Zig Zag Education

Politics AS and A Level | Edexcel | 8PL0/9PL0

2017 specification
first exams in 2019 (2018 for AS)

Course Companion for A Level Edexcel

Component 2: UK Government

Prime Minister and the Executive

2026 Edition

zigzageducation.co.uk

POD 13009

Publish your own work... Write to a brief...
Register at **publishmenow.co.uk**

Photocopiable/digital resources may only be copied by the purchasing institution on a single site and for their own use

Contents

Product Support from ZigZag Education ..... **ii**
Terms and Conditions of Use ..... **iii**
Teacher's Introduction **1**
3.1 The Structure, Roles and Powers of the Executive **2**
What is the Executive? 3
The Structure of the Executive 4
The Main Roles of the Executive 5
Powers of the Executive 6
Exclusive Roles and Powers of the Prime Minister 8
Exclusive Roles and Powers of the Cabinet 10
3.2 The Concept of Ministerial Responsibility **12**
Collective Responsibility 13
Individual Responsibility 14
3.3.1 The Power of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet **21**
Two Types of Government 22
Appointing Ministers to the Cabinet 27
Has Presidentialisation Occurred? 29
3.3.2 The Powers of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to Dictate Events and Determine Policy **31**
What Do We Mean by Dictating Events and Determining Policy? 31
The Power of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to Dictate Events and Determine Policy: Before 1997 33
The Power of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to Dictate Events and Determine Policy: After 1997 35

Acknowledgements
The Assessment Objectives reproduced throughout this resource are licenced under the Open Government Licence (version 1.0). You are encouraged to use and re-use the Information that is available under this licence, the Open Government Licence, freely and flexibly, with only a few conditions. For the full licence, see **http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/**

The following images are licensed under **Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 License**. These are reused and distributed under the terms and conditions found at: **http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/**

- Sajid Javid by Policy exchange
- Cameron and May by ukhomeoffice
- Cameron by United Kingdom Home Office
- Priti Patel by DFID
- May in 2010 by ukhomeoffice
- Nigel Lawson by Financial Times

The following images are licensed under **Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License**. These are reused and distributed under the terms and conditions found at: **http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/**

- Michael Gove by Chris McAndrew
- Iain Duncan Smith by Chris McAndrew
- Jeremy Hunt by Tenger
- Tulip Siddiq by Chris McAndrew

The following images are licensed under **Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 3.0 License**. These are reused and distributed under the terms and conditions found at: **http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/**

- Government logo by Sodacan
- Thatcher by Chris Collins

The following images are licensed under **Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike 4.0 International License**. These are reused and distributed under the terms and conditions found at: **http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en**

- EU withdrawal by Furfur
- Police by Katie Chan
- New Labour by Peerybingle
- Poll tax riots by James Bourne
- Trump on TV by Michael Vadon

The following images are licensed under **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License**. These are reused and distributed under the terms and conditions found at: **http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/**

- May by Kremlin.ru

The following images are licenced under the Open Government Licence (version 1.0). You are encouraged to use and re-use the Information that is available under this licence, the Open Government Licence, freely and flexibly, with only a few conditions. For the full licence, see **http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/**

10 Downing Street by Sergeant Tom Robinson RLC

- The Cabinet table by HM Government
- Civil Service Employment by Office for National Statistics
- Gordon Brown by HM Government

The following images are licenced under the Open Government Licence (version 3.0). You are encouraged to use and re-use the Information that is available under this licence, the Open Government Licence, freely and flexibly, with only a few conditions. For the full licence, see **http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/**

- Theresa May by Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office
- David Cameron announces his resignation by Tom Evans
- The Chancellor delivers the Autumn Budget 2024 by Kirsty O'Connor / Treasury
- Keir Starmer gives his Inheritance speech in the garden of 10 Downing Street, August 2024 by Simon Dawson, No 10 Downing Street

Cover illustration by Judit Molnar (© ZigZag Education 2025).

Teacher's Introduction

This course companion is designed to provide students with a comprehensive educational resource on the UK Government for AS and A Level Edexcel.

Remember!
Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

It contains all of the relevant and significant information for the UK Prime Minister and the Executive module. The question 'Is the prime minister too powerful?' has been an important exam topic for many years, and there is no reason to think that the exams for the new specification will be much different.

This companion covers all of the key areas: the structure, roles and powers of the executive; the concept of ministerial responsibility; the powers of the prime minister and the cabinet; and the relative powers of the prime minister and the cabinet. Along with this, talking points and exam tips will be provided throughout.

This pack has been designed to be either worked through in order, or dipped in and out of to support your own lesson structures. Please use it in whichever way you prefer. The talking points, exam tips and activities provided are designed to engage students while provoking the critical thought and analysis that will be required in the exam.

Each chapter contains:

- a brief overview and learning objectives for the chapter
- a list of key terms
- students' notes, and analysis of the key events
- 'Talking Point' questions designed to encourage discussion in class and develop key analysis skills

Second edition, April 2020
The second edition of this course companion has been updated to reflect recent developments, contemporary debates and new political contexts that have emerged since its initial publication. In relation to the Prime Minister and the Executive, this includes (but is not limited to) political developments since the 2017 general election, discussion relating to the outcome of the 2019 general election, and changes in the positions of prominent political figures.

Third edition, October 2022
The third edition of this course companion has been further updated to reflect developments such as the political context since the 2019 general election, the changing composition of cabinet, the increasing role of secondary legislation and the premiership of Boris Johnson.

Fourth edition, January 2026
A swathe of new examples and updates from the Truss, Sunak and Starmer governments, including resignations, new talking points, and a new case study of Keir Starmer's ability to control events and dictate policy.

 © ZigZag Education, 2022–26

3.1 The Structure, Roles and Powers of

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Understand the structure of the three main sub-branches of the executiv
- ✓ Understand the main roles of the executive including with regard to le
- ✓ Understand the concept of prerogative powers.
- ✓ Be able to explain the different roles of the prime minister and the cab

Key terms

Prime minister	The head of the government and the chair of the cabinet
Cabinet	The main decision-making body in government. It is c prime minister – and other senior ministers who are c
Executive	A branch of government that is responsible for implem policy. In UK politics, the executive inherently overlaps government, the legislature, as the executive is made u
Minister	A member of government, in either the House of Comm who has been given a specific policy area to focus on.
Government department	A unit of government, usually run by a minister, that polic
Secondary legislation	A law which passes through Parliament without going process that primary legislation does. It is enacted or c
Royal prerogative	A range of powers that are available to ministers, han monarch. Parliamentary approval is not required.
Patronage	The power available to an individual to appoint some
Primus inter pares	A Latin phrase meaning 'first among equals' represen position within the cabinet. Different prime ministers emphasis on the 'first' or 'equal' aspects within their g
Separation of powers	A system of government where legislative, executi kept apart and do not work together, i.e. neither has a
Fusion of powers	A system of government in which the executive, legisl intertwined or fused together and are able to directly
Peer	A member of the House of Lords.

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

What is the Executive?

The executive in the UK is less clearly identified than in political systems t
have a separation of powers. The USA, for instance, has an executive that
elected directly and separately from the legislature. It does not cross over
with any other branch of government. Presidential elections are strictly fo
the executive and elect the leader of the executive br[illegible] – the president.
Congressional elections take place between p[illegible]esi[illegible]tial elections and
exclusively elect the legislative bra[illegible]ngress. This is not the case in t
UK. Members of the UK ex[illegible]ive [illegible]e part of the legislature as many of
them are MPs who ha[illegible]e elected to the House of Commons. But the
important [illegible]to [illegible]member is that the executive differs from the
legislature [illegible]se its function is to make and implement policy.

The executive in the UK is not only made up of MPs and peers, but the hea
of the executive branch lies in the legislature. The main institutions are:

- the **prime minister** – the head of the executive and the chair of the cabinet
- the **cabinet** – the chief decision-making body in the executive, made u
- **ministers** – members of the government who have been selected by th one specific policy area

The main unit of the executive is **government departments**, usually run b
implementing policy in one area. For example, there is in government the
Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education. A
by ministers. A note should be made here to ackn[illegible]d[illegible]e **junior ministe**
government ministers who do not sit in th[illegible]c[illegible]bin[illegible]. Non-ministerial depa
the Food Standards Agency, the N[illegible]tion[illegible]rime Agency and the Water Se
These are made up of the [illegible]-day administrative workers of the execut
departments [illegible]e r[illegible]a[illegible] **special advisers** and **civil servants**. The experti
for the dai[illegible]tioning of departments.

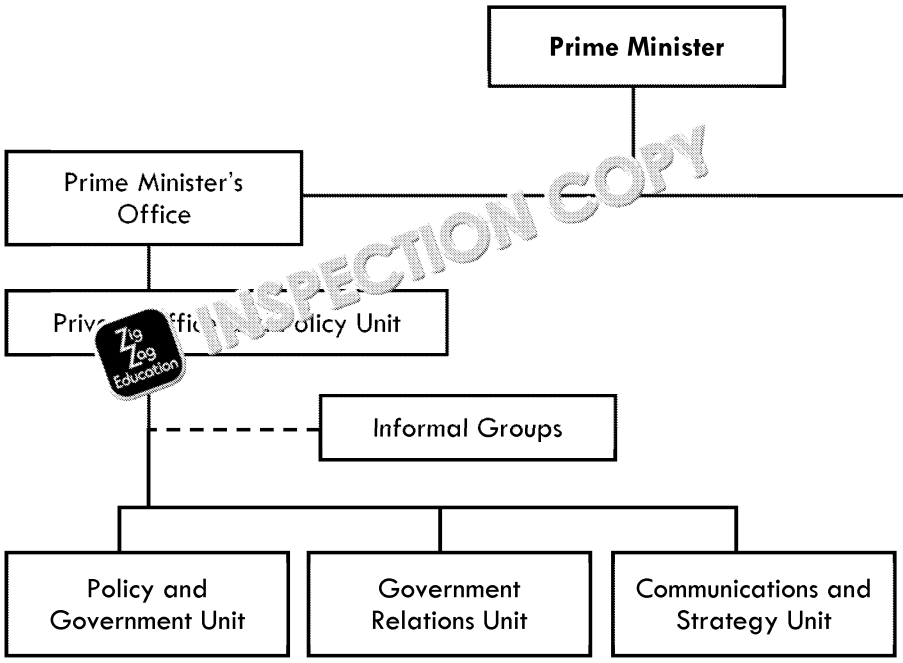
The Core Executive

The Prime Minister's Office is located inside 10 Downing Street (above).

