 days but cannot amend or reject it. The Lok Sabha is free to accept or ignore these recommendations, showing its dominance in financial legislation.

Under Article 70 of the Constitution of Pakistan, the process is like that of India. A money bill must originate in the National Assembly. After passage, it is transmitted to the Senate, which has 14 days to make recommendations. The National Assembly considers these but is under no obligation to accept them. Once the National Assembly passes the bill, it is sent to the President for assent. This arrangement shows that the National Assembly exercises superior authority, whilst the Senate acts only as a reviewing body in legislative matters.

Nepal, by constitutional requirement, empowers the finance minister to present the budget in a joint sitting of parliament. After approval in the House of Representatives (HoRs), the finance bill is sent to the National Assembly. The upper house may return it with comments within 15 days, but if it fails to do so, the Speaker of the HoRs certifies it and forwards it to the President. In the case of ordinary bills, the National Assembly has up to two months to review, but even if it rejects or delays them, the HoRs can override its decision by passing the bill with a simple majority. Hence, the HoRs clearly holds the final word.

Bhutan's parliament's both chambers, the National Assembly and the National Council, are empowered to introduce legislation. However, money bills must originate in the National Assembly. After passage, they are forwarded to the National Council, which may propose changes but cannot block or veto them. The National Assembly therefore has primacy, particularly in financial and budgetary matters, whilst the National Council's role is mostly advisory and revisory (Horgan, 2019).

Across all four South Asian states, the lower house dominates the legislative process by having greater legislative authority. The logic behind this is -lower houses are directly elected by the people, giving them greater democratic legitimacy. They exercise decisive power over money bills and retain the final say even on ordinary legislation. Whereas upper houses-Rajya Sabha (India), Senate (Pakistan), National Assembly (Nepal), and National Council (Bhutan)- are limited to delays, reviews, or recommendations.

In the United Kingdom, legislation may originate in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords, but the latter's powers are constitutionally constrained. The Lords can scrutinise, debate, amend, and even reject most public bills, yet under the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949, their rejection does not amount to a veto, as the Commons can enact such bills without Lords' consent if passed in two successive sessions at least one year apart (Bogdanor, 2009). Thus, the Lords' effective role in ordinary legislation is one of revision and delay, with a maximum holding power of about one year. In financial legislation, however, the principle of Commons' supremacy is absolute: money bills, which deal exclusively with taxation, borrowing, or public expenditure, must originate in the Commons and are certified as such by the Speaker. The Lords cannot amend or reject these bills and may delay them for no longer than one month, after which they receive Royal Assent irrespective of Lords' approval; (House of Commons Library, 2021). This framework institutionalises the dominance of the elected Commons over public finance, whilst assigning the Lords a revisory but ultimately subordinate role in the legislative process.

8.2.3 Ensuring Quality of Decision Making by Deliberative Process

In India, both houses generally need to pass a bill for it to become law, though money bills can only originate in the Lok Sabha. Once such a bill is passed, it is sent to the Rajya Sabha, which has 14 days to recommend changes but cannot amend or reject it. Constitutional amendments have a special procedure: whilst most are passed by

both houses, those affecting provisions listed in the Proviso to Article 368(2) also need ratification by at least half of the state legislatures. The Constitution provides for joint sittings to resolve legislative deadlocks under Article 108, whilst the President addresses a joint session under Article 87. In recent years, however, clashes between government and opposition have caused frequent deadlocks in the Rajya Sabha. During 2015–16, several sessions were severely disrupted, with even full washouts, leaving the voice of the people in the Lok Sabha obstructed by the upper house's non-functioning (Sankar, 2017).

Pakistan's bicameral structure provides for ordinary legislation go through the passage of both houses, but in practice, the Senate has limited power over money bills, which can only originate in the National Assembly. Unlike India, there is no provision for a joint sitting to resolve a deadlock on ordinary legislation, as the Senate cannot override the authority of the National Assembly on financial matters. However, constitutional amendment bills require approval from both houses, reinforcing the Senate's role in safeguarding federal balance. Thus, the Senate functions as a stabilising chamber, ensuring that smaller provinces and minority voices are heard, even if it lacks equal powers in day-to-day lawmaking.

In Nepal's federal parliament, consisting of the House of Representatives (HoRs) and the National Assembly, the bicameral structure is designed to provide review and oversight. Ordinary bills must pass both houses, though the National Assembly has only a delaying power of two months. If it rejects or amends a bill and the HoRs does not accept, the HoRs can still pass the bill with a simple majority, making the lower house the decisive authority. For money bills and security bills, the National Assembly's role is even more limited: it may only offer recommendations within 15 days, which the HoRs can accept or reject. However, constitutional amendment bills require broader consensus, including ratification procedures, giving the National Assembly a stronger voice in structural matters. This reflects Nepal's attempt to balance majoritarian responsiveness with federal review mechanisms (Devkota, 2022).

