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# **“A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COURT STRUCTURE AND CRIMINAL TRIAL PROCESS IN INDIA, THE UNITED STATES, AUSTRALIA, AND JAPAN”**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

The judiciary occupies a central position in constitutional democracies, serving as the primary institution for the administration of justice and the protection of constitutional values. This paper examines the judicial systems of India, the United States, Australia, and Japan by focusing on two interrelated aspects: the structure of courts and the criminal trial process. The study analyses the hierarchical organization of courts and the procedural stages of criminal trials, including investigation, prosecution, trial, and appeal. While India and Japan follow unified judicial systems, the United States and Australia adopt federal system with distinct court hierarchies and procedural approaches. Despite these differences, all four systems emphasize judicial independence and fair trial guarantees. The comparative analysis highlights key similarities and differences and offers insights relevant to improving the effectiveness of criminal justice administration.

**KEYWORDS:** Comparative Judicial Systems, Court Structure, Criminal Trial Process, India, United States, Australia, Japan, Criminal Justice.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

The judicial system plays a central role in upholding the rule of law and ensuring the fair administration of justice. While constitutional frameworks differ across nations, the effectiveness of criminal justice largely depends on the institutional framework of courts and the procedures governing criminal trials. This paper compares the judicial systems of India, the United States, Australia, and Japan by examining two interrelated aspects: the structure of courts and the criminal trial process. By analysing these elements across the selected jurisdictions, the study highlights key similarities, structural variations, and procedural approaches that influence the delivery of criminal justice, with particular reference to their implications for efficiency and fairness.

## STRUCTURE OF COURTS: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

### A. INDIA:

The Indian judiciary is a single integrated system of courts for the Union as well as the States. The Constitution of India, 1950, divides the judiciary into two parts: the superior judiciary (consisting of the Supreme Court and the High Courts) and the subordinate judiciary (the lower courts). The Supreme Court of India is the highest court in the country and is situated in New Delhi. There are **25 High Courts** in India. Since India has **28 States**, each State has one High Court, although some High Courts have jurisdiction over multiple States and Union Territories. States are divided into districts, each having its own District Court, along with sub-courts functioning within each district. India has several special courts and tribunals constituted through statutes to reduce the burden on regular courts and to provide faster adjudication. These tribunals include the Central Administrative Tribunal, State Administrative Tribunal, National Green Tribunal, National Company Law Tribunal, Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, Armed Forces Tribunal, Debt Recovery Tribunals, Debt Recovery Appellate Tribunal, Railways Claims Tribunal, Securities Appellate Tribunal, Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal, Industrial Tribunal, and Motor Accident Claims Tribunal. Special courts have also been established under various statutes in the country, including Fast Track Courts, Family Courts, Labour Courts, POCSO Courts, CBI Courts, Special Courts for money-laundering cases, Courts for MPs and MLAs, Rent Courts, and Juvenile Courts. The hierarchy of Indian courts in civil matters is the Supreme Court, High Courts, District Courts, and Subordinate Courts. In criminal matters, the hierarchy consists of the Supreme Court, High Courts, Sessions Courts, and Magistrate Courts, which are further classified into Judicial Magistrates (First and Second Class) and Metropolitan Magistrate.

### B. USA:

The judicial system of the United States reflects its federal constitutional framework, under which judicial authority is shared between the federal government and the individual states. Article III of the U.S. Constitution establishes the federal judiciary, headed by the Supreme Court of the United States, and empowers Congress to constitute lower federal courts. Consequently, the United States follows a dual court system consisting of federal courts and independent state court systems, each exercising authority within its respective constitutional sphere. The federal judiciary is organised

in a three-tier structure comprising District Courts as trial courts, Circuit Courts of Appeals, and the Supreme Court. Federal courts primarily adjudicate matters involving federal statutes, constitutional interpretation, disputes between states, and cases implicating foreign governments. In addition to Article III courts, Congress has constituted specialised Article I courts to adjudicate specific disputes such as taxation, military justice, veterans' claims, and monetary claims against the federal government, thereby enhancing judicial efficiency and institutional expertise. Parallel to the federal judiciary, each state maintains its own judicial system under its respective constitution. Although structural arrangements vary across states, most follow a hierarchical pattern consisting of trial courts, intermediate appellate courts, and a state supreme court. State courts primarily adjudicate criminal prosecutions and civil disputes arising under state law, making them the principal forums for routine litigation. This decentralised arrangement reflects the autonomy of states within the American federal system, while the Supreme Court of the United States ensures constitutional uniformity in matters involving federal law.