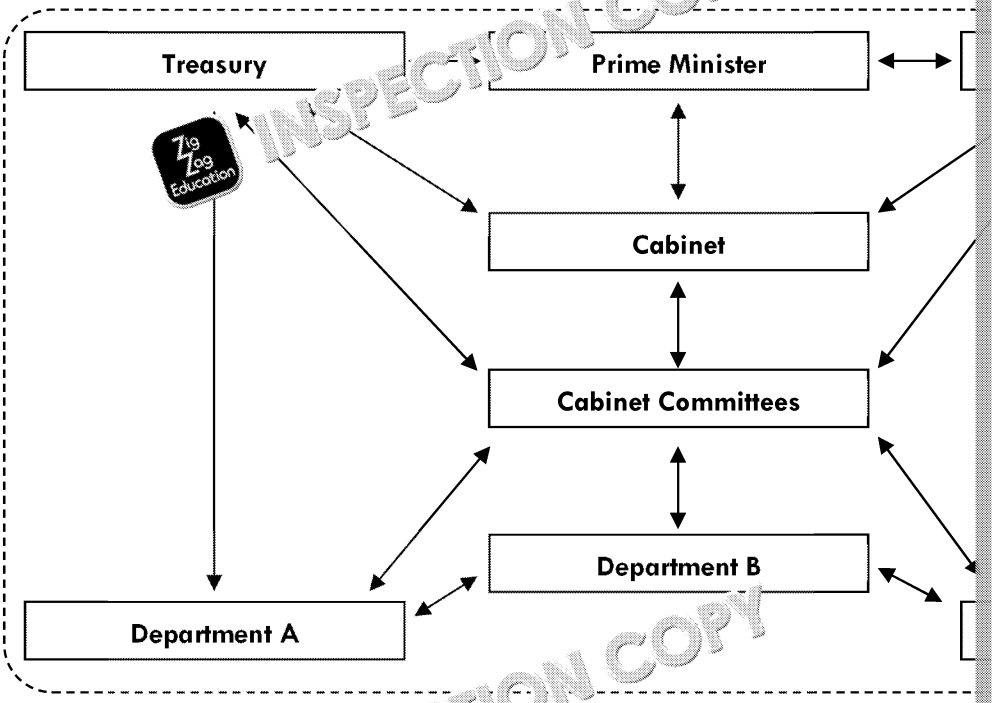
One theory about where power
that of the **core executive**. Put s
consists of all the main parts of
the prime minister, the cabinet,
Office, the Prime Minister's Off
that coordinate the work of oth
Decisions are made at different
core. Demands and suggestions
the public [illegible]essure groups, me
Eu[illegible]e [illegible]nd various elements
p[illegible]ies. Of course, much will
the time and in a smaller way o
personality of the PM a[illegible]d [illegible]sters. Margaret Thatcher was very much i
herself and [illegible]ng [illegible]through, while John Major was much more likely to
made elsew[illegible]n the core. Both were constrained by the fact that prime mir
others, and even Margaret Thatcher was forced to admit to the Scott Inquiry
changes in the law that she did not know about. The probable truth is that to
person to make all the decisions, and it is not the prime minister who wields
all times, however strong they appear to the public.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

The Structure of the Executive



The core executive is at the heart of the government, with the prime minis
departments interacting with all administrative areas of the executive. The
institutions that exclusively work for them, such as the Prime Minister's C
Though these may work with other institutions, with the diagram above i
as to how this begins to happen, they are seen as ... as ng prime ministe



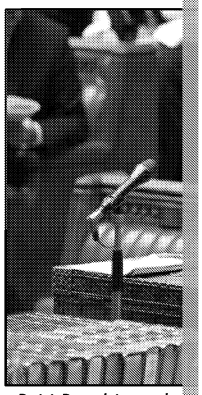
Above is a diagram sho... ...tructure of the executive and how differ
interact wit... ...volved in this are the Prime Minister's Office, t
and day-t... ...orkers in departments. Also, as the diagram suggests, di
departmen... ...ork with each other, along with cabinet committees, the Tr
The lines may seem a bit confusing, but don't worry; they signify which ir
and what is important is that all government institutions work with each
to function effectively. It is useful to remember the ways that these groups
make sure that the government keeps working.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

The Main Roles of the Executive

It can be confusing to work out what the chief functions of the executive a
discussed, they are inherently linked to the legislature. We will discuss th
more detail and outline how these are different roles from those of the leg

Proposing Legislation



Priti Patel introdu
b

The executive is charged with the task of putting forward bills to the Houses of Parliament. Though Parliament is the chief legislator, its role is mainly to discuss bills and scrutinise [illegible] to help them pass the legislative process. The actual [illegible] of suggesting areas where the law should be changed – initiating legislation – is down to the government. It is usually ministers who will introduce a bill to Parliament, and this will normally involve some of the promises made in the government's manifesto. Hundreds of bills may be progressing through Parliament at any one time.

Proposing the Budget

Rachel Reeves delivering the budget in October 2024.

The executive is also charge
plans of the government. Ev
Exchequer will set out new l
front of Parliament where th
state. At times when there h
be more than one budget in
in 2017 there was a budget i

Though the legislature may
financial policy of the gover
own economic plan and ver
legislation. Ministers, however, negotiate with the chancellor prior to the bu
negotiations occur with departments as well as the whole of cabinet. The O
by Rachel Reeves, highlights the various areas that the government must fo
budget. For example, changes were made to transport, housing, business ta
personal taxes, including tax changes to inheritance of farmland. It is clear f
budget is an important function of the executive.

Making Decisions on Policy

Ultimately, the executive is a decision-making body. The prime minister and the cabinet can be said to be the key bodies in performing this function – the administrative, day-to-day members of the executive are responsible for implementation. The cabinet, [illegible] by the prime minister, meets regularly in a room specifically designed to hold meetings, where day-to-day policy is discussed and future plans are brought forward by specialist ministers. These plans must be within legislation and budget plans.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

Powers of the Executive

You may already be familiar with the term '**elective dictatorship**'. This descr
politics where the executive has a number of institutional and structural adva
dominant over the legislature. This is particularly important in relation to pol
important policy-making powers that the executive enjoys that make it domi

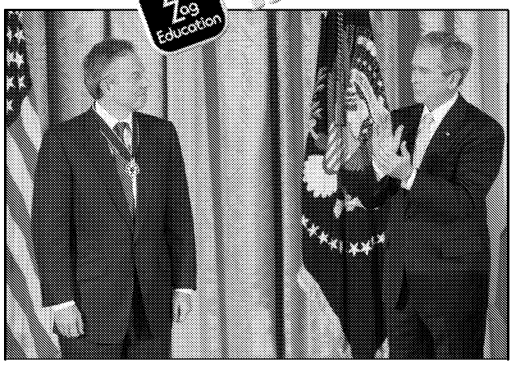
Prerogative Powers

Prerogative powers are powers ha[illegible]inisters, including but not restricted to the prime mini[illegible]by the monarch. The royal prerogative wa traditionally a gro[illegible]clusive powers held by the monarchy and exerc according[illegible]ver, a gradual shift of power from the monarchy to Parliament[illegible]een most of these powers move to the executive. Though royal family still possesses some prerogative powers, the limits on these a relatively firm. This is because they would be threatening democracy to challenge the government, which has a mandate, on any issue. For examp the prerogative power to give royal assent to legislation has not been deni since 1707, as it would present major constitutional difficulty and contro

A number of prerogative powers, though, are now firmly in the hands of t executive. More specifically, it is ministers who exclusively have these powers. Some examples of these powers include:

- making treaties
- the deployment and organisation of armed forces
- international relations and diplomacy
- granting pardons
- organising the civil service

The prime minister has a gro[illegible]of p[illegible]nage powers, including the recommendation to di[illegible]e Parliament



Tony Blair (left) and George Bush (right) have been investigated for their reasons for deploying forces in Iraq.

You should not assume that prer fixed and set in stone since they v family to the executive. There ha have attempted to limit the powe ability to wield these powers unc view them as undemocratic and been the power to deploy armed of the prime minister was brough the controversy surrounding Ton in Iraq in 2003. Gordon Brown su convention that Parliament shou deployed to new areas. The Syria of how t[illegible]er has shifted. Da Parliament, including by a rebellion withi[illegible]h[illegible]party, and did not ser there has been another vote on Sy[illegible]. There has not been a situation where deploying armed forces h[illegible]ised by the executive since the conventi

There hav[illegible]a[illegible]pts to limit other ministerial prerogative powers in Fixed-term[illegible]ments Act 2011 sought to prevent the government from parliamentary approval from over two-thirds of MPs. This was introduce potential for the executive to abuse its power by calling elections tactically elections were still called in 2017 and 2019, leading to the bill being repeal prerogative power being restored.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Control over Legislation

The executive holds a range of institutional advantages over the legislatur
legislative process. In general, the government can be said to have control
While it is Parliament's job to scrutinise and amend legislation, almost all
executive – usually by the relevant government minister. Government bill
are very rarely defeated. This gives the governme[illegible]derable power a

Parliamentarians assemble in the House of Lords for what would have been Elizabeth II's final Queen's Speech in May 2022 (Charles stood in for her), in which the legislative agenda of Boris Johnson's ill-fated government for the following year was set out.

The executive also
are introduced, a
debating bills. Co
schedule enables
the legislative pro
to minimise scrut
proposals.

The government's
set out in the King
Queen's Speech, w
during the State O
Although the King
content will reflec

Secondary Legislation

Secondary legislation consists of chang[illegible]law which can be made b
approval of Parliament, thus b[illegible]the legislative process through w
progress. **Statutory In[illegible]** are the most common form of secondary
derives th[illegible]or[illegible]pass Statutory Instruments from previous Acts of
permitted [illegible]o do so.

A good example of how Statutory Instruments are often used is the Misus
an example of primary legislation – permits the executive to determine wh
restricted. As such, when new dangerous substances emerge, the governm
to ban them by issuing Statutory Instruments, and does not need to consu

The widespread use of secondary legislation during the coronavirus pandemic became particularly controversial. Due to the nature of the emergency, many unprecedented restrictions on the public's behaviour – such as the banning of social gatherings – were made using Statutory Instruments, and without parliamentary scrutiny. Some MPs argued that passing such drastic laws called for democratic oversight, and the extent of the changes being made unilaterally by the executive set a dangerous precedent. The Speaker of the House of Commons Lindsay Hoyle even criticised the development, telling the House that: 'The way in which the government has exercised its powers to make secondary legislation during this crisis has been totally unsatisfactory.'

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

Exclusive Roles and Powers of the Prime Minister

There are many ways in which the prime minister and the cabinet have si
as is expected because they work together and the prime minister is part c
are many roles that the prime minister has that the cabinet does not, and t
prime minister are, therefore, different because they help to carry out this

Political Leadership

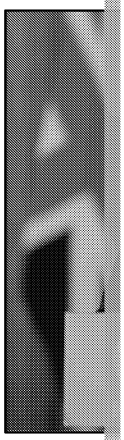
Theresa May was defeated in December 2017 over an amendment she opposed that gives Parliament a second vote before a final deal over Brexit. Eleven Conservative MPs rebelled and influenced the result.

The prime minister must organise t
government. This involves strategi
including over high-priority or eme
responsibility of the prime ministe
government will take when approa

A major factor in carrying out this
party is aligned on most issues. Thi
that makes up a majority governme
recent elections have shown that th
is important, though, is that the pri
leader of the largest party in Parlia
have become increasingly importar
so it is up to the prime minister to e
and this will help to lead politically

National Leadership

The prime minister is the le ing n ional figure in the UK. This means th
main person that we look to whenever the country must be united. This is
times of cr he must, therefore, be a good communicator
with both t st of the government and the public because
they will be relied on to maintain order and calm through their
media communication in times of emergency or crisis.