Bhutan's both houses may introduce and deliberate on legislation, but money bills must originate in the National Assembly. The National Council may propose amendments or offer advice, yet it cannot indefinitely block the passage of bills. In cases of disagreement, bills can be returned to the National Assembly, which holds the final word. Constitutional amendment bills, however, demand a higher threshold of approval from both chambers, ensuring national consensus. The National Council, being a partly apolitical body with members nominated for expertise, plays the role of a review chamber to moderate political conflict and improve the quality of deliberations.

In the United Kingdom, the legislative process requires a bill to pass through both the House of Commons and the House of Lords before receiving Royal Assent and becoming law (Davis, 2015). Whilst bills can be introduced in either house, Money Bills concerning taxation and public expenditure - can only be introduced in the Commons (House of Commons, 2017). The House of Lords acts as a revising chamber, scrutinising proposed legislation and suggesting amendments; however, its power to amend is limited by the Parliament Acts of 1911 and 1949. If the Lords do not agree with the bill, the Commons can pass it after a period of delay, with the Lords unable to indefinitely block the legislation, thereby ensuring the supremacy of the elected House of Commons (Bradley & Ewing, 2018). The legislative process includes several stages: First Reading, where the bill is introduced; Second Reading, where the principles of the bill are debated; Committee Stage, where the bill is examined in detail and amended; Report Stage, where further amendments are considered; and Third Reading, where the final version of the bill is debated (Bogdanor, 2019). Once both Houses agree on the final text, the bill is sent for Royal Assent, where it becomes an Act of Parliament. Constitutional amendments, although not restricted by a written constitution, often require broader public consultation and Parliamentary approval, especially for significant changes such as those to the electoral system (Davis, 2015). The House of Lords cannot amend Money Bills, and its power to delay other legislation is limited by the Parliament Acts (Laws, 2016).

Lessons from Different Bicameral System

Adopting a bicameral system similar to those in South Asia and the UK for Bangladesh could have both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, an upper house could provide a necessary check on the legislative process, improving the quality of laws through deeper scrutiny, as seen in India's Rajya Sabha

and Pakistan's Senate. This could help balance the dominance of the lower house, which is more susceptible to populist pressures, and ensure that minority interests are better represented. Additionally, if designed with the participation of experts, like the UK's House of Lords, an upper house could bring specialised knowledge to policymaking. However, the negative impacts could be significant. Bangladesh's political system, marked by entrenched patronage and corruption, risks turning an upper house into a tool for political elites, much like Pakistan's Senate or the UK's House of Lords, where political maneuvering and horse-trading often dominate. Moreover, if the upper house is not directly elected, as in the UK, it could reduce the legitimacy of the political process, leading to public disillusionment. The potential for gridlock, as seen in India's Rajya Sabha or Nepal's National Assembly, could exacerbate political deadlock in Bangladesh, where the opposition already faces difficulties in influencing government decisions. Therefore, whilst an upper house could contribute to more balanced and thoughtful governance, it could also reinforce elite control, hinder legislative efficiency, and further alienate the public if not carefully designed.

However, the existing challenges do not automatically mean Bangladesh needs a second chamber. Many of the benefits expected from bicameralism can actually be achieved with the system we already have, if it is strengthened and allowed to function properly. Committees can do the same revising and reviewing work that upper houses do, but only if they operate independently and follow strict scrutiny procedures. Likewise, enforcing real public consultations, giving the opposition guaranteed space, and reducing excessive party control could create the same checks and balances without building another layer of institutions. Improving transparency, tightening parliamentary rules, and making oversight tools like question periods, oversight of executive and committee reports - more effective would also help fix the current gaps. In other words, the problem is not the absence of an upper house; it is the weakness of existing mechanisms. Strengthening these institutions can deliver the balance, accountability, and deliberation that Bangladesh needs, without risking the elite capture and gridlock that a new chamber might bring.

Recommendations for Ensuring Accountability of the Majority in the Parliamentary System of Bangladesh



09

This study critically examines the accountability mechanism currently in practice in the parliamentary system of Bangladesh and thereby explores how the over-concentration of power of the majority party in the parliamentary system could be lessened. Addressing the structural shortcomings of the legislature, therefore, becomes the primary focus for any meaningful reform. Without a legislature capable of ensuring transparency, scrutinising executive decisions, and safeguarding pluralism, the promise of democratic accountability remains hollow. Reforming parliamentary practices to dilute the unchecked power of the majority is not just a political preference, but an essential remedy for strengthening democracy and restoring governance integrity.

