

Balancing Elites and Masses in Two Legislative Bodies

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Headwing society is one in which elites and the general population have a symbiotic and trusting relationship in all social institutions. Many types of social institutions exist in the different spheres of society: governance, economy and culture. However, because government involves legal power and can force people to serve the will of the elites who wield that power, government institutions can cause the greatest oppression and get most of our attention.

Sustainable societies need to be both intelligently managed and serve the needs of people, "the masses." Slavery and serfdom are the starkest examples of the masses serving the will of elites. Only a small percentage of the population makes up the political class. But, without proper checks and balances, the elites in this class will use their power to become lords and masters, treating the masses as second-class citizens and expendables.



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Earlier societies were governed by kings, princes and feudal lords. Aristotle referred to good kings as those who served the population, and bad kings as those who used the people to serve themselves. Today, in more complex institutional and bureaucratic societies, individual kings are often replaced by classes of elites in government administration, political parties, and those with great wealth or organizational power. Instead of merely focusing on individuals in power, we need to focus on social institutions and elites. While this problem needs to be fixed in universities, corporations, churches, NGOs, and all kinds of social institutions, this article uses the example of governance.

One way to balance the interests of the masses with the skill of elites in the law is with two legislative bodies. This can be constitutionally addressed with an upper legislative house representing elite expertise and a lower house representing the population, with each house having the power to veto one another. This allows only legislation that is deemed functional by the elites and enjoys the "consent of the governed." This type of legislation began in ancient times and needs to be continually updated as societies evolve.

Ancient Rome and Tribunes' Power to Veto

A significant historical development occurred in Ancient Rome when the "plebs" (the people, or working classes) decided they had enough of fighting in the armies of the patricians (ruling elite class) without any say in the laws their Senate passed. Without checks and balances, the Senate passed legislation that burdened the masses and provided the elite with special privileges.

When the plebs reached a breaking point, they went on a nationwide strike, bringing Rome to a political and economic crisis. This was similar to the "no taxation without representation" demanded by the American states 2,300 years later. By 471 BC, a plebeian assembly was established that elected tribunes who could represent the plebs at the Senate. They had the power to recommend and veto legislation. Then by 450 BC, a group of ten people known as the *decemviri* had drawn up Twelve Tables of Law that were approved by both the patricians and the plebs. These tables were a social contract that spelled out the rights and responsibilities of all citizens, and both the aristocratic and working classes. This protected the interests of the plebeians as a class, but allowed the best educated and skilled elites to administer the Republic.

This Roman system of legislation was a resilient social institution. Despite the corruption of rulers and upheavals in the Roman Empire, the Senate, as an institution, lasted in the East until the fall of Constantinople in 1453, a lifespan of over 2,800 years.

The House of Commons and the House of Lords in England

In England, the House of Lords developed from the "Great Council" that advised the king. It was composed of ecclesiastical leaders, hereditary nobles, and regional administrators. They were the elite or aristocratic class with the knowledge and skills to guide society. Legal rights to grievance and due process were granted to all free people by the *Magna Carta*, giving the House of Commons its origins in the 13th

and 14th centuries.

Over time, with the rise in wealth and influence of the commercial class in the House of Commons, it eventually became the primary legislative body and controlled taxation, similar to the House of Representatives in the United States today. Industrial society posed a new challenge: both the industrial elites and workers were together in the House of Commons without a means to balance their interests. With the receding influence of the landed aristocracy and the House of Lords, the clash between owners and workers is represented by different political parties in the House of Commons. The winning party controls legislation and there is no recognized veto by the other. There are no separate bodies representing elites and masses. This division leads to revolutionary social unrest as the two groups fight for control of the House of Commons, rather than existing as two independent legislative bodies with the power to veto one another. Now the Information Age has caused another shift between elites and masses. The British legislative system needs to catch up to these cultural changes balancing skills of current elites with the well-being of masses in contemporary society.

The Senate and House of Representatives in the U.S.

The American Founders sought to create a republican form of democracy based on the strengths and weaknesses of previous systems of government. The wisdom of the educated elites resided in the Senate. Senators were appointed by state legislatures. The people were represented in the House of Representatives. The lower house represented the citizens who put forward the budget, which had to get the approval from the elites in the Senate. The lower house, representing the people, could resist a tyranny of the elites with veto power over proposals by the Senate.

The Constitutional Convention was divided over how senators would be chosen, but agreed that the interests represented by the lower and upper houses should be as diverse as possible. The elites in the Senate needed to check the legislation from disintegration into "mob rule," on the one hand, while the lower house was to check against oppression by moneyed interests and the political class, on the other. As the new government was a "union of states," it was finally (and narrowly) decided that state legislatures would appoint senators. This would also serve as a check by the states on the expansion of federal power.

The Destruction of the U.S. Senate and the Elite vs. Masses Partisanship that Followed

The 17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1913) repealed the states' right to appoint their representatives to the Senate. This undercut state power and increased federal power. Senators became elected by the same populace as the House of Representatives, eliminating the important check on popular sentiments by more seasoned elites. This made the Senate a relatively superfluous political body. It only took one year for the reorganized federal government, prodded by the lobbying of banks, to enter into World War I after whipping up public sentiment. It is unlikely that state-appointed senators would have so easily approved.

The U.S. Congress, like the House of Commons in England, became a battlefield between elite and popular interests. Two political parties representing these interests became further entrenched in government and eventually hijacked the legislative process from a non-vigilant citizenry. The parties got their names on ballots using the rhetoric that it would be easier to vote. But the result was that the parties took the legislative process away from the citizens.

