

2017 specification
first exams in 2019 (2018 for AS)



UK Prime Ministers 1979–2024

From Thatcher to Sunak
for AS and A Level AQA Politics

Third Edition

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Teacher's Introduction

This pack is designed to provide students with an applied educational resource for the module Prime Minister and the Executive, as part of the AQA Politics A Level.

Remember!

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

Understanding the key individuals, circumstances and events associated with a selection of modern prime ministers is essential for learning about politics in the United Kingdom. Debates surrounding the executive power of the prime minister, the role of cabinet in government, and the constraints on prime ministerial power in government should become familiar to students studying this module. This pack will give vital context to many of these debates, providing students with examples to learn that are relevant to both the module and the wider course.

This pack will cover every prime minister from Thatcher to Sunak, exploring key elements of their premiership that are of relevance to the 2017 AQA specification. This includes, but is not limited to, their intentions prior to entering office, their relationship with the cabinet, the impact of electoral performance on their style of governance and effectiveness, their crisis management and response to major events, their internal party management, and finally their legacy since leaving office. Although this pack provides a detailed overview of each premiership, it is not designed to be comprehensive, instead focusing on events and debates of relevance to the specification.

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 and activities provided are designed to engage students while provoking the critical thought and analysis that will be required in the exam. While studying a multitude of premierships may be of benefit to students, the minimum specification requirement is to study one prime minister from the period 1945–1997, and one prime minister since 1997.

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Margaret Thatcher (May 1979 – November 1990)

Table 1: Key dates in Thatcher's premiership

Date	Event
May 1979	Wins general election with 43-seat majority
April–June 1982	Falklands conflict
June 1983	Re-elected with 144-seat majority
March 1984 – March 1985	Miners' strike
January 1986	Westland affair: Michael Heseltine resigns from cabinet
February 1986	Single European Act signed
June 1987	Third election victory: 102-seat majority
September 1988	Bruges speech on European integration
March 1990	Poll tax controversy
November 1990	Conservative leadership contest; resigns as PM

Introduction

By any standard, Margaret Thatcher was one of Britain's most remarkable prime ministers. She was the first woman to hold the office and, with more than 11 years in Number 10, the longest-serving twentieth-century premier. Unusually among British political leaders, she gave her name to an ideology ('Thatcherism'), which came to define not only her own period of power but also the politics of subsequent decades. Thatcher's governing style was also distinctive. She was enormously driven and focused, and often came across as unsympathetic and domineering, creating opponents as well as admirers.

Thatcher stood for a clearly defined set of policy objectives:

- The ending of the **post-war consensus** which had prevailed since the Labour government of Clement Attlee (1945–51), with a new emphasis on reducing state involvement in the economy and society.
- The reversal of what she regarded as national decline, by taking a strong stance on the country.
- A determination to defend Britain's interests in the European Community (later the EU), which led to her becoming increasingly hostile to the process of integration.

Her record is more controversial than that of any other post-war prime minister. While promoting entrepreneurship, curbing trade union power and raising Britain's world status, critics argue that her legacy was one of social division and unfairness at home, and a decline in Britain's global power.

The examination requires you to be able to discuss the power of the prime minister and cabinet to dictate events and influence policymaking. We will assess Margaret Thatcher in relation to four areas:

- Governing style and relationship with the cabinet
- Crisis management: the Falklands conflict of 1982
- Impact on the economy
- Relationship with Europe

In each case the focus will be on the extent to which Thatcher was in control of events and policy.

Post-war consensus: a period of relative stability between UK political parties, which lasted from 1945 to 1979.

- The mixed economy and ran key industries
- The maintenance of full employment;
- Consultation with trade unions in policymaking;
- The provision of a welfare state



Margaret Thatcher

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Governing style

Thatcher's style of government was intensely personal. She was not afraid to use the powers of the prime ministerial office to the full to pursue her agenda: sacking and reshuffling cabinet colleagues who did not measure up, sometimes belittling them in public, and relying on unelected personal advisers for policy advice. Her aggressive behaviour is partly explained by her 'outsider' status. Thatcher was a woman from a lower-middle-class background, at a time when the Conservative Party leadership was dominated by men. She had to be assertive in order to survive in a challenging political environment.

'If you just
prepared to
you, at any
nothing!' - M

Thatcher used the media to project her image more positively, cultivating friendly relationships with the press, appearing on television, assisted by professional experts from the public relations industry. She was recognisable as 'Maggie' or 'the Iron Lady', a 'presidential' leader standing apart from politicians of the day. She was known for 'hand-bagging' colleagues, interviewers and government ministers using the power of argument and personality to get her way.