### **C. AUSTRALIA:**

The Australian judicial system reflects a federal constitutional framework in which judicial power is shared between the Commonwealth and the states. Chapter III of the Australian Constitution vests judicial power in the High Court of Australia and such other federal courts as Parliament may establish. Consequently, Australia operates a dual court system comprising federal courts and state and territory courts, each exercising jurisdiction within their respective constitutional spheres. At the federal level, the judicial hierarchy consists of the High Court of Australia, the Federal Court of Australia, and the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. The High Court functions as the apex court and the final court of appeal, with primary responsibility for constitutional interpretation and the resolution of matters of national legal significance. The Federal Court exercises jurisdiction over civil and criminal matters arising under federal legislation, while the Federal Circuit and Family Court primarily handles family law matters and less complex federal disputes. In addition, specialised federal tribunals operate within the federal judicial framework to adjudicate subject-specific disputes, thereby enhancing judicial efficiency and expertise. Parallel to the federal judiciary, each state and territory maintains its own court system under its respective laws. Although institutional structures vary, most states follow a hierarchical pattern

comprising Supreme Courts, intermediate courts such as District or County Courts, and Magistrates' Courts. State courts exercise broad jurisdiction over criminal prosecutions and civil disputes arising under state law, making them the principal forums for routine litigation. Appeals from state supreme courts may be carried to the High Court of Australia, ensuring coherence and uniformity in the interpretation of federal and constitutional law.

#### D. JAPAN:

Japan follows a **unified national judicial system**, distinct from the federal or dual court structures found in countries such as the United States and Australia. Article 76 of the Constitution of Japan, 1946 vests the entirety of judicial power in the Supreme Court and such inferior courts as are established by law. In accordance with this constitutional mandate, the Diet enacted the Courts Act, 1947, which provides the statutory basis for the organisation and functioning of the judiciary. Notably, the Constitution expressly prohibits the establishment of extraordinary tribunals, reinforcing the principle of judicial unity and independence. The Japanese court system consists of five principal levels: the Supreme Court, High Courts, District Courts, Family Courts, and Summary Courts. The Supreme Court of Japan functions as the apex court and the final court of appeal, with primary responsibility for constitutional interpretation and ensuring uniformity in legal interpretation across the country. It also exercises supervisory authority over the administration of justice in lower courts. Below the Supreme Court, the High Courts primarily exercise appellate jurisdiction over decisions of District, Family, and Summary Courts, while also exercising limited original jurisdiction in specified categories of cases. A specialised Intellectual Property High Court functions as a branch of the Tokyo High Court, reflecting Japan's emphasis on judicial specialisation within a unified system. District Courts serve as the principal courts of first instance for civil, criminal, and administrative matters, while also exercising appellate jurisdiction over Summary Court decisions. Family Courts, established to address domestic relations and juvenile matters, adopt a rehabilitative and welfare-oriented approach, particularly in cases involving minors. Summary Courts constitute the lowest tier of the judiciary and handle minor civil disputes and less serious criminal offences. Overall, Japan's integrated court structure promotes procedural uniformity, hierarchical coherence, and centralised judicial administration, distinguishing it from jurisdictions that operate parallel federal and state court systems.

## CRIMINAL TRIAL PROCESS: A COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

### A. INDIA:

India follows an adversarial system of criminal justice, where the prosecution represents the State and bears the burden of proving the guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt. The accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty. The criminal trial process is governed by the Bharathiya nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (BSA). The BNSS classifies criminal trials into Sessions Trials, Warrant Trials, Summons Trials, and Summary Trials.