*Boris Joh
example o*

A clear example of a prime minister performing this role would be the televised announcements conducted by Boris Johnson during the coronavirus pandemic, in which he discussed the restrictions being introduced to society, and the government's approach to managing the spread of the virus. In this role, Johnson acted both as the spokesperson for the government and as a figure of national leadership. During times of emergency such as these, it is common for the go nt and the prime minister to receive popularity b os i opinion polls – though this is not always gua d

Tal Point

Do you think the prime minister's exclusive roles make them like a

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Government Appointment

The prime minister has the power to appoint and dismiss government mini
this power can be used to determine the nature and the agenda of the gove
prime minister only. The prime ministerial power to appoint and dismiss ca
relevant – it means that inherently the prime minister is more powerful tha

Boris Johnson was regarded as having appointed Nadine Dorries to cabinet due to her personal loyalty to him.

This would suggest that that t
choose a cabinet that mirrors t
strengthens their personal pos
case. Prime ministers must giv
factors when selecting ministe
loyalty to themselves; creating
satisfy party groups; ideally, n
relevant experience and exper
demographic representation fo
many instances in which these
and this has cost prime minist
give enough consideration to less right-wing factions in her party in the C
tenure. Theresa May was criticised for appointing MPs who were not loya
Boris Johnson received scrutiny for not balancing party opinion in his app

Chairing the Cabinet

As well as the appointment of government ministers giving the prime mi
over the rest of the executive, the PM is also in an advantageous position b
the cabinet. This means that they lead cabinet meetings. This provides an
ministers to set the government's agenda, as they have the chance to shap
meetings and can decide which viewpoint will be looked upon more favo
cabinet committees to help ensure that issues that come to the cabinet are
have great authority in achieving what they have set out. Theresa May set
committees after her first cabinet meeting. For all of these reasons, being t
important role of the prime minister.

Leading the Executive

Above all, the prime minister must direct and manage their branch of government and help it to function effectively as the executive branch. Th
links to some of what we have already discussed, namely, that the prime minister has authority over the cabinet. The prime minister is also the hea
of the civil service and must, therefore, manage all civil servants accessible
the executive. The most important of these are those based in the **Prime Minister's Office**. This refers to all of the civil servants and advisers based
10 Downing Street, who provide advice to the prime minister on whatever
they demand. Prime ministers appoint senior advisers within Number 10.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Prerogative Powers

The prime minister has certain powers that have been passed down by the discussed, this is the case for all of the executive, including the cabinet, bu specific to the prime minister. The most significant of these are **patronage** has the authority to appoint life peers to the House of Lords. David Came saw the appointment of 13 Conservative peers just b[illegible] he left office.

Other prerogative powers of the [illegible]ister include the deployment o exercised by Tony Blair in [illegible] now more limited due to a convention which saw th[illegible] of a parliamentary vote on such matters, whic since. Ther[illegible] while prerogative powers are generally weakening, they available to the prime minister.

Representing the UK Internationally

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, 1984.

The prime minister is the chief figure who and is responsible for diplomacy with oth internationally. The most visible examples this role are with Margaret Thatcher and T with US presidents. Thatcher built a new ' the UK and the USA because of her close i Ronald Reagan, and Blair sought to contin building rapport and friendship with Geo

In some cases the prime minister may take a l[illegible]ct[illegible]on international affa Sunak appointed former PM David Ca[illegible]n as Foreign Secretary; while S issues, Cameron became th[illegible]ver[illegible]ment's leading international spokesma Starmer's approach [illegible] represents a return to the traditional prime min UK. Starm[illegible]pproach has been to bridge the divides between the USA a 'special rela[illegible]ship' and supporting European allies.

Exclusive Roles and Powers of the Cabinet

Some Important Facts about the Cabinet

It meets once a week, while Parliament is sitting – 30 or 40 times a year. Som important than others. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretar the three most important members of the cabinet, apart from the prime minis in full cabinet. It is there mainly to give approval, resolve disagreements, leg debate issues and to stand as a symbol for executive d[illegible]ns that all agree o

What is the Role of the Cabin[illegible]?

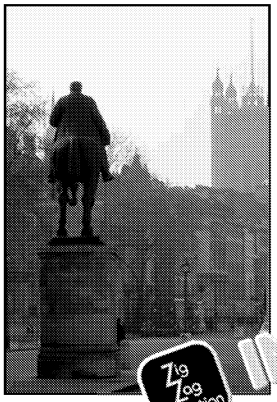
The **cabinet system** st[illegible]a[illegible]e heart of the UK system of government. By the collecti[illegible]isi[illegible]making that is supposed to take place to agree on gove minister as *primus inter pares*, meaning 'first among equals'. One of the princi is the right to select the few (usually about 20) who will form his or her cabine known as **Secretaries of State**, and will head government departments. Othe department or be there because of another role such, as the Cabinet Secretary.

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Not all cabinet members, therefore, are Members of the House of Commons. made in cabinet committees, and these decisions have the same status as full prime minister who decides on the committees, their composition and the ag Sometimes cabinets will be reorganised to make them more efficient, as happ responsibilities for local government and transport were separated, or in June responsibility for constitutional affairs was created within the cabinet. In 200 Department for Justice.

One of the issues today is that prime ministers tend to sideline their cabinets preferring to rely on **personal advisers** or on informal meetings with a few m cabinet. The work of the civil service serving the cabinet is coordinated by th civil servants in the Cabinet Office. The Prime Minister will also appoint sure the work of the Cabinet Office ties in with government policy. Blair's Ca for 30 minutes, just once a week and members of Brown's Cabinet were know insufficient discussion and consultation. We should remember that the cabin collective power when it is minded to, as more recent prime ministers have d

Where are the Cabinet Decisions Made?



Whitehall, London – traditional home of the civil service and most government departments.

The answer is usually in **cabinet committees**. The **committees** (e.g. Economic Affairs, Local Governm The latter deal with particular issues when needed important industrial dispute or national emergenc committees have the same status as a cabinet decis the full cabinet when there is disagreement. It is th what committees there will be, what they will disc of them. The trend recently has been for prime mi to rely more on personal advisers.

Here is a good time to say a little more about the **C Secretary** leads the work of this office, supervising the main tasks are to provide the cabinet and comm coordinate the meetings and make sure that decisio As we have seen, the Cabinet Office has become more coordinated with t and it could be argued that this has been another way of strengthening th at the expense of the cabinet itself. You will read several arguments that say that cabinet government is now dead, and that real power now lies in the hands of the prime minister, their personal advisers, and the senior civil servants who work with them. But that may not always be true.

Did yo
The Ca
its work
public k
governi

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

3.2 The Concept of Ministerial Res

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Understand the concept of individual responsibil
- ✓ Understand the concept of collective res sibility.
- ✓ Be able to recite and use examp f ministers resigning for both indiv collective reasons.

INSPECTION COPY

Key terms

Ministerial responsibility	The idea that government ministers bear the responsibil performance of the government.
Collective responsibility	The idea that cabinet, as a collective political body, sh the positive and negative actions and consequences of government.
Individual responsibility	The idea that a cabinet minister should be held comple of their government department or personal performar
Department performance	The success or failure of go nt departments and themselves profess ly d implementing and upho
Policy failure	Th a law being implemented by an individu been unsuccessful in some way.
Personal misconduct	The failure of government ministers to work and live way that satisfies the demands of public life.
Binding decisions	The success of the cabinet in reaching a unified decisi dismissal of cabinet members who did not support thi
Vote of no confidence	The defeat of the government on a major issue which the entire government.

James Calla Government have resign vote of no c in 1979.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

What is Ministerial Responsibility?

Simply put, ministerial responsibility means the ways in which ministers are l failure of their political and personal performance. There are two types of min often seem to get **collective responsibility** mixed up with the idea of **individu** these is enforceable by law. They are **conventions**, and there have often been refused to resign. One of the questions often asked is whether these ideas still

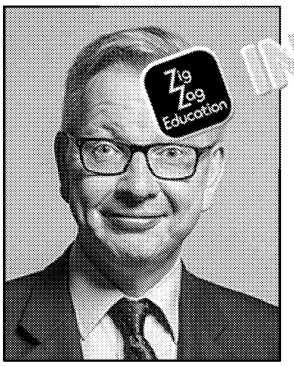
The difference between individual responsibility and collective responsil

- **Collective responsibility** is the convention that all members of the cab decisions made by the cabinet (even if they privately disagree with the if they resign). Collective responsibility now includes all meml
- **Individual responsibility** is the convention that individual minister for their departments and **personal** actions, and resign if they are lik the government.

If a minister is caught having an affair, or is managing their department **individual responsibility**, and the minister might have to resign. If a mi themselves to agree publicly with a cabinet or government policy, then t under the idea of cabinet or government **collective responsibility.** It is v mixed up. Look at the examples you use very carefully.

Collective Responsibility

Meetings of the cabinet, where debate can be occur between members in c conclusion that will become policy, should be **secret**. This means that t of ministers will be private, and the public face of the government can be



Michael Gove led the cabinet revolt against the handling of Brexit negotiations by the executive.

What is agreed upon in cabinet meetings is governm ministers – who have agreed to it, agree to be bound support it. The cabinet is then responsible jointly, as for that policy. The cabinet should, therefore, be pra the government were to lose a no-confidence vote, t

If a member of the cabinet finds they cannot suppo publicly, they will resign. You should be clear that cabinet failing at something, but rather specific mir cannot in good faith be part of a specific policy.

To some extent, resignations for reasons of collectiv relatively rare) are, therefore, acts of protest, of con more sceptical approach) for future political gain – ship, to borrow a phrase. Because they are rare, these types of resignation show a crack in the face of the government which is open to criticism and government policy.

In recent years there have been examples of exceptions to the rule of colle consciously applied exceptions, such as in the formation of a coalition cabi referendum of 2016, mean that collective responsibility is suspended on a the cabinet may be allowed to choose a side and not be obliged to resign (avoid mass resignations or to allow voting on 'issues of conscience', such examples are discussed later.

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

There are also times when collective responsibility is challenged. As ment discussions within cabinet should remain a confidential matter within the can and do go public at times. Personal differences and departmental conf times such as the Brexit debates at the end of 2018 and start of 2019, mean can go public. For example, Boris Johnson (then Foreign Secretary) and M Secretary) collaboratively challenged the position on Brexit of Theresa Ma Hammond, by writing a report urging a harder [illegible] rawal from the EU. report was leaked, and suddenly it was [illegible] that the cabinet was not un on the most important issue of the day.

Problems arise when the prime minister does not consult the cabinet many issues was a particular problem when ministers resigned from Thatcher and Blair governments, frequently speaking out about not havin hand in many cabinet decisions at all. These two prime ministers had a lar degree of power, having large majorities, and, therefore, did not have to s as much time and energy trying to reach a consensus as to Theresa May, f instance, whose lack of a majority in the 2017 Election meant her cabinet represented a range of opposing views at a time when these divisions wer coming to a head in the issue of the UK's relationship with the European Union.

Individual Responsibility

An image of the Hillsborough disaster, where many Liverpool fans died. This is clearly a very sensitive issue not only for people of the area but for the UK as a whole.