Thatcher's position as prime minister was bolstered by the fact that she always had a comfortable majority, which increased by 100 seats in the 1983 general election and fell only slightly in 1987. She served her historic third term. She was helped by the weakness of the opposition. In the early 1980s, Labour embraced left-wing policies which caused a group of moderates to break away and form the Social Democratic Party, which initially formed an alliance with the Liberals and later merged with them to form the Democrats. Labour was unable to appeal to enough centre-ground voters to win the 1987 election.

'Wet' or paternalistic:

favouring the use of the state to soften class differences, e.g. through the provision of welfare support for the poor.

Poll tax: a funding system for local government, entailing a flat-rate tax for each adult, instead of being based on the rental value of a property.

However, we should not exaggerate Thatcher's personal power. In her first two years she had to retain a number of moderate or paternalistic Conservatives in order to maintain a broad base of support. She did not feel confident to promote more like-minded ministers until after the Falklands conflict, and even then it was only after a number of colleagues defied her. High-profile resignations followed over the government in her final years. She lost Nigel Lawson, following a dispute in October 1989, and Geoffrey Howe, following a conflict with another senior figure, Deputy Prime Minister, in November 1990, opening the way for a challenge by Michael Heseltine, to challenge Thatcher for the leadership.

Thatcher's hold over Conservative MPs' loyalties was weakened by her championing of the community charge or 'poll tax', a reform of local government finance which was widely unpopular. There had been riots in central London on the eve of its introduction. Support now ebbed away from her parliamentary party, so that she won the first round of the leadership contest by a narrow margin in a second round. Sensing that a continuation of the competition would cause more damage to the party, she pressed her to resign. The manner of Thatcher's downfall shows that even a dominant leader can lose the support of senior colleagues and the public to continue.

Research

Research the resignations of three key ministers from the Thatcher Government: Michael Heseltine (1989), Nigel Lawson (1989) and Sir Geoffrey Howe (1990). In each case, note why their departures weakened Thatcher's hold on power.

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Crisis management: the Falklands conflict

In April 1982 Argentina invaded and occupied the Falkland Islands, a territory in the South Atlantic to which both it and Britain laid claim. Thatcher's government arguably contributed indirectly to the decision to risk an invasion, since the recent withdrawal of the patrol ship HMS *Endurance* had suggested that Britain lacked interest in the islands.

Once Argentine forces had seized the Falklands, however, Thatcher showed remarkable determination. She dismissed the advice of those who argued that it was impossible to recover an island 8,000 miles from the UK, and secured uncertain support from her allies. Exploiting her close relationship with US President Ronald Reagan to the full, she secured vital American logistical support for the operation. In public statements, Thatcher was unwavering in asserting that the desire of the islanders was 'paramount'. Lacking specialist military expertise, she backed the judgement of her generals, and even authorised the controversial sinking of the Argentine ship, *General Belgrano*. She also created an exclusion zone around the islands.



The recapture of the Falkland Islands strengthened Thatcher's position.

Thatcher showed skill in streamlining the decision-making process at the heart of a small war cabinet of key ministers and defence chiefs, which had real executive power. She maintained political support by regularly reporting back to the full House of Commons.

Victory in the Falklands was declared just 10 weeks after the Argentine landing. It was a dominant, decisive leader. She took the salute at a march-past of the victorious troops. She described the victory as 'the spirit of the South Atlantic' as a template for confronting domestic problems. She was Prime Minister as firmly in control of events, and the ensuing upsurge of popular support led to her election victory the following year.

Impact on the economy

Economic policy was central to Thatcher's vision of Britain's future. In her first term, she tackled inflation, which she regarded as the main obstacle to economic growth. Her strategy was to control the money supply, through a combination of high interest rates and cuts in government spending. The consequence of this, as Table 2 (overleaf) shows, was a toleration of high unemployment, which was politically acceptable to Thatcher as it was concentrated mainly in older industries in England, lowland Scotland and southern Wales, which were not expected to support her. Unemployment slowly came down, but rose again following a mid-1980s economic boom, which led to increased consumer spending.