### Stages of Criminal Trial

#### Pre-Trial Stage

- The criminal process begins with the commission of an offence, which may be cognizable or non-cognizable. In cognizable offences, the police may register a First Information Report (FIR) and commence investigation without prior court approval, whereas permission of a Magistrate is required for non-cognizable offences. The FIR is the formal initiation of criminal proceedings and may be lodged orally, in writing, or electronically.
- Following FIR registration, the police conduct an investigation, which includes collection of evidence, examination of witnesses, and arrests where necessary. An arrested person must be produced before a Magistrate within 24 hours. Upon completion of the investigation, a chargesheet is filed before the Magistrate. The Magistrate then takes cognizance of the offence, determining whether a prima facie case exists to proceed with trial.

#### Trial Stage

Criminal trials are conducted according to the nature and gravity of the offence.

- I. Sessions Trials** are held for serious offences triable exclusively by Sessions Courts. After committal by a Magistrate, the Public Prosecutor opens the case. The court may discharge the accused if no sufficient ground exists; otherwise, charges are framed. The prosecution and defence present evidence, followed by arguments, and the court delivers judgment within the prescribed period.
- II. Warrant Trials** relate to offences punishable with death, life imprisonment, or imprisonment exceeding two years and are tried by Magistrates. After supply of

documents, the accused may seek discharge. If charges are framed, evidence is led by both parties, followed by judgment.

- III. Summons Trials** involve offences punishable with imprisonment up to two years. Formal charges are not required; the substance of the accusation is stated to the accused, followed by evidence and judgment.
- IV. Summary Trials** are conducted for minor offences and follow the procedure of summons trials. In such cases, the Magistrate may impose a sentence not exceeding three months' imprisonment.

**Post- trial stage:**

After the pronouncement of judgment by the trial court, an aggrieved party may prefer an appeal before the appropriate appellate court, subject to the provisions of law. In India, appeals generally lie from the Magistrate's Court to the Sessions Court, from the Sessions Court to the High Court, and ultimately to the Supreme Court. An appeal involves a re-examination of the findings of fact and law recorded by the trial court. In addition to appeals, higher courts may exercise **revisional jurisdiction** to examine the legality, correctness, or propriety of any order passed by a subordinate court. The Supreme Court may also be approached through special leave, thereby ensuring judicial scrutiny at multiple levels.

**B. USA:**

The criminal justice system of the United States operates within a federal framework, under which both the federal government and individual states possess independent authority to prosecute criminal offences. While each state maintains its own procedural rules for criminal trials, federal criminal proceedings are governed uniformly by the **Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure**. Criminal prosecutions at the state level are initiated by state prosecutors or district attorneys, whereas federal prosecutions are conducted by **United States Attorneys** on behalf of the federal government. In both systems, the burden of proof rests entirely on the prosecution, which must establish the guilt of the accused **beyond reasonable doubt**, and the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

## Federal Criminal Trial Process

### Initial Stage:

- Federal criminal proceedings arise from offences that violate statutes enacted by Congress and typically involve matters of national concern, such as interstate commerce, federal taxation, banking regulations, immigration, national security, or crimes committed on federal property.
- Investigations into federal offences are carried out by specialised federal agencies, including the **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)**, **Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)**, and **United States Secret Service**, among others. Upon completion of the investigation, evidence is submitted to the **U.S. Attorney's Office**, which exercises prosecutorial discretion in deciding whether to initiate criminal proceedings.
- If prosecution is approved, a **criminal complaint** supported by an affidavit establishing probable cause is filed, and the accused is produced before a federal magistrate judge without unnecessary delay. At this stage, pretrial services officers prepare a report assessing the accused's background, financial condition, and risk factors to assist the court in making decisions regarding release or detention. Where the accused lacks financial means, legal representation is provided through court-appointed counsel under the **Criminal Justice Act**.

### Pre-Trial Proceedings:

- The accused is formally informed of the charges during the **initial appearance**, along with fundamental constitutional rights, including the right to remain silent and the right to legal representation. The court then considers whether the accused should be released pending trial or detained under the **Bail Reform Act, 1984**, based on factors such as risk of flight or danger to the community.
- In felony cases, a **preliminary examination** may be conducted to determine whether sufficient probable cause exists to proceed further, unless the prosecution secures an indictment from a **grand jury**. The grand jury, comprising citizens, examines the prosecution's evidence and issues an indictment if it finds adequate grounds to charge the accused. Following indictment, the accused is arraigned, during which the charges are formally read and a plea is entered.

