

*In what ways and why are the committees of the US Congress so much more powerful than the committees of the House of Commons?*

*The committees of the US congress and the committees of the House of Commons both have substantial amounts of powers in the way in which they rule the country and are able to pass legislation.*

*Within the American congress there are separate powers within the House of Representatives and the Senate and there are also powers held by Congress as a whole. Congress as a whole however cannot hope to perform enormous tasks such as introducing radical amendments without resorting to a form of streamlining, hence there are committees – in particular, standing committees. There are 15 standing committees in the House of Representatives and a further 19 standing committees in the Senate.*

*In American politics it is quite true to say that congressional committees have a lot of power. Firstly they are both legislative and investigatory committees. Although their principal role is to consider and amend legislation they many also commission major private investigations. Apart from just considering legislation congressional committees are also able to develop, draft and pass their own legislation. This alone shows that they indeed have a lot of power. Legislation developed elsewhere may be rejected by the committees, amended or in some cases excepted in full. Committees also have large permanent staff and expensive research facilities. Another feature of congressional committees is that they are also able to call witnesses from Congress, the administration or outside bodies. By doing this they have a picture of a full-scale inquiry every time a new law is proposed. Also policy in the Senate and rules in the house have the ability to kill or severely hinder legislation.*

*Committee chairpersons are powerful political and such positions are much sought after. In many ways chairpersons are as powerful, perhaps even more so, than the department directors and secretaries who are appointed by the President. They wield considerable power over the agenda and procedure of the committees and, as a result, committee chairmen can exert a great deal of influence in the house and the senate.*

*Finally select or special committees can be formed by either house.*

*Similarly to the Standing committees in Congress the standing committees in the house of commons main role is to consider possible amendments of legislation during its passage through the house. On the face of it, it appears to be a key role, but in practice these committees are very much controlled by Government whips. Therefore only those amendments of which the Government approves are likely to be adopted. Standing committees in UK politics lack independence, and in any case, all their proposals must be approved by the whole house at the “report stage” of a Bill. It is already evident that US congressional committees have more power over passing legislation than the UK ones. So in comparison with American instead of the committees having most power over passing legislation Government whips have far greater power.*

*Also the UK congressional committees unlike the US ones have no way of finding out what information may have been withheld by witnesses, again, this deducts from their powers even further.*

*Overall it is clear that the US Congressional Committees have far more power than the Committees of the UK. American committees are able to pass and amend legislation whilst in the UK the Government dominates the parliamentary agenda so is able to block any legislation to which it is opposed. American Congressional Committees are able to get hold of a lot more information than the British Committees are able to. US Congressional Committees have a larger degree of power and more influence than the one of the United Kingdom.*