Individual responsibility, while cabinet is supposed to be a uni important in British politics. As principle that a sole cabinet mi personal or political misconduc should not affect the rest of the uncertainty about what this co who manage government depa be individually responsible for civil servant or adviser workin Examples for this are numerous. In 2014, for example, a high-profile case the Cabinet Office, whose minister was Francis Maude. The 24-year-old w edits to the Wikipedia page that described the Hillsborough football stadi were killed. This is different from Maude being accountable to Parliament minister should remain as open as possible, he was unable to prevent this department so it would not have been practical for him to resign. It shoul general individual responsibility is less common than collective responsib of reasons, including autonomous governments that are trusted to handle collective mandates.

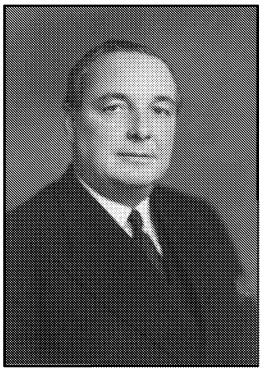
There has also been clarification in recent times regarding the difference b the management of government policy. Individual ministerial responsibili policy has been introduced and how it can be assessed in terms of its broa operation of managing this policy, however, is up to civil servants within department, and ministers cannot be expected to know or be held account individual when implementing policy.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

Case Study – Tulip Siddiq

Prior to the 2024 election, the Labour Party repeatedly criticised the Conservatives of lacking integrity and ethics. Once elected in 2024 Labour introduced a new ministerial code and made holding ministers to higher standards an important feature of their governance. In January 2025 Trea Minister Tulip Siddiq resigned over an anti-corruption investigation linked t and her family in Bangladesh. After referring her e[illegible] the prime minister's standards advisor and being found to not have broken the ministerial code Siddiq still resigned. This demonstrates individual responsibility in action as Labour's sensitivity to upholding high ethical standards led to her resignatio Had this not been the case, Siddiq may have kept her job.

So, it isn't always easy to say when ministers should resign or be sacked, a departments is not always something they know about and can realistical circumstances that we can broadly categorise into reasons why individual ministers resign.



Sir Thomas Dugdale.

1. Taking Responsibility for the Department

One reason, in essence the flip side of what has been are departmental mistakes which cabinet ministers r individual responsibility for. This, however, is rarer individuals to suffer as a result of errors within the c incident in 2011 is, therefore, quite symbolic of the n some occasions, though, ministers are forced to resig Sir Thomas Dugdale is the most relevant example of 1954 because of controversy surrounding a 700-acre spa Dorset. This land had been purchased by the govern r[illegible]e the Second World War, and it had pro its owner. However, the Ministry of Agriculture, whose minister was Dug out to som[illegible]lse. Dugdale took the brunt of criticism and was forced t that ministers may be forced to resign under individual responsibility; ho this is not a common occurrence.

2. Policy or Performance Failure

Another reason why ministers of the cabinet may be forced to resign inde executive is if there is a significant policy failure. Again, this is not a certai that it will be the minister who takes the fall as a result of the failure of a p good example is seen in the resignation of Foreign Secretary Lord Carring opinion regarding the Falklands War. An example of performance failure resignation is Estelle Morris, who resigned from her position as Educatio after it was judged by herself and her party that she was more effective as responsibility as a result of policy failure is, therefore, only sometimes enf

3. Personal Misconduct Personal misconduct is a more expected reason w would be held individually responsible and suffer the consequences separ their cabinet positions. Ministers are expected to live their personal lives and professionally in a decent and morally good manner. If this ministerial conduct i compromised, they run the risk of being forced to resign. Examples of this numerous. Michael Fallon (left) resigned in 2017 following allegations of p harassment. This and other examples will be discussed in more detail later important is that personal misconduct is one of the instances when that inc responsibility can be justified.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

4. Political Pressure

The final reason why a minister may be forced to take individual responsi
significant political pressure to which the government has to respond. The
blame, and it is not a result of ministers breaking from the requirements o
professional lives. This could involve sustained pressure from the media c
was forced to resign as prime minister following the Jun 2016 European
department responsibility, not due to the failure of the policy he created, r
misconduct, but because of the pressure to resign from the public and me
of him voting against the outcome of the referendum.

Ministerial Responsibility in Coalition 2010–2015

At one level the agreement made by the Conservatives and Liberal Demo
coalition provided a clear foundation upon which all cabinet members co
collective responsibility. The agreement mapped out the broad policy dire
programme in the main areas of government responsibility, including eco
constitutional reform and defence policy. Conservative and Liberal Demo
members knew what their party leaders had negotiated. For instance, Dav
try to replace the Human Rights Act and Nick Clegg was not going to opp
education fees for students.

On the other hand, the coalition agreement covered several areas where the
and Liberal Democrat MPs were allowed to abstain but not vote against the
nuclear power and the introduction of a married couples' tax allowance we
understanding could take effect.

In the case of individual responsibility, there were cases where cabinet mi
in Parliament or the media for the actions they or their departments had o
resignation. However, in 2011, Theresa May, the Home Secretary, blamed
Control Agency for the relaxation of checks on European travellers and re
Andrew Lansley, the Health Minister, was heavily attacked over the way
the NHS but never offered to resign. He was publicly backed by David Ca
moved from the post in a cabinet reshuffle in 2012.

A number of resignations by cabinet ministers were offered and accepted
misconduct reasons which were bringing embarrassment to the governme
Democrat ministers David Laws (Treasury Secretary) in 2010 and Chris H
2012 together with Conservative ministers Liam Fox (Defence Secretary) i
Whip) in 2012 and Maria Miller (Culture Secretary) in 2014.

The priority for David Cameron and Nick Clegg was to keep the coalition
parliament and almost certainly led to the prime minister taking a fairly le
conduct, especially where the cause was the different views held by the C
Democrat Party members. This could be seen when Liberal Democrat min
supported the government bill which would allow the redrawing of const
reduction in the number of MPs from 650 to 600 (see above). It can also be
Liberal Democrat Business Secretary, was exposed by a newspaper public
policies of the Conservative cabinet members and making very un-ministe
was going to deal with the proposed takeover bid of BSkyB by the Murdo
normal circumstances he would have been under strong pressure to resig
transferring his responsibilities for media affairs to another cabinet minist

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

David Cameron and Ministerial Responsibility 2015–2016

Having won the 2015 General Election outright, David Cameron was free another coalition. However, he quickly found that two new factors were g interrelated. Firstly, the Conservative government was committed to hold the UK's membership of the EU, and the cabinet would almost certainly b argument they would want to campaign on. Secondly, Cameron had annc election campaign that he would not be contesting the next election as the the candidates to succeed him would probably in his cabinet and would hav dynamics of government.

By March 2016 Cameron had concluded his renegotiation on the terms of announced the promised in/out referendum (now known as the Brexi place on 23rd June 2016. The government recommended that the country w inside the EU. However, in order not to split his party, Cameron allowed in agreement to campaign to leave. This amounts to the suspension of coll for this issue, which follows what Harold Wilson, the Labour prime minis referendum on the same issue. It soon became clear that five full members campaign to leave, and the other 16 campaigned to remain. Ministers outs cabinet had a similar right to campaign against the government position.

On 18th March 2016 Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Welfare a Pensions, resigned from the government because he felt unable to support publicly the strategy for balancing the budget, which he argued was being on the backs of the most vulnerable and least well-off in society. However regarded Duncan Smith's resignation as being caused by disagreements surrounding the upcoming Brexit referendum. Meanwhile, austerity polic continued to be implemented.

On 23rd June 2016, Britain voted to leave the European Union in a referenc leading to David Cameron's resignation as prime minister. This resignatio type of ministerial responsibility – individual, because he had led the Rem collective, because he could not support a policy of leaving the EU.

Theresa May and Ministerial Responsibility, 2016–2019

Theresa May's premiership provides us with many examples of ministeria 2017, Michael Fallon resigned as Defence Secretary over an incident of alle had taken place 15 years earlier. Inappropriate behaviour is clearly a perso issue which is why it was an instance of *individual* responsibility.

Just a week later, Secretary for International Development Priti Patel resig under quite different circumstances after it emerged that she had be holdi secret meetings with the Israeli government without the knowledge of the Foreign Office, Cabinet or Prime Minister – an example of individual responsibility.

The Home Secretary Amber Rudd was forced to resign in 2018, after being accused of misleading Parliament. This came during the fallout from revelations that British citizens had been wrongly deported by the Home Office, known as the Windrush scandal. In addition, the Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson was publicly sacked after being accused of leaking

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

classified information to newspapers. Both are further examples of indivic
the case of Williamson it is unusual for a member of cabinet to turn down
have to be publicly dismissed instead.

Brexit has given us numerous examples of resignations over *collective* resp
normal times are relatively rare, particularly because most ministers have
their position and will not abandon it easily. In July 2018, Foreign Secretar
Secretary David Davis both resigned in opposition to the government's po
2018, they were joined by Work and Pensions Secretary Esther McVey and
Brexit department, Dominic Raab. The leader of the House of Commons, A
over the month in May 2019.

Including more junior ministerial positions, Theresa May oversaw a recor
government during her three years as prime minister, demonstrating the c
have in maintaining unity and discipline when their own authority has be
was by the result of the 2017 general election).

Boris Johnson and Ministerial Responsibility, 2019–2022

Boris Johnson's premiership was particularly turbulent in terms of resigna
Indeed, ministers began resigning in protest at Johnson's leadership befor
Minister! In total, six ministers resigned in anticipation of Boris Johnson b
including the Chancellor Philip Hammond, the Justice Secretary David Ga
Development Secretary Rory Stewart, who was also a leadership contende
considered to be on the Remain side of the Brexit debate within the Conse
chose to resign knowing that they would lose their positions anyway und

In September 2019, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Amber
Rudd resigned from the Cabinet and the Conservative Party in protest at
the expulsion of 21 pro-EU Conservative MPs by Boris Johnson. This
followed the resignation from a junior position of Johnson's brother,
Jo Johnson, two days earlier for similar reasons. Both could be seen as
examples of collective responsibility: they could not consent to decisions
being made by the Prime Minister.

More dramatically, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sajid Javid resigned
in February 2020 during a cabinet reshuffle in which Johnson demanded
that Javid sack all of his advisers and replace them with advisers he had
selected, effectively handing control of the Treasury to the prime
minister's office. Coming just weeks after a thumping general election
victory, the sudden resignation of such a senior member of government
for internal reasons is highly unusual, and could be seen as an example
of Johnson asserting his new-found power over the Cabinet.
In May 2020, a government crisis occurred when it emerged that the
Prime Minister's key adviser, Dominic Cummings, had appeared to
have broken the coronavirus lockdown measures by travelling across th
absorbed in the pressure for Cummings to resign, but both he and the Pr
had acted appropriately and not broken the law. The decision to retain Cu
resignation of Douglas Ross – a junior minister in the Scotland Office – wh
government's position.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

A particularly contentious issue arose in November 2020, when Home Secretary Priti Patel was found by an internal investigation to have engaged in the bullying of civil servants in her department, and thus breached the ministerial code – the standards which ministers are expected to abide by. By convention, breaching the ministerial code is a resigning matter; however, Johnson decided to reject the findings of the report, and allowed Patel to remain in post. As a result, it was the standards adviser himself who resigned instead of Patel, due to the Prime Minister publicly reaching a different conclusion from him.

Johnso
that Ha

Health Secretary Matt Hancock broke his own rules on social distancing.