- Pre-trial procedures also include **discovery**, requiring disclosure of evidence by the prosecution, and **plea bargaining**, whereby the accused may plead guilty in exchange for reduced charges or sentencing recommendations, subject to judicial approval. Additionally, both parties may file **pre-trial motions** seeking rulings on evidentiary or procedural issues prior to trial.

### **Trial Stage**

Federal criminal trials are typically conducted before a **jury**, selected through a structured process to ensure impartiality. The trial commences with opening statements, followed by presentation of evidence by the prosecution and cross-examination by the defence. The defence may then present its evidence, after which closing arguments are made. The jury deliberates privately and delivers a verdict in open court.

### **Post-Trial Stage**

Upon conviction, the accused may file post-trial motions, including motions for acquittal or a new trial, challenging legal or procedural irregularities. Sentencing is imposed by the judge after considering statutory guidelines, the seriousness of the offence, prior criminal records, and mitigating or aggravating factors. Following sentencing, the convicted person has the right to file an appeal before the appropriate United States Court of Appeals, and in exceptional cases, seek review by the United States Supreme Court on substantial questions of law.

## **C. AUSTRALIA:**

Australia follows an adversarial system of criminal justice. Under this system, the prosecution and the defence present their cases before the court, usually presided over by a Magistrate or Judge, depending on the nature of the offence. The burden of proof lies entirely on the prosecution, which must establish the guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt. Australia functions under a federal structure, under which both the Commonwealth and the States have the power to prosecute criminal offences. As a result, each State and Territory has its own criminal procedure laws. However, despite minor procedural variations, the overall structure and stages of the criminal trial process remain largely similar across all jurisdictions.

**Pre-trial stage:**

- 1. Investigation:** *The criminal process begins with an investigation conducted by the police after the commission of an offence. During this stage, evidence is collected, and statements of witnesses are recorded. Upon completion of the investigation, a brief of evidence is prepared and forwarded to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) for consideration.*
- 2. Decision to Prosecute:** *The CDPP examines the brief of evidence to decide whether prosecution should be initiated. This decision is based on whether there are reasonable prospects of securing a conviction and whether prosecution is in the public interest. Where charges are laid prior to CDPP review, the CDPP determines whether the proceedings should continue or be discontinued.*
- 3. Commencement of Proceedings:** *If prosecution is approved, formal documents such as a summons or court attendance notice are issued, requiring the accused to appear before the Magistrates' or Local Court. The accused may enter a plea of guilty or not guilty or seek an adjournment to obtain legal advice. A guilty plea may result in immediate sentencing, while a not guilty plea leads to further trial procedures.*
- 4. Hearing of Summary Offences:** *Summary offences are tried before a Magistrate without a jury. During the hearing, the prosecution and defence present evidence, including witness testimony. After considering the evidence, the Magistrate delivers the verdict and, where applicable, imposes sentence.*
- 5. Committal Proceedings (Indictable Offences):** *In the case of indictable offences, committal proceedings may be conducted before a Magistrates' Court. The purpose of this stage is to determine whether sufficient evidence exists to justify a trial before a superior court. If satisfied, the Magistrate commits the accused for trial.*
- 6. Trial Before Superior Courts:** *Trials for indictable offences are conducted before the District Court, County Court, or Supreme Court, depending on the seriousness of the offence. The prosecution files an indictment setting out the charges. Trials are generally conducted before a jury, particularly in Commonwealth offences. Both parties present evidence and examine witnesses, after which the jury returns a verdict.*

7. **Sentencing:** *Where the accused is found guilty, the judge imposes an appropriate sentence. Sentencing options may include imprisonment, fines, conditional release orders, community service, or other statutory orders.*
8. **Appeals:** *A person convicted of an offence may appeal against conviction or sentence before the Court of Appeal. The prosecution may appeal against the sentence but is barred from appealing an acquittal.*

#### **D. JAPAN:**

Japan's criminal justice system is characterised by a **hybrid procedural model**, combining features of both the inquisitorial and adversarial traditions. Judges assume an active role in the examination of facts and assessment of evidence, particularly during the investigation and evidentiary stages, while adversarial principles operate through structured submissions by the prosecution and the defence during trial. Criminal proceedings are governed by the **Code of Criminal Procedure, 1948**, which regulates investigation, prosecution, trial, and adjudication. The responsibility of establishing the guilt of the accused rests with the prosecution, which must prove the charges **beyond reasonable doubt**, and the accused is presumed as innocent until proven guilty in accordance with law.