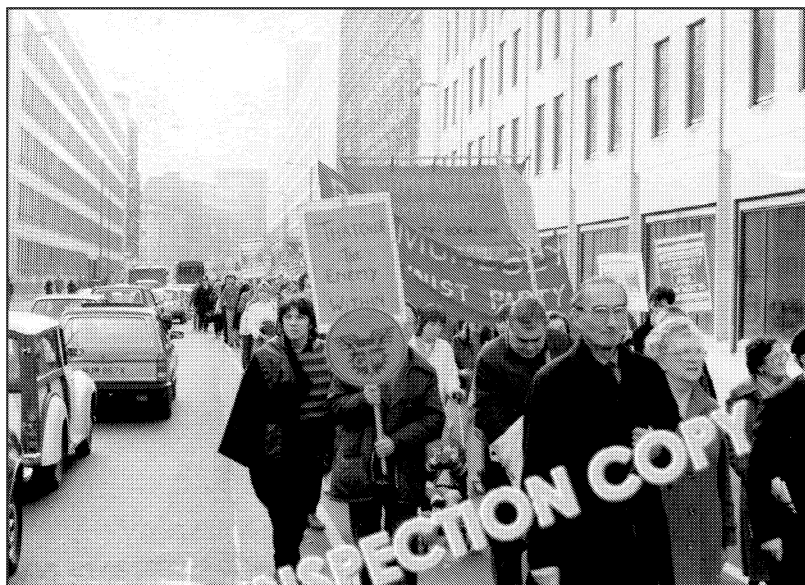
Thatcher had considerable success in reducing the power of the trade unions, which she saw as inhibiting the growth of a vibrant market economy. This was due in part to government legislation aimed at restricting union powers, such as the **closed shop** and the **picketing** of workplaces, and obliging unions to hold ballots to elect their leaders. It was also helped by what many regard as the faulty tactics of her main industrial opponent, the National Union of Mineworkers, in the year-long coal strike of 1984–85, which played into the hands of a prime minister who was determined not to give way to industrial action. In particular, the miners' leader,

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Thatcher's economic policies aroused considerable opposition: here, supporters of the miners' strike protest against her policies.

Arthur Scargill, leader of the National Union of Mineworkers, was on strike against the government. The government used police across the country to prepare for the strike.

Another area of difference was ownership of the major industries. Her government privatised industries such as British Telecom, British Gas, and the electricity supply. This led to increased competition and lower prices. Small investment funds were floated to encourage small investors.

Thatcher's policies did not, however, create the large-scale 'popular capitalism' of which she spoke. The number of shareholders increased from 3 million to 11 million in 1979–90, but relatively few had large portfolios, and many shares were bought up by large city companies.

The BBC's economics editor, Stephanie Flanders, reflected at the time of Thatcher's death that 'the shift in favour of the market is the legacy to remember first. That is around us, and very unlikely to go away'. The negative side of this was a Britain in the 1980s that was prosperous in the south, based on a booming tertiary sector, and a neglected post-industrial north. Thatcher left a legacy of increased choice for consumers and opportunity for innovation. To make itself electable once again, Tony Blair's 'New Labour' in the 1990s embraced her policies, pledging not to increase direct taxation levels or to reverse her privatisation measures.

However, we should not exaggerate the influence of one individual over economic policy. Manufacturing employment had been falling since 1966, long before Thatcher was elected, and the forces of globalisation and new technology were promoting a shift to a service-based economy. Had Labour been re-elected in 1979, it would have had to deal with the problems of inflation and the unions – though no doubt with different policies pursued by Thatcher.

Table 2: Key economic indicators

Date	Unemployment rate (%)	Inflation (Retail Price Index %)
1978	5.4	8.4
1984	11.9	4.6
1990	7.5	9.3

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Question

Use Table 2, and other information drawn from this section, to answer the question. How much difference did Thatcher's premiership make to the British economy?

Relationship with Europe

Thatcher was never enthusiastic about membership of the European Community, had to defend Britain's interests through hard bargaining with other member states, winning a rebate on Britain's contribution to the European budget, achieving this the issue at meetings of the heads of government. At the time, Britain was the second largest contributor to Community finances, even though it was the seventh richest member, and so she was right on her side. The episode demonstrated Thatcher's ability to secure a particular outcome through her personality. She would not be deterred, despite the ill-feeling that her tactics caused.

In the second half of her premiership, however, Thatcher exercised less influence. She signed the 1986 Single European Act, which set out the steps towards the removal of barriers to the free movement of labour, capital, goods and services within the Community. This was the beneficial effect of market forces. But she was dismayed to discover that for Europe was a stepping stone to further integration, to reach the Community, with the goal of a single market on the horizon. She was also concerned by the emerging Community agenda of extending social rights. In a speech at Bruges in September 1988, she declared that she would not take back the freedoms of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level.