In June 2021, footage leaked to the media exposed the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, engaging in an affair with a staff breaching the government's own social distanci The matter was particularly egregious as the He for leading the government's response to the pa subsequently forced to resign for personal misc

In July 2022, the Deputy Chief Whip, Chris Pinc sexual misconduct. Allegations that the Prime M previous similar accusations against Pincher we however, Johnson later accepted that he had bee allegations, but appointed Pincher to the goverr

Johnson's admissi th he was aware of the Pi immediate resignations of Health Secretary Sajid Javid and Chancellor Ris that they had lost confid in the Prime Minister after a series of scandals. Th o resignations precipitated a wave of mass resignation Cabinet members and junior ministers alike, all on the grounds of no longer wishing to share collective responsibility for the Prime Minister's decisions. In total, 61 members of government resigned in 24 hours – the largest number in British political history. The resignations forced Johnson himself to resign, as he was no longer able to fill government posts.

Johnson's own resignation was on the basis that he had lost the support of his MPs – so it was ultimately political pressure that ousted him. But in the end Johnson's resignation could also be said to have been due to all three other types of individual responsibility we have identified: performance failure, personal misconduct and taking responsibility for departmental failings.

p

Key Moments in Ministerial Responsibility 2022–2025

Liz Truss's short-lived government of autumn 2022 was nevertheless ever responsibi on Burns resigned as Minister of State for Trade Policy about 'seric misconduct' during the 2022 party conference. Kwasi Kwa following the fallout from the mini budget – it could be argued that the pr ministerial responsibility here to try to shield herself from the political im

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

Suella Braverman left Truss's government after sharing sensitive informat
using a personal email address – a failure of individual responsibility. But
over change, after becoming prime minister just a week later Rishi Sunak

Sunak's less than two-year innings also saw its fair share of examples. Ga
the government following bullying allegations (which h strenuously den
resigned as Chancellor when Sunak's ethics adviser advised that he had b
with his tax affairs. The most important example of collective responsibilit
when Robert Jenrick resigned stating that Sunak's flagship Safety of Rwan
Bill did 'not go far enough'.

In February Anneliese Dodds resigned over cuts to foreign aid in fav
clear example of being unable to abide by collective responsibility. The mo
Starmer's Labour government came in September when Angela Rayner re
about her personal tax affairs, having reportedly failed to pay tax on purch
major figure in the government, with her own mandate as elected deputy
her departure triggered both a cabinet reshuffle and a deputy leadership e
Rayner may be better off outside the struggling government, while some o
they are free of an antagonist and competitor in the government.

Talking Points

Do failures of individual responsibility do more damage than resig
responsibility?

Do resignations from their government always damage a prime mi
sometimes help to remove competitors?

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

3.3.1 The Power of the Prime Minister a

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Understand the various factors that affect the se[illegible]on of ministers by
- ✓ Be able to justify whether you think the UK has a pr[illegible]me ministerial or a something in between.
- ✓ Understand what makes a [illegible]e minister predominant and how this aff
- ✓ Understand the k[illegible]ons as to whether the prime minister can no be presid[illegible]

Key terms

Prime ministerial government	A mode of government where the prime minister has dominate the cabinet.
Cabinet government	A mode of government where the cabinet has the m responsibility applies. The prime minister is no mo cabinet ministers.
Presidentialisation	The process of the UK prime minister becoming incr political system.
Predominant	Describes a prime mi[illegible]fe[illegible]o uses resources and p potential a[illegible]e[illegible]ore, becomes proactive.
Pre-emin[illegible]	[illegible]scribes a prime minister who uses resources avai basic level of power but remains similarly powerful
Personalised leadership	When a prime minister has a strong public personal aims and strategy.
Spatial leadership	When a prime minister does not work very closely of the executive but keeps a small circle of advisers.

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Two Types of Government

We have seen that there are many parts to the executive of the UK govern
has tended to reside with either the prime minister or their cabinet.

Prime Ministerial Government

A prime ministerial government is one where the executive is dominated
specifically concerned with the relationship between the prime minister a
ministerial government is one where the cabinet is overlooked and is rare
prime minister.

In the constitution of the US you can read precisely what the role of the pr
the other branches of government may do to scrutinise the executive.

You won't read anything similar about the UK prime minister, because th
over several centuries. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the first minister was chief adviser to the king, and as the nineteenth century progressed, the role became associated with the leaders of political parties who were still constitutionally bound to govern as part of the cabinet. The prime minister was seen as 'first among equals', and that is still the basic constitutional position today, although the growth of executive power in general has added a range of responsibilities to the role.

Remember that constitutions have two sides – theoretical and practical. From the 1960s there were warnings that in practice the prime minister was becoming too powerful. Crossman and others were talking about **'prime ministerial' government** – where the prime minister seemed to be making all the important policy decisions away from the cabinet – and later Tony Benn criticised the immense power said to be exercised by the prime minister also at the expense of the cabinet and even of Parliament.

Department for Work and Pensions
Ministry of Justice
HM Revenue and Customs
Ministry of Defence
Home Office
Scottish Government
Department for Transport
Business and Energy Department
Environment Department
Department of Health and Social...
Cabinet Office
Attorney General's Office
Department for Education
Foreign Office
HM Land Registry
Welsh Government
UK Statistics Authority
National Crime Agency
Local Government Department
International Trade Department
HM Treasury
Culture Department
Ofsted
Food Standards Agency
Ofgem
Competition and Markets Authority
National Archives
Charity Commission
Office of Rail and Road
Ofqual
Ofwat
Northern Ireland Office
Supreme Court

The number of civil servants in most gove
The total number of civil servants emp

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

Cabinet Government

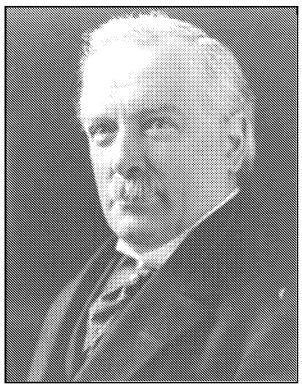
Government coat of arr

In the UK we have **cabinet government,** whe collectively within the cabinet, and not by inc does not always happen, but the whole idea c suggests that there is some kind of collaborat and other ministers. The idea has not totally the power of the cabinet has weakened and th has [illegible] in the last century. The UK [illegible] way politically active, at some times

The Prime Minister and the Cabinet

So, we are in a position to say something about the real relationship betwe prime ministers and the cabinet. We have seen where Thatcher's occasiona disregard for her colleagues' opinion led her, and how John Major attempt a more collegiate style of government, with equally disastrous consequenc Blair also tended to disregard his cabinet when it suited him, and again he found himself back-tracking when the cabinet turned on him. Gordon Bro discovered the same painful truth, while David Cameron, as the leader of a coalition government, had to be much more careful to listen to the opinion his colleagues, especially Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats. Have you noticed a pattern here? Prime ministers seem to have more pow over the Cabinet at times when they are popular with the electorate. This h been true in each of the cases we have looked at. Where prime minister is voters, then the cabinet tends to increase in confidence, and can even force the prime minister. This is evident from recent examples. By losing her par general election, Theresa May also undermined her own credibility as a lea time as prime minister [illegible] trying to balance the conflicting inter members of the cabinet. Similarly, as his public popularity eroded amid m of 2022, Boris Johnson's Cabinet took the future of his premiership out of h

Is the Prime Minister Too Powerful?



Dominant Prime Ministers are nothing new. David Lloyd George had been the youngest member of the House of Commons in 1890 at 27 years old. He became a powerful Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1908, and led the Liberals in a coalition government during World War I. He was often accused of ignoring his cabinet and of governing without their advice.

By the Second World W been many prime minist known personalities, so Gladstone, Lloyd Georg seemed to become more constitutional role of 'fir allow. Some people wer this, but generally the pr government' did not bec the Second World War.

In the 1960s, **Richard Cr**[illegible] Labour cabinet minister, wrote a forew 'The English Constitution'. As we have seen, he referred to **'prime minist** suggested [illegible] increase in the prime minister's use of the prerogati cabinet. The executive had seen a dramatic rise in importance in the twen needed to be made more speedily and as technology was beginning to pro was becoming more of a media personality in his own right. The truth, as collective cabinet government was becoming less important compared wi elsewhere by the prime minister using other individual advisers.

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Zig Zag Education

One area of special power being picked up was the prime minister's powers of patronage. In the 1980s, **Tony Benn** reasserted the danger of prime ministerial power, particularly when accompanied by large government majorities in Parliament. In 1985 he referred to 'personal rule in the very heart of our parliamentary democracy.' Other writers such as **Burch** suggested that cabinets were no longer suited to the difficulty of governing a modern state and that many issues are no longer dealt with by the cabinet as a whole. Decisions are sometimes just as likely to be taken in committees.

The problem would be that the prime minister who led a party with a large majority of seats in the Commons would face a parliament that seemed relatively powerless. Since the nineteenth century, there have been only three successful votes of no confidence by Parliament against a prime minister and his government – two in 1924 and one in 1979. In addition, the power of the prime minister to put their supporters into the House of Lords had long been an issue. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George had threatened to do this in order to get the 1911 Parliament Act through Parliament. Add to this the prime minister's power as **leader of the party**, and the decline in the number of cabinet meetings over the century, and we can sense a growing problem. By the 19 year was about 60, down from about 90 just after World War II. By the 199 and has hardly improved since.

There is also the issue of the constitution's heavy reliance on convention a prime minister's power. Many commentators highlighted Boris Johnson a predecessors to disregard conventions, and use the weight of his office an constitutional norms. Examples of this may be Johnson's attempt to scrap when an ally – Owen Paterson – fell foul of their standards, or handing ou contravening a verdict reached by the House of Lords Appointments C

Modern prime ministers have also transformed the structure of the institu within, in order to obtain greater control over the business of government advisory units of his office and the Chancellor's was interpreted as a direc influence over the Treasury, and led to the resignation of his first Chancel

It is clear that the power of the prime minister has grown in relation to tha times, the prime minister has been able to use institutional resources and a as is evident in certain stages of the Thatcher and Blair governments. How minister may appear secure, it should be noted that by-passing cabinet to severe mistake. The obvious example of this was the loss of support for Th cabinet following the poll tax riots of 1990.

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Case Study – Conservative Government 1979–1990

Margaret Thatcher is widely regarded as one of the most powerful prime ministers in British history. Throughout her tenure, she frequently ignored the cabinet and imprinted her own personal ideology – Thatcherism. This was evidence of a prime ministerial government. However, by 1990, many ministers in the cabinet were disgruntled by the fact they had been peripheral in the government agenda. Many who resigned had spoken out about Thatcher's dictatorial role in the cabinet. The Conservative leadership election after her unpopular poll tax showed the consequences of ignoring of the cabinet long term – many of them stopped their support of Thatcher and she was ousted because of Thatcher. Is this evidence of a cabinet government?

Clearly, how much the prime minister is able to dominate the cabinet vari dismissive of the ministers in her cabinet. Other prime ministers, such as J from her, were not dominant in this context. This variance is a result of a r which will be described below.