#### **Procedure in the Criminal Trial Process**

##### **Pre-Trial Stage**

1. **Investigation:** Criminal proceedings in Japan ordinarily begin with an investigation conducted by authorities. While both police officers and public prosecutors possess investigative powers, police officers handle the majority of criminal investigations in practice. Upon completion of the investigation, the police submit all collected materials, including statements and evidence, to the public prosecutor. The prosecutor carefully reviews the records to determine whether prosecution should be initiated.
2. **Arrest:** Where a suspect is taken into custody, the police must refer the suspect to a public prosecutor within **forty-eight hours**. The prosecutor may order release or seek a judicial order for pre-indictment detention within **twenty-four hours** of receiving custody. At every stage, the suspect must be informed of their rights, including the right to remain silent, the right to legal representation, and the right to consult defence counsel. Bail may be granted by the court after

hearing both parties. Where the suspect or accused lacks the means to appoint counsel, the court may appoint defence counsel to ensure access to legal assistance.

- 3. Institution of Prosecution:** Public prosecutors in Japan exercise **wide prosecutorial discretion** in deciding whether to institute criminal proceedings. This decision is taken after evaluating factors such as the seriousness of the offence, circumstances of commission, age and background of the suspect, prior criminal record. To safeguard against misuse of this discretion, two oversight mechanisms exist. The **Committee for the Inquest of Prosecution**, composed of citizens, reviews decisions not to prosecute and may recommend reconsideration. Additionally, the **quasi-prosecution procedure** allows court-appointed attorneys to initiate prosecution where non-prosecution is found to be unjustified. The Japanese system does not permit private prosecutions or police-led prosecutions, and courts generally cannot take cognisance of offences without formal initiation by a public prosecutor, subject to limited statutory exceptions.
- 4. Pre-Trial Conference Procedure:** In cases falling under the **saiban-in system**, a pre-trial conference is conducted prior to trial. During this stage, the court, prosecution, and defence clarify disputed issues, prepare arguments, and identify evidence to be examined. This process facilitates efficient trial management, ensures timely disclosure of evidence, and assists lay judges in understanding the case by narrowing the scope of contested matters.
- 5. Appointment of Saiban-in (Lay Judges):** Saiban-in are selected through a lottery system from among Japanese citizens aged **eighteen years or older** who possess the right to vote in elections to the House of Representatives. Random selection ensures impartiality and promotes public participation in the administration of criminal justice.

**Trial Stage:** The saiban-in system applies to serious crimes punishable by death or life imprisonment, and intentional crimes resulting in death. Cases outside this system follow a similar trial process but with some differences. Non-saiban-in trials are heard by a single judge or a panel of professional judges, and pre-trial conferences aren't required. During trial, both prosecutor and defense request evidence examination in open court. The court decides on evidence admissibility after hearing both sides and checking relevance and reliability.

**Trial proceedings may be divided into four stages:**

- 1. Opening Proceedings:** The court confirms the identity of the accused. The public prosecutor reads out the charges and informs the accused of their rights. The defence and accused may make preliminary statements, if they so choose.
- 2. Examination of Evidence:** The trial begins with opening statements from both the prosecution and the defence, outlining their cases. Each side then presents evidence and calls witnesses, who are examined and cross-examined. In saiban-in trials, they can also refer to points already clarified during the pre-trial conference.
- 3. Questioning of the Accused:** Following the examination of evidence, the accused may be questioned by the prosecutor, defence counsel, and finally by the court. The accused is not examined as a witness, is not placed under oath, and retains the right to silence.
- 4. Closing Arguments:** After completion of evidence, the prosecution and defence present closing submissions addressing factual and legal issues, as well as sentencing considerations. In appropriate cases, victims or their representatives may also present their opinion before the court.
- 5. Deliberation and judgement:** Upon conclusion of arguments, professional judges and saiban-in deliberate collectively to determine guilt or innocence based on the evidence. The court then pronounces judgment, resulting in acquittal or conviction, and imposes sentence where applicable.