As an isolated national leader, Thatcher was powerless to stop the drift of the other member states towards closer economic and political integration. She also found herself in conflict with some members of her own government. The Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, was determined to join the Exchange Rate Mechanism, designed to link member states' currencies together, in order to maintain monetary stability. In October 1989 after Thatcher refused to sack a private economic adviser, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, in opposition to the ERM. Yet a year later, under pressure from her new Chancellor, Geoffrey Howe, and the political establishment and the business community, she reluctantly took Britain into the ERM.

Thatcher remained hostile to the direction that Europe was taking. It was her negative 'No! No! No!' outburst in the House of Commons, that provoked Geoffrey Howe's resignation, leading to her own downfall weeks later. Thatcher's involvement with Europe clearly demonstrated her capacity to control events. The confrontational approach that she took in her later years was a legacy for her party which became politically toxic in the 1990s. The rise of a right-wing European Conservative backbenches, encouraged by Thatcher from the sidelines, created serious problems for her successor. In the longer term, it fed into a longer debate about the future of the UK with opponents of further integration able to claim legitimacy from Thatcher's example.

Activity

Review the information presented in this chapter. Make a table listing examples of Thatcher's attempts to control policymaking and events, and of cases where she was less successful in doing so.

Examples of attempts to control policymaking and events	
Successes	
The Falklands conflict	Her growing isolation of the Labour Party

Talking point

'Thatcher owed much of her success to the strength of her personality. But the down to earth, confrontational approach ultimately contributed to her downfall.'

Is this a fair assessment of Thatcher as prime minister? Explain your answer.

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John Major (November 1990 – May 1997)

Table 1: Key dates in Major's premiership

Date	Event
November 1990	Wins Conservative Party leadership election, becoming PM
January 1991	Start of the Gulf War
December 1991	Secures the Euro 'opt-out'
April 1992	Wins surprise majority in 1992 general election
September 1992	UK crashes out of ERM on 'Black Wednesday'
July 1993	Wins 'confidence' vote on Maastricht Treaty
December 1993	Downing Street Declaration of 1993, the right of Irish self-determination
June 1995	Resigns as Conservative leader to run for re-election, wins
December 1996	Loses parliamentary majority
May 1997	Loses 1997 general election by biggest margin in British political history

Introduction

Taking office from one of the longest serving and most impactful prime ministers in British political history, John Major oversaw a series of defining moments in contemporary British politics. This included taking the Conservative Party into a then unprecedented fourth term in a row in office, managing a prolonged crisis of internal party discipline, the emergence of heated debates over Europe that often dominated his six and a half years in office, and finally his landmark defeat.

A former banker who grew up in Brixton, Major was an unusual prime minister for a number of reasons. He is one of the few people to have held the office who did not go to university, instead leaving school at 16. In addition, upon his appointment to the top job he had been involved in frontline politics for only three years, having entered the cabinet in a junior position in 1987, before promotion to Foreign Secretary in 1989, and then Chancellor in 1990. His unassuming background and equally unlikely rise in politics can be considered to make him a somewhat unconventional prime minister. His tenure provides examples of both unexpected success and dramatic failure, culminating in a general election in which a Labour landslide reduced the Conservative Party to its worst result for almost 100 years.

Major had a considerably 'softer' image and approach to power when compared to Margaret Thatcher. To his supporters, this was due to his honesty, integrity and pragmatism, which symbolised that he was weak and ineffective, and that he commanded little respect from the public or his own MPs. His governments are often remembered as dysfunctional and plagued by corruption and a pervasive sense of decline. However, this overlooks the fact that many key decisions were made by Major, especially during his early years in office, that ensured the country's stability throughout his tenure and that he was not reluctant to take risks in his management of the country.

This profile will assess four different aspects of Major's premiership:

- Early years: forgotten success?
- Conservatives and Europe: a fatal division
- Governing style: managerial or constrained?
- Decline: long march to defeat

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Early years: forgotten success?

Although an unlikely future prime minister, Major quickly ascended from holding to winning the Conservative Party leadership contest in 1990. Crucial to his victory was his predecessor Margaret Thatcher, to whom he had remained loyal prior to her resignation. Leading by up to 20 points in some opinion polls, the Conservatives hoped that a new government would regain support for the party with a general election less than two years away.

An early test of Major's leadership was the onset of the Gulf War in January 1991, leading to a broad coalition of nations to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. Unlike the later conflict, which damaged Tony Blair's reputation, the Gulf War was a military operation with a clear objective: restoring the national sovereignty of Kuwait and reprimanding the aggression of Iraq. In this respect, it was considered a success, completed in under two months, with no British casualties in Iraq and a much lower loss of British life than in the Falklands War under Thatcher, and the ongoing conflict in Northern Ireland.