Based on the detailed review, analysis and cross-country exercise on accountability issues related to different forms of parliamentary practices, CPD would like to put forward following recommendations.

- (a) Interim government should not make any regulatory initiative, and thereafter, the 13th new parliament should not adopt forming an upper house;
- (b) Interim government should put focus on, and thereafter, the 13th new parliament should continue working on different reform proposals targeted to the judiciary, local government, electoral system and political parties in the final consensus list
- (c) The 13th New Parliament should put focus on strengthening the existing parliamentary system by necessary legal, institutional and operational measures as suggested below;
- (d) The 13th New Parliament should consider setting up a 'Parliamentary Commission for Democracy, Legislative, Executive and Legal Affairs.

9.1 Strengthening Institutional Reform Through Reform Proposals

Various proposals have been placed by different reform commissions and those have been discussed by the political parties at the Consensus Commission meetings. Based on the analysis, CPD found that the reform mechanisms suggested by the Constitution and Election Reform Commissions carry normative appeal but fall short of practical applicability in Bangladesh's political culture. Proposals such as bicameralism, proportional representation, inclusion of non-partisan figures, and committees for appointments are designed to strengthen accountability, transparency, and checks on majority dominance. Yet in a system historically shaped by entrenched partisanship, patronage, and a winner-takes-all political ethos, these measures risk becoming ornamental rather than functional. While their democratic potential cannot be entirely dismissed, in practice they are likely to produce unintended consequences such as deadlock, manipulation, or further concentration of power under dominant parties. Thus, instead of ensuring accountability and balance, these mechanisms may replicate existing weaknesses, showing that without deeper structural and cultural transformation, institutional reforms alone cannot guarantee meaningful checks and balances in Bangladesh.

The study appreciates different recommendations made for strengthening the existing parliamentary system including floor crossing of parliament members, making standing committees functional by appointing members from the opposition parties, transparency of political parties' fund raising and fund utilisation mechanism, strengthening local government system, extending more authority to the local government with more fiscal authority, higher female representation in local and national elections. However, the majority party should have the authority to function the executive responsibilities properly-hence all important and constitutional positions to be appointed by the government but those could be reviewed by the national parliament through a review committee.

9.2 Strengthening the Existing Parliament–Jatiya Sangsad

9.2.1 Expanding Private Members' Participation and Legislative Balance

To make the system more accountable, reforms must reduce procedural barriers and widen the scope for private members' participation. Relaxing the rigid referral of private members' bills to committees and enabling MPs to play a more active legislative role, as in other Westminster parliaments, could diffuse concentrated power and ensure broader representation. Equally, empowering parliamentary committees with stronger scrutiny functions would raise the quality of oversight and allow opposition MPs to meaningfully challenge government proposals. Together, these reforms could transform the Jatiya Sangsad from a government-dominated chamber into a more balanced forum of deliberation and accountability.

9.2.2 Overcoming Weaknesses in Scrutiny of Legislation

The shortcomings in the scrutiny of legislation still persists. Although recent improvements, such as the practice of referring bills to committees after the first reading, have enhanced the legislative process, committee scrutiny remains rushed and superficial. Many bills are examined in haste, often with reports produced after just one meeting, which limits the depth of analysis and oversight. Additionally, despite provisions for public participation in the legislative process, these opportunities are rarely utilized, leaving significant gaps in democratic engagement. The dominance of the ruling party in committee leadership further weakens the committees' ability to challenge the government's agenda, as it allows bills to be pushed through with minimal opposition. To address these issues, reforms should focus on improving the quality of committee deliberations by allowing for more time, enhancing public participation in the process, and ensuring greater independence of committee leadership. Strengthening these mechanisms would allow for more thorough scrutiny of legislation and improve executive accountability.

9.2.3 Restructuring Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQT)

To improve parliamentary oversight in Bangladesh, reforms should focus on restructuring PMQT to ensure questions are selected by ballot, not the Prime Minister, to prevent partisan bias. The Speaker's authority should be strengthened to enforce rules against long-winded replies and partisan tactics. Opposition engagement must be guaranteed, with the Leader of the Opposition present and allotted fixed questions. Question rules should ensure PMQT focuses on high policy, while departmental issues are redirected to relevant ministries. Finally, oversight motions should be streamlined, reducing delays and ensuring timely government responses.

