
INFORMATION NOTE

Summary of Electoral Systems in Selected Places

1. Electoral systems

1.1 The Panel on Constitutional Affairs, at its meeting on 20 February 2006, requested the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) to provide a summary of electoral systems in selected places based upon the research papers previously issued by RLSD.¹ This note provides updated information on the election/selection of the legislature, head of state and head of government in Singapore, New Zealand, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, France and the United States.

¹ The relevant research papers are listed as follows:

- (a) Systems of Government in Some Foreign Countries: Singapore (RP03/99-00);
- (b) Systems of Government in Some Foreign Countries: New Zealand (RP04/99-00);
- (c) Systems of Government in Some Foreign Countries: Germany (RP05/99-00);
- (d) Systems of Government in Some Foreign Countries: The United Kingdom (RP06/99-00);
- (e) Systems of Government in Some Foreign Countries: Japan (RP07/99-00);
- (f) Systems of Government in Some Foreign Countries: France (RP08/99-00);
- (g) Systems of Government in Some Foreign Countries: The United States (RP09/99-00);
- (h) Systems of Government in Some Foreign Countries: The Overall Comparison Table (RP10/99-00); and
- (i) The Selection of Head of State and Head of Government in Selected Places (IN11/03-04).

Table 1 — Composition and characteristics of the legislature

Country	Name of House	Total membership	Type of membership	Features of electoral and appointment system
Singapore Population: 4 351 000	Parliament of Singapore.	94.	(1) Elected Members of Parliament (MPs). (2) Appointed MPs: • Non-Constituency MPs; and • Nominated MPs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elected MPs – elected from single-member constituencies and group representation constituencies (GRCs). In GRCs, political parties field a team of three to six candidates. At least one candidate in the team must belong to a minority race. Non-Constituency MPs – three Members (or up to a maximum of six) are appointed from among unsuccessful opposition candidates who have the highest percentage of votes in their respective constituencies. The number of Non-Constituency MPs is reduced by one for each opposition party candidate returned in the general election. Nominated MPs – up to nine Members are appointed for a term of two and half years² by the President on the recommendation of a Special Select Committee of Parliament.
New Zealand Population: 3 820 000	House of Representatives.	About 120.	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slightly more than half of 120 (depending on the population distribution) are elected from geographical electorates on a first-past-the-post basis, the remainder is chosen from party lists. Each voter has two votes – one for an electorate vote and the other for a party. A party is not entitled to any list MPs unless it wins either 5% of the "party votes" or at least one electorate seat.
Germany Population: 82 430 000	Bundesrat (Federal Council).	69.	All appointed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointed by the 16 state governments. Member's terms are not fixed, but are determined by the state governments.
	Bundestag (Federal Parliament).	At least 598.	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 299 members are elected in district constituencies and a further 299 via lists of candidates drawn up by political parties in each federal state. Each voter casts two votes – the first for a constituency candidate and the second for a party list. A party has to win at least 5% of the votes cast or three constituency seats to be represented proportionally.

² The maximum term of any one Parliament is five years.

Table 1 — Composition and characteristics of the legislature (cont'd)

Country	Name of House	Total membership	Type of membership	Features of electoral and appointment system
The United Kingdom Population: 59 834 000	House of Lords.	About 700.	About 600 life peers, 12 Law Lords, 92 hereditary peers, 26 archbishops and bishops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life peers are appointed by the Monarch. 75 hereditary peers are elected by political parties, 15 are elected by the whole House, and two are royal office holders.
	House of Commons.	646.	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MPs are elected in single-member constituencies on a first-past-the-post basis.
Japan Population: 127 435 000	House of Councillors.	252.	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100 members are elected by proportional representation from one nationwide electoral district, and 152 are elected from 47 prefectural constituencies. Each voter casts two votes, one under the voter's electoral district, and the other under the proportional representation system.
	House of Representatives.	480.	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 300 members from single-seat districts. 180 members are elected by proportional representation in which the country is divided into 11 electoral blocs. Similar to the election of the House of Councillors, each voter casts two votes.
France Population: 61 400 000	Senate.	321 ³ .	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senators are elected by approximately 150 000 representatives of local administrative councils and deputies of the National Assembly.
	National Assembly.	577.	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deputies are elected in single member constituencies through a "two rounds" system⁴.
The United States Population: 285 669 915	Senate.	100.	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two Senators per state. Almost all states use the first-past-the-post system.
	House of Representatives.	435.	All elected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single-member district system. Each state is represented in the House proportional to its population, and each state is entitled to at least one Representative.