**Post-Trial Stage:**

**Appeal:** A party dissatisfied with the trial court's decision may file an appeal before the **High Court** as the first appellate forum, followed by a further appeal to the **Supreme Court**, which serves as the court of last resort. Appellate courts review questions of law, procedural regularity, and correctness of the judgment. Even after exhaustion of ordinary appeals, **extraordinary remedies**, including a new trial or extraordinary appeal, may be invoked in exceptional cases to prevent miscarriage of justice.

**COMPARATIVE TABLE: COURT STRUCTURE AND CRIMINAL TRIAL PROCESS:**

element	INDIA	USA	AUSTRALIA	japan
nature of system	Adversarial system	Adversarial system	Adversarial system	Inquistorial and adversarial system
court structure	Single unified court system	Dual court system (federal and state courts)	Dual court system (state and common wealth courts)	Unified national court sytem
GOVERNING LAWS in CRIMINAL TRIAL	Bharthiya nagarik suraksha sanhita 2023, bharthiya nyaya sanhita 2023, bharthiya sakshya adhiniyam 2023	Federal rules of criminal procedure and state laws	State criminal procedure Acts and commonwealth laws	Code of criminal procedure, 1948
BURDEN OF PROOF	Burden of proof lies on prosecution	Burden of proof lies on prosecution	Burden of proof lies on prosecution	burden of proof lies on prosecution
standard of proof	Beyond reasonable doubt	Beyond reasonable doubt	Beyond reasonable doubt	Beyond reasonable doubt
role of prosecutor	Represent the state in criminal prosecution	Represents the State, and U.S. Attorneys represent the federal government in	Represent the state and common wealth in criminal prosection and they have discretion to	Represents the State; has broad discretion in instituting prosecution, subject to statutory review mechanisms.

		criminal prosecutions; they have discretion to decide whether to initiate prosecution.	decide whether to initiate prosecution	
role of jury	No jury system	Jury in serious offences	Jury trial for indictable offences; no jury in summary trials.	Saiban-in (lay judges) sit with professional judges in serious criminal cases.
investigation authority	police	Specialised federal agencies for federal offences	police	Police and public prosecutors
types of trial	Sessions trial, warrant trial, summons trial, summary trial	Jury trial and bench trial	Summary trial and jury trial	Saiban-in or judge only trial
trial court	Magistrate and sessions court	District court	Magistrate court for summary offences , district or county court and supreme court for indictable offences	District courts for serious offences and summary courts for less serious offences
pre-trial stage	FIR, investigation, final report or	Investigation, complaint, grand jury indictment,	Investigation, brief of evidence, prosecutor reviews	Investigation,prosecutorial review, pre-trial conference

	chargesheet, cognizance	bail, motions, plea bargaining	and decides to prosecute, committal proceedings	
public participation	Criminal cases are decided by professional judges	Citizen act as jurors	Jury determines guilt, judge decides law and sentencing	Citizens sit with professional judges and jointly decide facts, guilt, and sentence

### **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COURT STRUCTURE AND CRIMINAL TRIAL PROCESS:**

The criminal justice systems of India, the United States, Australia, and Japan reflect distinct constitutional frameworks and legal traditions, which directly influence their court structures and criminal trial processes. India follows a unified judicial system with a hierarchical structure comprising subordinate courts, High Courts, and the Supreme Court, ensuring an integrated system for both Union and State matters. In contrast, the United States and Australia operate under a dual court system, in which federal and state courts function independently within their respective jurisdictions. Japan also follows a unified national court system, where all courts derive authority from the Constitution and function under a centrally organised judicial hierarchy.

With respect to criminal trial processes, India, the United States, and Australia primarily follow the adversarial system, under which the prosecution and the defence present their cases before an impartial court, and the burden of proof lies on the prosecution. Japan follows a mixed system, combining inquisitorial features—such as an active role of judges during investigation and examination of evidence—with adversarial elements during trial proceedings. In all four jurisdictions, criminal liability must be established beyond reasonable doubt, although the procedural roles of judges and prosecutors vary considerably.