9.2.4 Strengthening Committee Oversight of the Executive

For strengthening committee oversight of the government, committee meetings must be held regularly and with sufficient duration to ensure thorough scrutiny of government activities. The current irregularity and brevity of committee meetings undermine their ability to effectively oversee ministries and government actions. Enforcing a strict reporting schedule for committees, similar to the process for bill scrutiny, would ensure that their findings are consistently presented to the House, allowing for timely deliberation. Additionally, committees should avoid focusing too heavily on partisan or past government issues, as seen in the current practice where committees emphasize the activities of previous administrations rather than holding the current government accountable. To address this, clear guidelines should be established to ensure that committees maintain a balanced approach, focusing on the present government's actions while still addressing historical concerns where relevant.

Furthermore, increasing the depth of scrutiny should be prioritized, with committees avoiding over-reliance on subcommittees that often fail to report back. Lastly, strengthening the power to enforce attendance and compelling the production of documents is critical to overcoming challenges in holding witnesses accountable.

9.2.5 Ensuring Opposition Participation and Ending Parliamentary Boycotts

To end the cycle of boycotts and restore accountability, Bangladesh must first address rigged elections, which erode legitimacy and push the opposition out of Parliament. Ensuring free, fair, and transparent polls through an empowered Election Commission is the starting point. Inside Parliament, meaningful opposition participation should be guaranteed by limiting excessive party control over MPs and encouraging greater independence in representing constituencies. Mechanisms such as cross-party committees and stricter oversight requirements would create constructive avenues for opposition engagement. Finally, curbing the practice of partisan domination of proceedings and institutionalizing stronger checks and balances would reduce incentives for walkouts. Without these reforms, Parliament risks remaining an instrument of executive control rather than a forum of accountability.

9.2.6 Enhancing Budgetary Oversight and Financial Accountability

Budgetary oversight by the financial committees in Bangladesh must be effective. First, the Committee on Public Accounts (PAC) should expand its scope beyond merely reviewing audit reports and actively engage in addressing financial irregularities and reviewing annual financial accounts as stipulated by its mandate. The committee must also work towards reducing the audit report backlog by setting clear timelines for processing older reports, as delays hinder effective oversight. Similarly, the Committee on Public Undertakings (PUC) and the Committee on Estimates (EC) should enhance their engagement with public institutions, ensuring their recommendations align with government policies and consider administrative reforms. Strengthening inter-ministerial cooperation is crucial to ensure committees receive the necessary working papers promptly, as delays in acquiring key information currently hinder timely meetings. Finally, committees should adopt more streamlined processes, such as focusing on recommendations in their reports, to improve efficiency and ensure that their findings reach the public.

9.3 Establishing an Independent Commission for Accountability: Case of Venice Commission

This study explores an alternate institution which could play an oversight role in order to support the parliamentary affairs properly. A cross-country data analysis reveals that Kenya and the UK practice Commissions for parliamentary oversight and support. Kenya's Parliamentary Service Commission and the UK's House of Commons Commission (Jogerst, 1993) are tasked with managing staffing, budgeting, and internal governance to ensure the effective functioning of their parliaments. While they play a significant role in strengthening parliamentary activities, their location within the parliamentary structure means they are not fully independent and remain subject to political influence.

CPD's research study argues for the establishment of an independent commission in Bangladesh that can provide both pre-legislative and post-legislative support to ensure the desirable state of impartial scrutiny, stronger accountability, and more democratic practices. In this connection, this study recommends setting up a Commission currently in operation in the European Commission titled "European Commission for Democracy through Law". The name of the proposed commission could be – 'Parliamentary Commission for Democracy, Legislative, Executive and Legal Affairs'.

The European Commission for Democracy through Law was established in 1990 with the objective to strengthen the understanding of the legal system of participating states, promote the rule of law, and examine problems raised by the working of democratic institutions of participating states. It is established as a Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe. It is a consultative body which co-operates with member states of the Council of Europe and with non-members. (Council of Europe, European Commission for Democracy through Law, 2023)

The main purposes of the Commission are constitutional, legislative and administrative principles and techniques that serve the efficiency of democratic institutions and their strengthening. It also aims to protect fundamental rights and freedoms that involve the participation of the citizens. Furthermore, it contributes to local and regional self-government for the enhancement of democracy.