³ The number of senators will progressively increase to 346 in 2010 in order to reflect changes in the French demographics.

⁴ If no single candidate receives an absolute majority of the votes cast as well as obtaining votes of more than 25% of registered voters on the first ballot, candidates that obtain more than 12.5% of the votes of registered voters are placed on the second ballot. Whoever receives the most votes on the second ballot is declared elected.

Table 2 — Selection of head of state and head of government

Country	Selection of head of state	Selection of head of government
Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The President is directly elected by a simple majority vote. Both voter registration and voting are compulsory. • A Presidential candidate must satisfy the Presidential Elections Committee that he is a person of integrity, good character and reputation. The candidate is required to have top management experience in government agencies or large Singapore companies and no membership of any political party on the date of his nomination for election. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Prime Minister is appointed by the President and must be regarded as being likely to command the confidence of the majority of MPs. • The Prime Minister must be an MP.
New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Monarch of the United Kingdom is the head of state. • The Governor-General is appointed by the Monarch of the United Kingdom, on the advice of the government, to be the personal representative of the head of state. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Prime Minister is appointed by the Governor-General. • In making the appointment, the Governor-General, by convention, accepts the outcome of the electoral process and subsequent discussions among political parties as to which party or group of parties is to govern the country and the internal decision of that party or group of parties as to who is to lead the government.
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The President is elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast by members of the Federal Convention which comprises all Bundestag Members and an equal number of delegates elected by local parliaments. If, after two votes, no single candidate has received this level of support, in the third and final vote, the candidate endorsed by a plurality of votes cast is deemed elected. • The Presidential candidate must not be a member of the government or a federal or state parliament. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chancellor is nominated by the President and elected by an absolute majority of all Bundestag Members. • If the nominee of the President is not elected, the Bundestag may elect its own nominee within 14 days. If no one is elected within this period, the Bundestag will attempt an election. The President must appoint the person with the majority vote. If the person with the highest number of votes does not have a majority, the President may either appoint him or call new elections for the Bundestag. • The Chancellor is not required to be a member of the legislature.

Table 2 — Selection of head of state and head of government (cont'd)

Country	Selection of head of state	Selection of head of government
The United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Monarch is selected among members of the Royal Family according to a line of succession. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Prime Minister is appointed by the Monarch and must be regarded as an individual the most likely to maintain the support of the House of Commons. Usually, the Prime Minister is the leader of the party which has a majority in that House.
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Emperor ascends the Imperial Throne which is dynastic and succeeded to in accordance with the Imperial House Law passed by the Diet⁵. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Prime Minister, who must be a civilian, is appointed by the Emperor of Japan after being designated by the Diet from among its members, and must enjoy the confidence of the House of Representatives to remain in office. In designating the Prime Minister, each House of the Diet conducts a ballot under the run-off system⁶. If the two Houses choose different individuals, then a joint committee of both Houses is appointed to agree on a common candidate. If the two Houses do not agree within 10 days, the decision of the House of Representatives is deemed to be that of the Diet.
France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The President is directly elected by an absolute majority of the votes cast in a universal suffrage. If an absolute majority is not obtained on the first ballot, the top two candidates on the first ballot will stand for election on the second ballot. A Presidential candidate must have the public endorsement of at least 500 local and national representatives. Both voter registration and voting are not compulsory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Prime Minister is appointed by the President. Since the National Assembly can, by a vote of censure, force the resignation of the government, the choice of Prime Minister must reflect the majority in the Assembly. The Prime Minister cannot be a National Assembly Deputy or a Senator.

⁵ The National Diet of Japan is Japan's legislature. It consists of two houses: the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors.

⁶ It is a voting system that ensures a winning candidate will receive an absolute majority of votes rather than a simple plurality.

Table 2 — Selection of head of state and head of government (cont'd)

Country	Selection of head of state	Selection of head of government
The United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As both the head of state and the head of government, the President is elected by an absolute majority of votes cast by an electoral college which has 538 electors who, mostly nominated by parties and/or pledged to particular presidential tickets, are directly elected by voters under the "winner-takes-all" system in all but two states.⁷ If no candidate gains an absolute majority, the election is decided by the House of Representatives, with all Representatives of a state voting as a unit (i.e. each state has one vote). • The President must be a natural-born citizen of the United States, be at least 35 years old, and have been a resident of the United States for 14 years. 	

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⁷ The two states are Nebraska and Maine which adopt the system based on proportional allocation of votes.