Government majority

The size of the majority of the governing party, if indeed a majority is pres is a big factor in how much the prime minister is able to dominate the cab In general, the bigger the majority, the more likely it is that a prime minist government will unfold. In the 1997 General Election Tony Blair's New Labour won the greatest majority in the post-war political era. With 418 se to the Conservatives' 165, Blair was held in high regard among his own pa This included members of his cabinet, and there was more room to bypass cabinet as it was more malleable. He proceeded to ignore his cabinet consistently and thus exemplified a prime ministerial government, particu majority was huge. Similarly, since Boris Johnson's current majority in Pa Blair's after the 2001 general election, we can probably expect a return to a ministerial style.

On the other hand, David Cameron's Coalition Government was not one in highly personalised form of governing, and his cabinet held certain author was unable to bypass them. The most obvious difference between these tw difference between the two. The Conservatives in 2010 did not achieve a w election and were, therefore, forced into coalition with the Liberal Democra majority of 79, which is not feeble by any means but is dwarfed by New La Also, several members of the cabinet were Liberal Democrats themselves, i Minister Nick Clegg, and to bypass these members at the time would have posed serious problems for the unity and functioning of the government. For this reason, Cameron's government was a cabinet government in which he was first among equals and cabinet ministers were involved in decision-making and events that took place.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Electoral success

Government majorities are the result of another factor that determines how far a prime minister can dominate the executive – electoral performance. This is one reason why Thatcher and Blair were so dominant over the cabinet as prime ministers. They each transformed their party into the formidable electoral machine of the time. Thatcher won three elections and her leadership spanned over 11 years. Her majority, importantly, was at its lowest after the first general election she won in 1979 and therefore proved that she could consistently improve and maintain an impressive electoral performance while in office. For this reason, she commanded greater respect from the cabinet, who for many years conceded the dominance over them that she exerted.

Electoral success results in large majorities, which makes a prime minister more powerful – but electoral success also means the prime minister's party is strong; that is, the party is much more likely to keep a winning streak and, therefore, is happy to yield to the leader.

Policy success

The prime minister will always be judged on the basis of how well the government performs throughout its tenure, and this is inherently assessed by the success or failure of policy. The more successful the policy record, the more likely it is that the rest of the cabinet will defer to policy. A failure of major policy could represent a loss of faith in the cabinet's power potential.

Party unity

This is usually a product of achieving success in one or more of the factors outlined above, although some of it is down to circumstances. Indeed, it does help if a prime minister has shown that they can perform electorally or have been successful while in office. This will mean the cabinet obstructs the prime minister less in general. However, no matter what the circumstances, there are always factions within parties. Thatcher had to satisfy the 'wets' and 'dries' within her cabinet.

However, perhaps the best example is Theresa May's government between 2016 and 2019. The main split between the Conservative Cabinet was whether ministers are for a 'soft' or a 'hard' Brexit. Philip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer, frequently spoke about integration and cooperation with the European Union. Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and Environment Secretary Michael Gove were two of the hard-Brexiteers. This made the dominance of the executive difficult for Theresa May. This left the cabinet with the knowledge that factions would be dissatisfied and cause imbalanced in some way. This is evidence that party unity, or lack of unity, affects a minister's ability to dominate the cabinet.

Leadership style

The leadership of the prime minister is one of the key factors that influences the PM and the cabinet. There have been prime ministers since the Second World War with completely different leadership styles, both in the way they approach policy and the way in which their leadership is personalised.

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Political leadership concerns how a prime minister will deal with individu
within the government. The extent to which the prime minister can truly t
depends on circumstances that have already been mentioned in part. Publ
important. This is often affected by policy success or electoral performanc
leadership refers to how far the prime minister can show their personal in
prime minister is the most publicly exposed political figure in the UK and
opportunity to impose a very personal politica[illegible]e a while in office. Th
'Thatcherism' and 'Blairism' are the two most obvious examples, as they h
leadership styles. This has several advantages and disadvantages, but wha
are able to dominate the cabinet with this style of leadership.

Political ev

Perhaps the factor that is least within the prime minister's control is the extent to which external events shape their political control over the cabinet. They may inherit a set of circumstances which affect their ability to align the cabinet, for instance. Theresa May struggled because of Brexit, with many members of her cabinet in fundamental disagreement over how to tackle exiting the EU. This clearly put her at a greater disadvantage and gave increased power to the cabinet.

Cabinet Office

There have been very recent changes to the power of the cabinet in relation to the prime minister. Notably the Cabinet Office has been given r allowing for special advisers, a policy unit and a press office in the cabinet cabinet more powerful in relation to the prime minister, though this chang constitute the emergence of a cabinet government.

Appointing Ministers to the Cabinet

One of the [illegible]s that means the prime minister is destined to have a pow advantage over the cabinet is the fact that he or she appoints members of the cabinet. This may happen on a mass scale, known as a cabinet reshuffl or to replace one member of the cabinet who may have been forced to resign under individual responsibility. The prime minister, when they tak office, chooses their whole cabinet.

However, this is not as straightforward as it sounds, nor does it guarantee that the prime minister is indeed dominant over the cabinet. This is becau the prime minister must take a number of factors into account when selecting the cabinet (see table below and on the next page).

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Factor	Explanation
Ideology	While there is normally only one party in government, ther within that party that must all be satisfied. The best way o ideological balance represented within the cabinet. Theres meticulously between different ideological factions and bo In stark contrast, Boris Johnson almos[illegible]xclusively appoin wing of the party, and largel[illegible]ed other factions.
Politi performa	The past performan[illegible]ial cabinet members concer expertise. Ex[illegible]ostly refers to ministers who may h men[illegible]are used to the pressure and scrutiny that co [illegible]mond was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer by that he had done a good job in David Cameron's Cabinet i Foreign Secretary. Expertise is usually within a specific de instance, was reappointed by May because of the knowled had been handling since 2014. Previous performance does ministers in relation to cabinet appointments.
Personal performance	Unlike political performance, this relates to the personal co members. Michael Fallon, mentioned above, was kept on b political expertise in defence, but at the end of 2017 resigne harassment. This meant that May was forced to appoint an
Gender	The next few factors concern demographic representation. Ge when a prime minister is selecting their cabinet. Powerful go traditionally been held by men, and there has been a societal in government but in all aspects of British life. If the cabinet represent the population, then there should be half of each ge September 2022 only eight of the [illegible]members of the cabinet
Ethnic minority represen	Traditionally, ethnic minority representation in governmen there are signs that this is changing. 30% of Liz Truss's Cabi [illegible]d of people from an ethnic minority background, i and Home Secretary. That's more than double the percentag population who are from a minority ethnic background.
Age	The final demographic factor that the prime minister migh their cabinet is age. The cabinet has traditionally been seen politicians and as exclusive and elitist in its favour of those been a greater effort in recent times to lower the average ag dipped below the age of 50.
Loyalty	If there has been a leadership election or challenge, or ther unsuccessful general election, the prime minister may consi to them personally as party leader. The prime minister can decisions solely on who is best suited for the job. Boris Joh emphasis on loyalty in Cabinet as his public popularity wa
Position on major policy	Sometimes, beyond ideology, the party of government may issue. For instance, Theresa May had to ensure that Brexite adequately repre[illegible]te[illegible]d not undermined by her appoi
Coaliti	This is [illegible]issue[illegible]factor that the prime minister must consi [illegible]a one-party majority in Britain. However, in 2010 to take this into account when selecting his cabinet, and thi whoever he liked. There were five Liberal Democrat cabin Prime Minister Nick Clegg. For obvious reasons, Conserva Cameron's first choice, suggesting that his power of appoi total control over the cabinet.

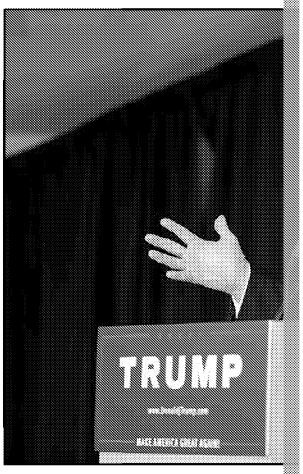
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Has Presidentialisation Occurred?

So, the power of the prime minister has increased over time, and we have ministerial government in British politics. However, this is not to suggest powerful in relation to the rest of the executive. One debate that has arise prime minister can now be said to be presidential. While the prime minist with the president inherently, there are some diff[illegible] which have argu recent times. We will explore the main arg[illegible] for and against the case prime minister has occurred.

The Prime Mini[illegible] Presidential

- Leade[illegible]styles are becoming increasingly personalised. This has become a desirable trait of the prime minister and allows them to carry out their goals effectively. Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, for instance, were able to establish personal ideologies named after them. Other prime ministers have not been considered as dominant because their leadership has not been as personalised. There is an increased pressure on prime ministers to come across as leading figures in the political system. TV debates have been introduced in general elections, which emphasise that the pressure is on leaders more than ever.



In America, televis[illegible] presi[illegible]

- ***Predominant prime minis[illegible]*** [illegible]able leaders of presidential status. their party as we[illegible] [illegible]ider status in the political system makes t ways [illegible]en [illegible]y utilise their power to the full extent they are more politic[illegible]ithin both Parliament and the executive. Thatcher and Bl examples of prime ministers who were predominant in their nature. T and personal resources to maximise their power.
- The prime minister is becoming separated from the rest of their party British politics and has resulted in the prime minister at times being d cabinet and the broader party. Tony Blair enjoyed electoral success be ideologically and physically, away from the rest of his party. David C the Conservative Party and in this sense created distance between hin Similarly, Boris Johnson was regarded as having distanced himself fr government during the 2019 general election. All recent prime minist select few rather than the whole cabinet or party, and this is grounds minister has branched away from the legislative [illegible]k of the party, as
- As we have discussed earlier in this chapt[illegible], pri[illegible]ministers have an ab them that are not shared with MP[illegible]en other ministers or members but are not limited to, pa[illegible]nage powers, the control over the deployme leadership and re[illegible]ation. These are all powers that would be consi
- There[illegible]ea[illegible]focus now than ever before on the media capabilitie for exa[illegible] the US president is assessed based on their communicati celebrity-style status, we have begun to see this with the prime minist Theresa May were deemed to have been good politicians before beco poor communication skills were highlighted upon taking up office. In propelled to office on the back of his entertaining media performance

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

The Prime Minister is not Presidential

- While the power of the prime minister in relation to the cabinet has increased in recent times, it cannot be said that the prime minister controls their own branch in the same way that a president controls the executive. The executive, of course, can in the most difficult of times still hold a certain authority over the prime minister. Margaret Thatcher attempted to hold a presidential-style authority over the executive, but this backfired as it was effectively her own cabinet who ousted her in 1990. In this sense, the prime minister does not hold the same authority over their own branch as a president does.
- Predominant prime ministers may be considered presidential, but this is down to circumstances. ***Pre-eminent prime ministers*** are more common and are a more accurate representation of British prime ministers. They utilise the institutional resources available to them, and this does not make them presidential. They lead their party and the government, which is inherent to a prime minister, but usually they do not go beyond this role. Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Theresa May are all examples of Similarly, if these prime ministers are unable to control the agenda in can be attached to them alone.
- Though the prime minister has several exclusive powers that are not a senior ministers, this is not to say that they do not have political powe the powers of the prime minister are ministerial powers. Ministers the government departments and civil servants, which means they are not in a presidential system. They actually hold political weight and can cl
- Prime ministers may have significant electoral success to be conside uncha[illegible] for office, as it is with a president. Thatcher and Bl presid[illegible] the post-war era but also won the greatest majorities in of the three most recent general elections have resulted in the largest This has resulted in weak executives, and weak prime ministers who personalise their leadership.
- Party support is not guaranteed. This may be true of a presidential sy assurances of the nature of a lack of support. For instance, leadership prime ministers may face in times of unpopularity, whereas a preside This may not necessarily mean that another member of the party is of alternative, but may mean that the prime minister is subject to sustain significant change. After the 2017 general election, Theresa May faced cabinet and backbenchers, and was eventually ousted from her positi Conservatives MPs – hardly a presidential syste
- It is worth pointing out that the prime minister, unlike other ministers government department. This may mean they do not have the extent of a area that cabinet ministers commonly do.