In addition, Major was credited for encouraging US President George Bush to enforce a no-fly zone over Kurdistan, which was credited as having helped to prevent a genocide. Major was successful in his first big test as prime minister, and his popularity was seen to increase, and the Conservatives now trading top spot in the opinion polls.

On domestic policy, with the passing of legislation to introduce council tax, Major was regarded to have overcome the issue of the highly controversial 'poll tax' which had sparked rioting around the country and contributed to Thatcher's ousting.

Another divisive issue that had proved crucial in the downfall of Thatcher was that of the single European currency. European leaders had been discussing for the past year the implementation of a Europe-wide currency, an idea which received a more lukewarm reception in the UK, and that Major was far more open to the idea of European integration, many in his government were not. While Major was far more open to the idea of European integration, many in his government were not, and Major secured an 'opt-out' from the single currency in 1991, playing the time being. We will go on to see how, as Major's time in office went on, strategy became a far more difficult task.

The Labour Party had held a small but steady lead in many of the polls as the general election approached, there was a sense that the British public were tiring of Conservative rule after 12 years of Labour, which held a large rally in the run-up to the election, appeared in marked contrast to an understated campaign, with the Prime Minister performing a series of impromptu speeches from an upturned soapbox. Pollsters predicted either a hung parliament or a small Labour victory.

In the end, despite a relatively strong showing from Labour, the Conservatives met the expectations, receiving over 14 million votes – the largest number of votes any party has received in British political history. The Conservatives retained their majority, although reduced to a minority government, a result was considered one of the biggest electoral upsets in living memory, and set the stage for Major's time in office.

Talking point

Can Major's initial success in government be attributed simply to a large government? Compare and contrast with another modern prime minister.

Poll tax
controversial
introduced
a financial
burden
on the poor
of the country

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Conservatives and Europe: a fatal division

Major's early successes in government came in the context of a large parliamentary majority for Margaret Thatcher in 1987. Following the 1992 general election, he had to govern with a very slim majority, which changed the dynamics of his government considerably.

The most noticeable change caused by the slim governing majority now experienced by Major was the strengthened voice and power of **Eurosceptics** in the party. Though small in number, this group would be able to defeat the government in Parliament by voting with the opposition. In the context of the passing of the Maastricht Treaty – an international agreement authorising further European integration – this presented a major problem for the government.

Much of the first period of the new government was spent negotiating with Eurosceptics to secure support for the treaty, which had been passed by Parliament in order to pass into law. The 'Maastricht Bill' was held up for over a year, with the stalemate consuming the government's time and undermining Major's credibility and authority in Parliament. When he finally made the issue a vote of confidence, meaning its failure to pass would mean the government could not command a majority in Parliament and a general election would be called, the Conservative Party was performing so poorly in opinion polls at this time, it would be seen as voting to lose their own jobs, and so in the end the vote was passed by 339 votes. Though successful at passing the bill, his tactics had served to intensify the divisions within the party rather than it had supporters.

The issue of Europe was also central to perhaps the biggest event in the premiership known as '**Black Wednesday**'. As Chancellor, Major had advocated the UK joining the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, or ERM, which was designed to ensure the value of different currencies would not deviate too dramatically from each other – a stepping stone to the single currency. Eurosceptical Thatcher to join the ERM, and as prime minister he had made the decision to join. Currency speculators, however, had been betting large sums of money on the pound decreasing the value of the currency and forcing the government to dedicate ever more resources to its maintenance. On 16th September 1992 – only five months since Major's election – the pound was deemed unsustainable and the government was forced to devalue the pound, causing the UK to leave the ERM.

Because Major had staked so much of his political reputation on the ERM, the impact was highly damaging and lasting effect on his credibility, and also damaged the Conservative Party's economic competence. Many argue that this was a turning point in the popularity of Major, which he and his party never really recovered, while it also had the added effect of strengthening Eurosceptic opponents within his party. Black Wednesday, along with the parliamentary divisions within the Conservatives, created the perception of a government suffering from mismanagement – an image that stuck with Major for the rest of his period in office.

Eurosceptics were a small but vocal group within the Conservative Party who opposed the overall pro-European policy, even if they were not against the EU itself.

Black Wednesday was the day in 1992 when the UK crashed out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) and was forced to keep the value of the pound within certain limits, leading to a major loss of confidence in Major's government.