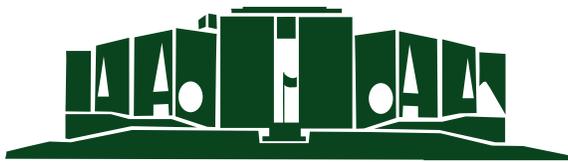
The Commission also encourages setting up similar bodies in other regions of the world and links them to run joint programmes within its field of activity. Furthermore, it carries out research, prepares studies and drafts guidelines. It is funded by member states of the Enlarged Agreement. Although it is assisted by the Secretariat General of the Council, it may take the assistance of consultants. It may also accept voluntary contributions.

On appointment and term, independent experts having eminent experience in democratic institutions and excellent contribution to the enhancement of law and political science shall compose the Commission. Any state can appoint a member or an associated member for a regular term of four years. An associate member shall have no right to vote. On leadership structure and functioning, the President and Vice President and other members of the Bureau shall be elected for a term of two years. The Commission shall have a Secretariat. The Secretary and Deputy Secretary are appointed by the opinion of the Commission. The Secretariat's function is to prepare and make all the documents available for the Commission.

On operational independence and interaction with stakeholders, the Commission members are independent and shall not receive any instruction from outside. The Commission members and experts receive guidance and support in exercising their duties throughout their mandate by the Secretary. The Commission engages in confidential discussion with governmental or public bodies, representatives of the private sector or from civil society during plenary sessions. The Commission holds four plenary sessions in a year. The Commission presents a report on its activities containing an outline of its future activities to the Committee of Ministers. The Commission is independent in character and flexible in its working method. The Commission holds four plenary sessions in a year.

On report, session and confidential protocol, although draft opinions and reports are restricted for the public, they shall be public once adopted by the Commission. The sessions that the Commission holds are private, and the President can invite guest representatives of interested institutions to participate in plenary sessions. For general and country-specific opinion preparation, rapporteurs are appointed based on multiple criteria. The general reports and country-specific opinions are submitted to the Commission for adoption. The session reports are circulated by the Secretariat after each plenary session.

The supporting bodies of the Commission include the Sub-Commission, Scientific Council, Joint Council on Constitutional Justice, and Democratic Elections. The liaison officers of the Joint Council on Constitutional Justice and four members of the Council for Democratic Election are elected every two years.



This study has demonstrated that the persistent weakness of accountability in Bangladesh's parliamentary system is rooted not merely in the structural design of the legislature but in the broader concentration of political power, party dominance, and fragile institutional checks. Evidence from legislative practice, committee performance, oversight mechanisms, and electoral processes confirms that the existing unicameral Jatiya Sangsad has struggled to function as an effective forum for representation and executive scrutiny. While recent procedural reforms have marginally improved committee engagement and legislative review, these gains remain constrained by partisan control, limited opposition participation, and the absence of credible electoral accountability.

The analysis further shows that although the introduction of a bicameral parliament is often presented as a mechanism for widening deliberative space and strengthening checks on executive dominance, the study does not consider bicameralism a guaranteed or immediate solution for Bangladesh. Given the country's adversarial political culture, weak democratic institutions, and fragile electoral credibility, the creation of an upper house may risk legislative deadlock, duplication of partisan conflict, and further weakening of the lower house rather than improving accountability. Therefore, the study argues that meaningful accountability can be achieved within the existing unicameral framework, provided that complementary institutional reforms are properly implemented.

In this context, the study draws attention to the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), established in 1990 to promote the rule of law, strengthen democratic institutions, and provide expert guidance on constitutional, legislative, and administrative reforms. Its functions including independent legal advisory support, research, guideline preparation, and confidential engagement with state institutions - demonstrate how an external yet cooperative oversight body can enhance institutional integrity without encroaching upon national sovereignty. Composed of independent experts and operating free from political instruction, the Commission exemplifies how procedural fairness, institutional balance, and democratic resilience can be reinforced through consultative rather than coercive mechanisms. The study therefore suggests that establishing a comparable independent commission in Bangladesh could provide structured, non-partisan oversight of parliamentary governance by actively engaging in pre-legislative and post-legislative review, monitoring the implementation of parliamentary undertakings, and offering continuous institutional feedback when necessary. Such a mechanism presents a more context-appropriate and sustainable solution to strengthening accountability than introducing an additional legislative tier, which risks intensifying partisan conflict rather than resolving it.

Accordingly, the study concludes that restoring accountability of the majority party in Bangladesh requires a comprehensive reform package prioritising institutional independence, procedural transparency, credible elections, strengthened committees, and meaningful opposition participation within the existing parliamentary structure. Sustainable democratic governance will ultimately depend not on creating additional legislative tiers, but on political commitment to uphold parliamentary norms, protect checks and balances, and rebuild public trust in representative institutions.



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