Parties only endorsed candidates who would march lockstep with the party interests as determined by financial donors. Legislation was no longer crafted in single-subject bills proposed by representatives who could be held accountable to the people for where they stood on each issue, but hammered out between party leadership, administrative officials, and lobbyists with hundreds of subjects buried in large omnibus bills that were hundreds, even thousands, of pages long. The citizens and their "representatives" are largely left out of the legislative process.

This new system of elites, with elements of plutocracy, corporatocracy, and ideological interest groups, became two warring tribal parties.

"Trumpism," which appealed to contemporary American plebs, was a reaction to this loss of "a government of, by, and for the people." Hillary Clinton's 2016 reference to Trump supporters as "deplorables" drove home the division between the political elites embedded in government, and average citizens who felt they had lost control of their country. Today the U.S. faces a crisis similar to ancient Rome, where the plebs are resisting funding an ever-expanding and unchecked bureaucratic state. The elites, on the other hand, are in fear of a revolt of the masses. This was evidenced by the fencing and stationing of a large number of troops around the U.S. Capitol after January 6, 2021.

The legislative process should return to a balance between the people and elites. Major improvements would occur with the repeal of the 17th Amendment, forbidding party affiliation after candidates on ballots, and requiring single-subject legislation.

The Failure to Represent the People in Russia and China

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels created a popular movement among workers that decried the growing impotence of the working class and the economic and political advantages of the "bourgeoisie" who controlled the capitalist stock markets and governments. The disparities were very evident in England at the time as portrayed in novels like *Oliver Twist*.



A tapestry depicting serfs.

Marx proposed a Communist political party that would seize control of "the means of production" from the owners, and govern "on behalf of the workers." Vladimir Lenin, with the help of Western financiers, used appeals to Marxism to seize control of the government and nationalize industry under a single-party state. The new party elite were armed with power and ideology but not the economic knowledge necessary to produce wealth or develop an economy. The communist party passed all legislation without checks against oppression by the citizens, creating a class of industrial serfs. The dysfunctional system eventually collapsed.

The Chinese revolution under Mao Zedong began like the Russian Revolution. But, China eventually realized the importance of private ownership and markets for economic development and reformed under Deng Xiaoping. However, the unchecked legislative power of the CCP allowed the exploitation of workers, and prevented their political expression. While China has become an economic powerhouse, politically it is in a position analogous to Rome before the Assembly of Plebs and the Twelve Tables of Law that guaranteed the rights of the people. To become a resilient and humane political system that serves its population, China needs a second legislative body that gives them representation.

Improving Our Legislative Bodies to Represent Both Elites and Masses

This brief review of political history shows that no great power governments have legislative institutions that adequately balance the need for responsible, knowledgeable, elite leadership and the rights and interests of the general population.

Elites with unchecked political power will inevitably use that for personal advantage and create a class system analogous to feudal lords and serfs. Without representation and veto power of the populations, government expansion, corruption, and oppression by elites will be the norm.

Responsibilities and Rights: A Senate and a House of Representatives

Thus, a "more perfect" form of government is one in which there are two houses of government in a state in which the upper house, or Senate, represents elite responsibilities and the lower house, or House of Representatives, represents the well-being of the general population.

The governments of today's great powers do not reflect this division properly. In the West, rights are emphasized and elites have significantly vacated their governance responsibilities, falling prey to fads, fashions and partisan political rhetoric. Through political parties, special interests have hijacked governments, creating a class of wealthy elites who control legislation without the input of the people. In the East, as in China, the Confucian teaching of duties to superiors and duties to society emphasizes responsibility, but not rights. While elites theoretically are responsible for wise and selfless governance,

they are inevitably corrupted by power and demand obedience from the population, whom they treat like serfs, to serve their personal interests.

England and the United States need to reconfigure their upper and lower houses to function in ways that represent constructive elite responsibility that is checked by the will of the people. If not, society will collapse into bankruptcy amid the pandering and self-serving rhetoric of power-seeking politicians, who sell their offices to wealthy elites. China, on the other hand, would benefit from converting its single-party elite leadership into a senate and adding a lower house representing the will of the people with the power to veto elite legislation. Without this, the persecution of minorities, organ harvesting, denial of rights to the masses, and Chinese foreign adventurism will continue.

These Improvements to Legislation Reflect the Balance Needed in All Social Institutions

The reconfiguration of governance to represent both the experience and skill of elites and the rights and desires of all people with two separate houses that check and balance one another is only one of many necessary improvements in modern society. Note that this division between elites and masses is not a Cain-Abel division. It is, rather, a division among adults who have achieved the first blessing and have acquired different skills for serving others.

There is a temptation, from "fallen nature," that drives both groups to use institutions and for their own purposes. Institutions often get sidetracked from their purposes by manias and ideological capture, which often destroys them (see Don Trubshaw, "Institutional Resilience and Ecological Threats as Factors in Societal Peace and Conflict," *International Journal on World Peace*, Dec. 2021, pp. 11-37). Whether a social institution is a corporation, bank, hospital, a non-profit, or other institution, it will have both leaders and members, or workers. The resiliency of the institution requires a positive relationship between these two groups that is centered on the founding purpose of the institution.

This article is adapted from the author's "Elites and the Masses: Legislative Bodies for a Functional Society" published on the blog [Integral Society: Culture, Governance, and Economy](#).

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Photo at top: *Interior of the dome of the United States Capitol rotunda.*