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Governing style: managerial or constrained?

In many respects Major's governing style was defined by his predecessor, in the sense that it was a completely opposite approach to government. Where Thatcher was controlling, strong and confrontational, Major often appeared responsive, uncertain and continually forced to react.

How much of this perception is a product of the two leaders' personalities, or simply the circumstances he governed in, is a matter of debate. It is certainly true that Thatcher's large majority encouraged her governing style considerably, while Major's slim majority for most of his premiership encouraged a more managerial approach. In addition, Major never enjoyed the same level of support as Thatcher had for much of her time in office, performed poorly in opinion polls for most of his premiership, and had the support of sections of the tabloid media that had been fiercely pro-Thatcher. All of these factors contributed to a lack of credibility and legitimacy as prime minister, and undermined his ability to govern effectively.

Not everything can be put down to circumstances, however. It was clear that Major was a pragmatist, and often seemed more interested in managing events than controlling them. One of the things that attracted widespread criticism was the 'cones hotline' – a barely used government hotline which people could phone to enquire as to why road cones had been placed on stretches of road in which construction was not taking place. Although facetious, it was a problem with Major's premiership: a lack of vision. What was it that Major wanted to achieve? He simply possessed it? Once again it did not help that his predecessor – a determined and strong leader – was easily be characterised in such stark contrast.

The Troubles: the conflict between unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland which began in the 1970s and ended in the 1990s.

In at least one respect, however, Thatcher was widely regarded as welcome in Ireland. Ireland had claimed thousands of British soldiers throughout the 1980s, and Thatcher could be said to have contributed to the conflict rather than helped to alleviate it.

Major's approach to the Troubles was to open peace talks with the IRA, and the 1993 'Downing Street Declaration' was a significant achievement in unionist and republican relations, helping to kick-start the peace process. The declaration affirmed the right of Irish people to self-determination, and an acceptance that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom. It was clear that a majority of the people wanted this outcome. The declaration changed the focus of the conflict towards negotiation, and provoked an IRA ceasefire. In this respect, Major's tendency towards compromise can be said to have contributed to a significant policy achievement.

In addition, Major's pragmatic approach to economic management following Black Wednesday have been successful in achieving sustained economic growth and a small budget deficit. However, Labour pointed to a declining tax take and as a result a poor quality of public services.

Activity: managerial or constrained?

Make a table with two columns as shown below. Use this to categorise some of the challenges Major faced while Prime Minister. Then answer the question: What was a more significant factor in Major's failure as 'weak': his personal attributes, or the circumstances in which he governed?

Challenge	Due to circumstances

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Decline: long march to defeat

Major's government is often said to have never recovered from the reputational damage of Black Wednesday, and the following five years often felt like a long period of decline for what was widely portrayed as an unpopular, outdated and incompetent government. While infighting over Europe contributed to this, a number of other factors were significant too.

Chief among these is what became known as 'sleaze' – a series of high-profile scandals involving Conservative MPs which undermined the credibility of the party's suitability for government. A series of salacious sex scandals and extramarital affairs attracted attention in the media and created a sense of moral ineptitude. Furthering this perception were scandals involving corruption, with some MPs accused of failing to declare conflicts of interest or being paid to ask certain questions in Parliament. Two high-profile Conservatives, peer Lord John Birt and minister Jonathan Aitken, were later convicted of perjury and imprisoned. While the perception of corruption, the image created of this government was one of immorality and dishonesty, which significantly damaged its popularity.

'The Conservative Party must make its choice. Every leader is leader only with the support of his party. That is true of me too.' – John Major

In addition, Major came under criticism of his own party throughout his tenure, leading to clear frustration. Major's former deputy, Michael Howard, described him as 'being in office for 10 years and looking weak and hopeless'. In addition, the perception of corruption further undermined his credibility.

Major's discipline of those members critical of him not only encouraged more criticism, but also damaged his image as a weak leader, unable to control his party. Such constant criticism and questioning led Major to dramatically resign as leader of the Conservative Party in 1995 in order to make way for John Major, which he entered as a candidate, telling his critics to 'put up or shut up'. He won the election, but over 100 Tory MPs had failed to support his leadership, either by abstaining or by voting against him.

A sense of decline and lack of credibility as leader was added to by consistently poor election results in local and European contests throughout Major's tenure, as well as a series of by-election losses. The Conservatives lost all 12 seats they were defending in by-elections and in several cases losing safe seats dramatically, with complete collapses in their vote share in some areas. Alongside MPs defecting from the party for various reasons, Major's government lost the 1997 general election in May 1997 and became a minority government. This further cemented the perception of a weak and unable to govern.