Citizen participation in criminal adjudication further distinguishes these systems. The United States places significant reliance on the jury system, where jurors determine guilt in serious criminal cases. Australia also provides for jury trials in indictable offences, while summary

offences are decided by magistrates. Japan follows the saiban-in system, under which lay judges sit alongside professional judges in serious criminal cases and participate in both fact-finding and sentencing. India, by contrast, does not involve citizens in criminal adjudication, as criminal cases are decided exclusively by professional judges.

Prosecutorial discretion also differs across jurisdictions. In the United States and Japan, prosecutors are vested with wide discretionary powers to decide whether to initiate criminal proceedings. In the United States, this discretion is exercised by District Attorneys at the state level and by U.S. Attorneys at the federal level. In Japan, while both police and prosecutors may conduct investigations, the decision to prosecute rests solely with the public prosecutor. Australia adopts a more structured approach through the Director of Public Prosecutions, who applies established criteria such as reasonable prospects of conviction and public interest. In India, prosecution is conducted on behalf of the State, but prosecutorial discretion is comparatively narrower and closely connected to police investigation.

The pre-trial and trial stages of criminal proceedings in the four jurisdictions demonstrate both shared principles and procedural diversity. In India, the pre-trial stage begins with the registration of an FIR and police investigation, followed by the filing of a charge sheet before the Magistrate. The Magistrate takes cognizance of the offence and decides whether the case should proceed to trial, be discharged, or be committed to the Sessions Court in serious cases. In warrant and sessions trials, formal framing of charges reflects judicial scrutiny at the threshold stage.

In the United States, pre-trial procedures are more elaborate and rights-oriented. Investigations are conducted by specialised agencies, followed by the filing of a complaint and an initial appearance before a magistrate. Issues relating to bail and detention are addressed at an early stage. In felony cases, a grand jury indictment or preliminary hearing serves as an important safeguard before trial. Plea bargaining is a central feature of the pre-trial process and often results in resolution of cases without a full trial.

In Australia, the pre-trial process involves police investigation and preparation of a brief of evidence, which is examined by the Director of Public Prosecutions to determine whether prosecution should proceed. For indictable offences, committal proceedings before a Magistrate act as a screening mechanism to assess whether sufficient evidence exists for trial

in a superior court, thereby streamlining the trial process.

Japan adopts a distinct pre-trial approach characterised by strong prosecutorial control. Police and prosecutors conduct investigations, and prosecution is initiated only upon the decision of the public prosecutor. In cases governed by the saiban-in system, a pre-trial conference is conducted to clarify issues, organise evidence, and ensure efficient trial management. Unlike common law jurisdictions, Japan does not follow jury indictment or preliminary hearings, relying instead on prosecutorial discretion and judicial oversight.

During the trial stage, India, the United States, and Australia largely follow the adversarial system, involving examination and cross-examination of witnesses and arguments by both parties. In the United States and Australia, jury trials play a crucial role in serious offences, whereas in India, fact-finding is undertaken solely by judges. Japan's trial process reflects its mixed system, with judges actively participating during the investigation and in saiban-in cases, lay judges deliberate jointly with professional judges on both guilt and sentencing.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The comparative study of the court structure and criminal trial process in India, the United States, Australia, and Japan demonstrates how constitutional frameworks and legal systems shape criminal justice administration. India and Japan follow a unified judicial system, while the United States and Australia operate under a federal system with separate court hierarchies, which influences jurisdiction and procedural oversight. All four countries recognise fundamental principles such as judicial independence, fair trial guarantees, and the requirement that the prosecution must prove the guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt. However, the procedure for conducting criminal trials varies from country to country at each stage of the process. The United States and Australia follow structured mechanisms such as grand jury proceedings and committal hearings. Japan primarily relies on prosecutorial discretion and pre-trial conference procedures. India adopts judicial scrutiny through the process of taking cognizance of offences by the court. Citizen participation in criminal justice administration also varies across these jurisdictions. Jury trials in the United States and Australia and the saiban-in system in Japan reflect different approaches to public involvement in criminal adjudication, whereas in India, criminal cases are decided exclusively by professional judges. Overall, this study highlights that although institutional structures and procedural practices differ, each system aims to balance efficiency, fairness, and accountability in criminal justice

administration. The comparative analysis of these four countries enhances understanding of alternative approaches to criminal justice without supporting a single uniform framework.

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