Thinking Point

Watch a TV debate for both the 2024 Harris and Trump US pre UK general election. What similarities and differences can you

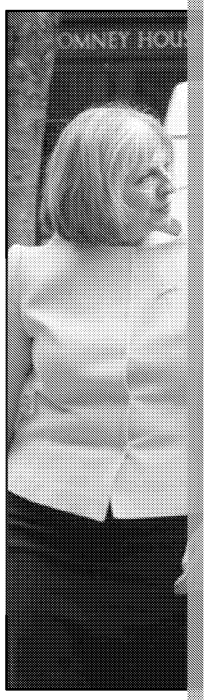
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

3.3.2 The Powers of the Prime Minister a
Dictate Events and Determine

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Gain a good understanding of at least one prime minister and their po and determine policy bef[illegible]9[illegible]
- ✓ Gain a good und[illegible]di[illegible]of at least one prime minister and their po and deter[illegible]ic, after 1997.
- ✓ [illegible]t[illegible]iscuss how specific policies or events impacted the power o [illegible]cutive.

Key questions



1. **How far are British prime ministers able to follow the policy agenda that they want?**
   This chapter explores the ways in which prime ministers since 1945 have attempted to implement personal objectives through policy, and the success or failure they have had in this.

2. **To what extent can prime ministers prevent circumstances that lead to their downfall?**
   This chapter will look at the ways that pr[illegible]me ministers have left office and [illegible]hether they could have done anything t[illegible]ve[illegible]this from happening.

3. **What [illegible]e individual events and policies that have d[illegible]mined prime ministers' power?**
   This chapter will take an in-depth look at the main policies and decisions that prime ministers took and how this affected their ability to determine events.

What Do We Mean by Dictating Events and Determinin

When questioning what the prime minister can do to lead the political age quite referring to the difference between predominant and pre-eminent pr difference of the use of individual power resources that we are most conce exploring the extent to which prime ministers ha[illegible]er able to imprint th rather than be reactive to events inside [illegible]ut[illegible]id[illegible]their control.

For this, we will examin[illegible]e[illegible]ime ministers before 1997; Harold Wilson 1997, we w[illegible]ok [illegible]extent to which Tony Blair, David Cameron, Ther have been [illegible]influence the political agenda while in office. Remember completely familiar with the specific implications of events and policy for before and one after 1997 in order to answer an essay question on the subj

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Year	Prime minister	Party	Reason
1945–1951	Clement Attlee	Labour	Called an election h but the Conservati and won based on s
1951–1955	Winston Churchill	Conservatives	Failing health.
1955–1957	Anthony Eden	Conser[illegible]ve	[illegible]iling health and p policy, to block the within his own par
1957–1963	Harold M[illegible]	Conservatives	Economic failures: unpopular because
1963–1964	[illegible]lec Douglas-Home	Conservatives	Inherited a governm be failing. Did bett general election.
1964–1970	Harold Wilson	Labour	Devaluing the poun momentum from th became unpopular
1970–1974	Edward Heath	Conservatives	After a hung parlia he was expected to reach a confidence from Northern Irel
1974–1976	Harold Wilson	Labour	Referendum over m Economic Commun
1976–1979	James Callaghan	Labour	His policy of pay re until he became gr
1979–1990	Margaret Thatcher	C[illegible]rvatives	Her controversial p to turn on her and l
1990–1997	[illegible]Major	Conservatives	Was seen as weak a due to his leadershi Thatcher's.
1997–2007	Tony Blair	Labour	Did not recover fro surrounded his dec Iraq, and 'jumped b
2007–2010	Gordon Brown	Labour	He was blamed for global economic cri skills made him ver only election as PM
2010–2016	David Cameron	Conservatives	Lost a referendum EU, and resigned th
2016–2019	Theresa May	Conservatives	Lost her party's ma[illegible]ection in 2017, an party over her Brex
2019–2022	Boris Jo[illegible]	Conservatives	A series of scandals dishonesty damage frustrated his MPs,
Sep 2022–Oct 2022	Liz Truss	Conservatives	Following a contro rapid loss of suppo confidence and her
2022–2024	Rishi Sunak	Conservatives	Lost the 2024 electi party's waning for

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

The Power of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to Dict
Determine Policy: Before 1997

Harold Wilson

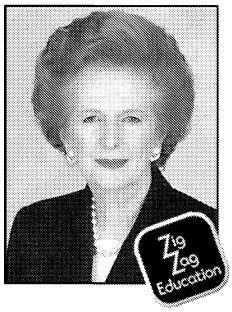
As the table above suggests, Harold Wilson had two spells as prime minis
Firstly, he was elected prime minister in 1964. For th[illegible]t few years, he e
relative success in being able to dictate event[illegible] determine policy. Becau
public opinion of him was high, h[illegible]tively unchallenged in implem
his personal agenda. This i[illegible] de[illegible]ajor reform to education, including a
particular focus o[illegible]g classes having access to universities. In fact, m
allocated t[illegible]at[illegible]n than defence by the Wilson Executive in its early te
Houses we[illegible]ult, social security was at the forefront of British politics, a
these contributed to a strongly socialist ideological agenda that represente
Wilson's political views before he entered office.

In terms of social reform, Wilson's Government was able to introduce new
with the cultural movements that were taking place. This included helpin
against ethnic minorities, relaxing of laws against homosexuality and the
Overall, Wilson determined policy that reflected his socialist principles. H
influence economic policy. He inherited a large deficit, which was unusua
he had to fight off the devaluation of the pound year after year. By 1967, h
longer. The devaluation of the pound was the turning of the tide of Wilso
beginning of the end for Wilson and his cabinet.

Wilson then became prime minister for the secon[illegible]e[illegible]our years after he
October 1974 General Election – the secc[illegible]o[illegible]th[illegible]year after a hung parlia
majority of three seats. This pos[illegible]bl[illegible]ns for Wilson, who saw deep pa
significantly limit what h[illegible]a[illegible]his executive were able to achieve. Unemp
the first tim[illegible]th[illegible]d he was criticised for this sort of record. Howe
second spe[illegible]rime minister was due to his position on Europe.

The prospect of integration into the European Economic Community (EEC
before Wilson introduced an in/out referendum in 1975. He had, before be
opposed the idea of integration with Europe, and specifically with the EE
from his own party, he was forced to hold a referendum, which resulted i
membership and integration. This set the issue to rest for some time with
result; the issue would be raised again following Thatcher's 1988 'Bruges s

Margaret Thatcher



Margaret Thatcher is viewed as one of the most influen
war period. She was also notable f[illegible]eing the first wom
longest serving prime mini[illegible]te[illegible]e twentieth century
eventful tenure, wi[illegible]Falklands War, the miners' str
creating c[illegible]rov[illegible]sy. As we have discussed, Thatcher w
pri[illegible]ters of the UK – she had a highly personalis
[illegible]dership. She also had transformed a struggling Cons
electoral machine.

Almost immediately after entering office, she set about dismantling the el
been ingrained in the British state as early as Clement Attlee's Governmer
successful in bringing about a more free-market capitalist political system

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

and imprinted a personal ideology, one concerned mainly with individua
famously quipped that there was 'no such thing as society' and likened th

Against the Keynesian economic approach of previous decades, this was a
radical economic change, which meant a 'smaller' state, privatisation (mo
services into the private sector), deregulation (removing restrictions on bu
increasing the flexibility of the labour market (in particular the ability of e
employees), including constraints on the power of trades unions.

In the most radical level of privatisation the UK has ever seen, Thatcher be
private investors, arguing that competition would mean that they would
private businesses, and these gains would be passed on to the consumer t
and lower prices. Gas, electricity and water were nationalised industries t
Telecom (BT) was privatised and the initial offering, where more than 50%
sale to the public, set a new record for the largest share issue in the world.

Perhaps the most defining event involving the economy during Thatcher's
strikes, which were a response to the Thatcher Government's colliery (coa
occurred in her second term, beginning in 1984 and not ending until the fo
140,000 miners at one time who were striking, and over 25 million labour
strikes. Speculation suggests that Thatcher wanted to shut down the coal
environmental reasons. However, what is important is that this resulted i
Government and put it in a stronger position than it had been in initially.

This was characteristic of Thatcher's ability to shape the political sphere a
outcome of events. Cabinet reshuffles allowed her to fill spaces with Thatc
dominate the executive relatively unopposed. Norman Tebbit, for instanc
as employment secretary as he supported the case for privatisation. She al
determined and uncompromising leadership style with the Falklands War
contributed to electoral success: Thatcher won three general elections as p
was able to influence the agenda in her favour.

Thatcher, though, is a great example of the fact that domination and contr
not last forever. She stretched too far in attempting to determine policy co
growing discontent among her cabinet. Despite the fact she had filled her
with her ideologically, many had become frustrated with their lack of con
continued to keep her advisers closer than her cabinet. When unpopular p
the poll tax, which sparked riots in 1990, a leadership election was called,
the cabinet was why she was unable to retain power.

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

The Power of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to Dict
Determine Policy: After 1997

Tony Blair

Tony Blair's Labour Party in 1997 won the largest majority in the post-war
This, in the UK, gave him a mandate the likes of which even Margaret
Thatcher did not possess. Blair, along with Thatcher, is seen as one of the
prime ministers who was most able to determine the agenda of his
government. Like Thatcher, he enjoyed electoral success throughout his te
winning three general elections in 1997, 2001 and 2005.

Blair himself imprinted a highly personalised leadership style and ideology,
sign that he was able to control the agenda. His leadership style was one of
pragmatism, and his ideology was unprecedented – 'New Labour' would
provide policies that lay between the left and right. Principles of the free-ma
desire to bridge the gap of inequality throughout his time in office. It was a r
electorally formidable.

The prime minister changed the constitution more than any of his predece
modernise and democratise some outdated laws and practices within the
time was relatively unchallenged. The most notable change, and one he w
Good Friday Agreement, which brought peace between the UK and North
been worked on for at least a decade beforehand). The Human Rights Act
citizens against the state. The House of Lords Act 2000 removed all but 92
of Lords, creating a party balance in the chamber. The Constitutional Refo
eventual creation of a Supreme Court which checked the power of the exe
the Bank of England and the Third Way made for economic stability and p
amendments were made to the constitution by Blair, and this is evidence t
agenda to [illegible] the very core of British politics.