A final factor in the long decline in Major's credibility was media opposition. Between the 1992 and 1997 elections, many newspapers which traditionally support the Conservative Party turned their allegiance to Labour. Labour leader Tony Blair had considered *The Sun's* support a crucial factor in Labour's defeat, and went to great efforts seeking the support of Rupert Murdoch. Media coverage increasingly portrayed Major as outdated, weak and boring, in opposition to the modernising image of Blair. With Major facing criticism from his own party and the media, and collapsing in opinion polls and by-elections, the Labour landslide in 1997, despite being a surprise to most.

Despite the unpopularity of Major's premiership at the time, Major's legacy has improved in recent years. His government's role in ending the economy from a recession to growth along with the recovery of the economy has been seen in a more positive light since the financial crisis of 2007/09. Similarly, his handling of the divisions over Europe has been viewed more favourably after the Brexit crisis that followed. His leadership of the party from 2016 to 2019. In addition, it can be argued that his technocratic and pragmatic approach is also viewed more favourably in contrast to the focus on personality politics that has followed. More than this, he is perhaps most commonly regarded as the 'forgotten prime minister' of the 1990s, a premiership located in between two figures with far more enduring legacies – and a lack of passion among their supporters and detractors alike.

Talking point

Which factor caused Major more problems in office: a lack of party support, or a lack of credibility?

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Tony Blair (May 1997 – July 2007)

Table 1: Key dates in Blair's premiership

Date	Event
May 1997	Wins historic landslide election victory for Labour
April 1998	Good Friday Agreement signed
October 1998	Human Rights Act receives royal assent
June 2001	Second landslide victory
October 2001	War in Afghanistan launched following 9/11 attacks
February 2003	1+ million people march against Iraq war
March 2003	War in Iraq launched after parliamentary approval
July 2003	Weapons expert David Kelly commits suicide
May 2005	Third election victory but significantly reduced majority
July 2005	Seven London bombings
January 2006	Interviewed by police in Downing Street over 'cash for honours' scandal
June 2007	Resigns as prime minister

Introduction

Tony Blair's stated aim as prime minister was to do politics differently: turn governing into a task that reflected a new modernity at the turn of the millennium – a moment in time which he was particularly interested in. This was a politics that for Blair was beyond ideology, and rejected the political debates and struggles of the twentieth century. Rebranding his party as 'New Labour' and opposing the social divisions of both class and nationalism, Blair positioned himself as neither left nor right but firmly in the centre, and sought mass appeal from across the electorate.

Yet in many ways his approach – rather than new – often resembled that of one of his predecessors: in many aspects of his governing style, his desire to reshape his party, and also often even his policy positions, Margaret Thatcher once called Blair her greatest legacy. Indeed, some even cite Blair's determination to hang on to power for just an extra few months at the end of his tenure as an effort to emulate what only Thatcher had done before him in the modern era: govern as prime minister for a full decade.

Blair's premiership was eventful and significant, though arguably its achievements expect from such dramatic electoral success, at least when compared to some of his predecessors. In the early years, constitutional reform seemed to codify Blair's new politics as far as 1997 might have promised. On economic policy, Blair deviated sharply from his predecessors, insisting that his vision of public/private enterprise was both Britain's and the world's. On the international stage that Blair readily expressed his confidence; buoyed by early success in Kosovo, Blair perceived himself as global peacemaker: a self-perception that was challenged by the Iraq War and its ill-fated aftermath.

This profile will assess four different aspects of Blair's premiership:

- Early reforms
- Governing style: prime minister or president?
- Foreign policy and the 'War on Terror'
- The long resignation

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Early reforms

Blair's astonishing election victory in 1997 made him, in theory, one of the most powerful men in British history. With a massive majority of 179, and meaningful Conservative opposition, it was virtually inconceivable that anything Blair proposed could be rejected.

Indeed, most of the limitations placed on Blair in his early years in power seem to make sense that in some areas he was content in carrying on the work of the previous Conservative governments. Nowhere was this clearer than on economic policy, in which Blair largely accepted the policies introduced by Thatcher and deepened by Major: low taxes, low spending and a market-led approach to the running of public services. Far from reversing policies of privatisation, Blair has generally liked – he embraced and extended them, from the privatisation of air traffic control to the internal market in the NHS. Other policies, such as introducing tuition fees for universities, were in considerable contrast with the socialist vision traditionally espoused by Labour.