As with Thatcher, however, unpopular policy was the reason for his eventua
the decision to join George W Bush's US forces in intervention in Iraq. This w
was not until it was discovered that the prime minister's main reason for int
imminent threat that Saddam Hussein posed with his weapons of mass dest
been founded upon false intelligence, that the public, and his party, really be

This is what Blair has ultimately been remembered for. Again, with such a
highlights that the prime minister cannot always control the agenda and d
Blair, like Thatcher, ignored his cabinet frequently, particularly as his lead
circle of advisers, though, who were with him for every step, including his
who the two of them agreed would become prime minister.

Talking Poi

**Why are Thatcher and Blair good examples of why prime minist
be able to influence the agenda?**

INSPECTION COPY

COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

Zig Zag Education

David Cameron

David Cameron faced many obstacles that those who c
This was mostly because in 2010, the Conservative Par
majority to form a government. They were forced to er
Democrats – the first in the post-war era – with a new
unity between the parties, Camer[illegible]ad five cabinet p
Liberal Democrats and a r[illegible]or c[illegible]aborative style of lea

Cameron enjoyed some success[illegible] coalition at times did not appea
his ability to control the l[illegible]e agenda. Indeed, the forming of a coalit
office power[illegible]at [illegible]e ministers have the right to exercise. Cabinet re
occurred a[illegible]lthy rate. He also kept a close circle of advisers, who he c
for key decisions. The 'Quad' – Cameron himself, George Osborne, Nick C
operated together in times when decision-making was needed. This is rem
held by Thatcher and Blair. He was able to imprint some of his own ideolo
the Conservatism of old and adding a new, modern flavour. This is why a
advocated, continued alongside key modernising legislation such as same
personally was in favour of, contrary to his party in general. It cannot be s
prime minister powerless in determining events in government.

However, there were certain restraints. Cameron was tied to keeping the c
the cabinet, for instance. This was not a formal limit, but Nick Clegg need
was to change anything about those members of the cabinet. He was critic
many times on the same issue, which was partly due to the tensions betwe
to satisfy and find balance within the government. Cameron was also una
legislation that was in the Liberal Democrat manifesto, such as the AV ref
successful policy admitted by the Conservatives was increasing the incom
Cameron was in support of this. The electoral system would have benefi
shows he was unable to dictate policy all of the time.

The prime [illegible]er [illegible]on the 2015 General Election with a working majority,
this appear[illegible]strengthen his power in his role. However, the 2016 Brexit
referendum changed everything. After campaigning for the case that Britain
should remain in the EU, and the resulting decision to leave, Cameron was f
to resign from office after having lost the support of the public and his own p

Theresa May

Theresa May is a good example of a prime minister who had little ability t
events and determine policy during most of her time in office. Her rise to
of the Conservative government came in the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit
referendum, with a power vacuum left after much of the leadership had b
the Remain campaign. Although May had supported Remain herself, her
leadership campaign focused largely on her ability t[illegible]iver Brexit. This i
that even from the very beginning of her premiership she was responding
events, rather than controlling them.

While her party did po[illegible]jority in Parliament during her first year
slim one. Th[illegible]ss[illegible]of narrow parliamentary defeats, combined with
polling in [illegible]or the Conservatives relative to Labour, persuaded her t
in 2017 by calling a general election and attempting to secure a more comf
was seen by many as a safe bet, with the Conservatives expected to benefi
support since the referendum, the election was disastrous for May. A poo
combined with a successful Labour campaign, led to May losing her party
much of her authority over her colleagues.

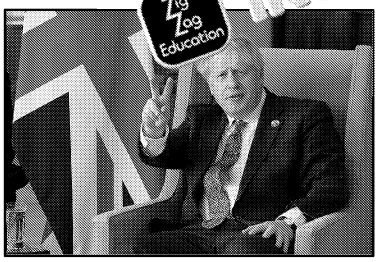
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

Rather than giving her greater ability to dictate events and policy, the 201
May to govern as a minority administration, with the support of the Dem
provided a number of extra constraints on her ability to govern, as passing
would now require the support of groups within Parliament with virtuall
Throughout her premiership, May tried to carefully balance the interests
Eurosceptics, who wanted Britain to withdraw from EU institutions entire
Britain to remain closely aligned with the EU (and
belonging to); and the DUP, who wanted No
after Brexit. As May was unable to
reliant on bringing these th

Ultimately
throughou
Although she secured enough votes to stay on as prime minister, her flags
bring her party together, and was rejected in the biggest parliamentary de
In response, opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn called a parliamentary vote
government, which she narrowly won with the support of DUP MPs. Thr
premiership, several members of her cabinet appeared to be positioning th
and her ability to remove disloyal MPs from cabinet was severely constrai
full-scale rebellion among MPs. In this sense, cabinet members enjoyed a s
of freedom to express themselves how they wished, which further undern

After two more large parliamentary defeats of her flagship Brexit policy, a
discussions with opposition MPs, Conservative MPs began attempting to
prevented a second leadership challenge within 12 months. May responde
minister. It can be said that prior to the 2017 general
events rather than taking charge of them, wh
policy was largely gone, and her ro

Boris Johnson



Immediately following his ascension to Prim
be said to have taken a more drastic approa
managing party divisions, than his predece
expulsion of 21 pro-EU Conservative MPs f
2019, and his controversial decision to pror
the same month, an action that was later de
Supreme Court. Rather than carefully balan
factions within the Conservatives, Johnson appointed a cabinet largely ma
the right-wing of the party, and began to renegotiate a 'harder' Brexit deal

This hard-line approach to party discipline ensured a more unified party
general election in December 2019. Johnson's 2019 election campaign was
campaign in 2017; it focused singularly on the messa
Leave supporters in traditionally Labour voti
large majority of 80, and the UK subs

The somewhat forced
accident or
on his larg
with that of the Chancellor's. The end result was that Johnson ended up w
experienced Chancellor in Rishi Sunak, and as a result is likely to have be
over the direction of the Treasury. It was speculated that Javid – an arch T
enthusiastic about Johnson's 'levelling up' agenda to reduce regional ineq
of public spending it would require.

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED

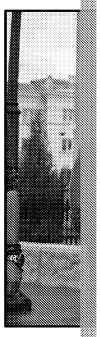
However, Johnson's control over events didn't last long after his general elec
2020 coronavirus pandemic crisis subsequently caused severe disruption to
political developments around the world. The government was unprepared
number of drastic emergency measures in order to ensure the health service
influx of patients. These included bans on social gatherings, the construction
substantial financial support for those whose employment was affected.

The pandemic serves as a clear indication of ho[illegible]y a prime minister, e
having recently won a general election [illegible]se control of events in the face
Johnson was initially on the ba[illegible]k foot when it came to coronavirus, and sper
anticipate the directio[illegible]t crisis would take. The government was frequ
lockdown [illegible]re [illegible]t the last minute, when they would have been more eff
political pr[illegible]placed on the prime minister for miscalculation during the
would be expected, however, given that the pandemic's course was often ha
up politicians around the world.

Johnson's control of events was also undermined by the emergence of a clea
Sunak, which increased the pressure on his performance. To an even greater
chief adviser Dominic Cummings also undermined his control of events, as
brief the media with negative insider information about the government tha

Johnson lost a considerable amount of control over events from November 2
minister attempted to change parliamentary rules to prevent an ally – Owen
from the House of Commons for improper lobbying. The scandal led to a hu
government was forced to U-turn on its position, angering Conservative MP
that parties had been taking place in Downing Street d[illegible]g lockdown, infu
minister's denials that parties had taken place [illegible]ere later disproven, underm

However, Johnson showed a [illegible]strong determination to regain con
period, frequently ma[illegible]e [illegible]n policy announcements or
controversi[illegible]ere [illegible]s that were widely viewed as attempts to
move the n[illegible]genda on from damaging stories. These attempts
were met with mixed success. For example, a major new asylum
policy was announced the day after the prime minister had
received a fine from police for attending a lockdown-breaching
party. The policy – in which refugees were to be deported to
Rwanda – was significant enough to take some of the pressure off
the prime minister. A less successful attempt to control the agenda
came in the wake of the publication of a damaging report on the
Downing Street parties. Johnson attempted to associate the leader
of the opposition, Keir Starmer, with disgraced children's entertainer Jimmy
forced the prime minister into an apology and merely added to questions ab


Johnson

The outbreak of war in Ukraine was one event in 2022 which Johnson manag
a strong supporter of President Volod[illegible]Zelenskyy, Johnson was instrum
leaders to give Zelenskyy m[illegible]sup[illegible]t, and became the first world leader t
capital Kyiv. But alth[illegible]h[illegible]Johnson took charge of the Ukrainian crisis, it wa
domestic p[illegible]l s[illegible]ndals that were piling up – particularly as the war slipp

Ultimately, Johnson could be said to have regained some semblance of politi
2022, despite political pressure that would have probably toppled most lead
showed greater initiative and maintained fewer boundaries than predeces
the agenda, his chaotic leadership style also inflamed the controversies tha

INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED
Zig Zag Education

Keir Starmer

Keir Starmer's Labour Party ousted the Conservatives in the 2024 general election with a 172-seat majority, ending 14 years of consecutive Conservative governance. Elected on the promise to change the UK and reverse years of underinvestment and political instibility, Starmer's approach so far has apparently proven disappointing to the electorate, with plunging personal approval ratings and with the Labour Party slumping to third place in many opinion polls.

Starmer's grip on his party started off tight: in their first month Starmer removed the whip from seven MPs for supporting an SNP amendment to scr the end of 2025 they had promised to get rid of the cap, saying that fiscal con He chose to avoid a larger rebellion looming on overall welfare reform, forcin

Voting intention polling has taken a dive since taking office, from around 45 Labour in May 2024 to less than 20% in January 2026. With such a large majo be able to obstruct Labour's legislative agenda the same way the Conservati minority government. However, Labour MPs – given the government's unp incentives to be loyal to the government's line.

Starmer's ability to dictate events and determine policy has been largely con global political conditions which Labour found themselves in when they toc the September 2024 budget in which chancellor Rachel Reeves set about filli public spending left by the previous government. While announcing big incre also set out tax rises to raise an additional £40 billion, mainly coming from bu

Much like Johnson, Starmer has taken well to the global stage and has playe international politics, particularly around bridging the divides between the T Europe, hosting an unprecedented second state visit to President Trump. Sta step up and defend Ukraine, establishing a 'coalition of the willing' to ensur against Russia (without the United States if necessary) until a peace deal is r

But he continues to face an uncompromising media environment. Largely ri agenda that much of the television channels follow, and social media is large who have found it expedient to be close to Trump's very right-wing adminis to be a major media and polling issue despite post-election net migration fig

Starmer faces the mounting challenges of controlling his party and policy di unfriendly press and social media environment, and a right-wing insurgenc and other elements supported by the world's richest men. All of these factor other, and it is unclear to what extent the problems stem from Starmer's faul political environment. As we write at the start of 2026, Labour still has time t chart a more positive course for government, but only time will tell how Sta up – and whether he ultimately leads that recovery, or is ousted.

Talking Point

What is the cause of Labour's poor polling? Is Starmer's leadersh communication at fault – which is ultimately under his control (or Or is it down to factors that the prime minister can't control well: environment, a struggling economy, and relentless geopolitics?

INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
INSPECTION COPY
COPYRIGHT PROTECTED