Tough language on law and order, on benefit fraud and asylum seekers furthered the Conservative image of the new Labour government. It could sometimes be hard to tell whether Blair sought by these policies because he believed in them, or because he simply sensed they were what the public wanted. Seen not just as a part of, but as the defining figure of, the 'zeitgeist': an abstract concept representing the ideas of a particular place at a particular time. And in this sense he was certainly successful.

Where he did differ greatly from his predecessors was in regards to constitutional reform. Under Conservative rule, many political institutions were widely regarded as outdated and inefficient. For the nations – a Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly – went hand in hand with the Northern Ireland, and substantially altered the way power was distributed in Britain. The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act, which sought to protect workers' rights, had been exhaustively blocked by the Conservative government. The Human Rights Act passed into law by Blair. As was the Human Rights Act – a milestone in civil rights legislation, allowing human rights cases to be seen by UK courts and not just on the European Court of Human Rights. While policy may have largely stayed the same, there were headline policies that differed significantly from the offer: the minimum wage, for instance, and greatly increased public money for child care.

Despite Blair's large majority, however, other promised reforms were less successful. The Electoral Commission, for instance, was considerably watered down, while a commitment to electoral reform was never fully implemented. Many other attempts at reforming politics, such as the introduction of regional assemblies and directly elected mayors, also failed. While it would be wrong to characterise Blair's government as unsuccessful, some critics argued that it lacked the ambition to match its mandate. The success achieved in 1997. Compared to the Attlee Government's first term from 1945 to 1951, or even the Thatcher government from 1979 to 1983, it could be said that Blair managed to do less with more.

Such an approach certainly didn't hurt his electoral prospects, however – and perhaps that was the point. In the 2001 general election, Blair maintained his enormous majority, with a net loss of only 10 seats, and a dramatically reduced turnout.

Activity: Blair's early reforms

Make a table with two columns as shown below. Using your own research, list the reforms introduced by Blair among Blair's early reforms. Use this to answer the questions: To what extent was Blair's government limited in its reforms? If there were limits, what were they?

Successful reforms	Failed reforms

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Governing style: prime minister or president?

Blair's governing style was much remarked on during his time in office, and often resembling that of a president than a prime minister. From the outset, Blair set at position by reforming the cabinet office and bringing it under tighter control from rejected the discursive decision-making of cabinet and Parliament, and instead promoted allies and special advisers in his decision-making. Blair had a tendency to promote the Lords and then important government posts, such as his former flatmate Charles number of cabinet-level positions. Others, like Baroness Amos, Lord Sainsbury and friends and allies given peerages and vital roles in government. Unelected persons Campbell became powerful and well known, and were often disliked by civil servants. The treatment of the executive was in this sense much like that of a presidential branch of the legislature, with its members appointed by the leader rather than elected by members. Clare Short and Mo Mowlam both publicly rebuked Blair's style of government of cabinet government and to his apparent disdain for Parliament. Blair's ability to allies could be said to demonstrate the relative lack of factional competition within

Blair's leadership was also a highly personalised affair to a far greater extent than his predecessors, and in a manner far more closely resembling that of a president. Blair often tried to come across as more of a celebrity than politician, and he pounced on events such as the death of Princess Diana and spoke for the nation, in his own words (and on this occasion to the detriment of the Queen, who was perceived as less responsive to the public mood than Blair). The term 'spin' was widely used by the media throughout Blair's time in office to refer to a massively increased emphasis on how the press were reporting events in government, as opposed to a focus on government itself. Reflecting this, the budget of the press office had doubled by 2001. Blair enjoyed broad support from the media during his time in office, including from the supporting newspapers such as *The Sun*, the *Daily Express* and *The Times*.

Spin: re-emphasised the president-like aspects of Blair's leadership, accused of heavily influencing the version of government presented to the public.



Blair's leadership style was highly personalised and media-orientated. He was often described as 'presidential' in his approach to government.

In many respects, Blair required his own party, given his high personal popularity. Indeed, his rebranding of the Labour Party was a conscious attempt to distance it from its past. By 1998 some of the critics of Blair's system as 'Napoleonic', called him 'an elected monarch'. Blair's government in 1997 with less than a majority in Parliament is often cited as an example of a government open to the accusation of 'dictatorship' in which a powerful leader controlled without representing a voting population. This could be contrasted with the 2001 general election, where Labour won 55% of seats on just

In this sense it should be remembered that Blair's dominating and heavily personalised style was only possible due to his exceptionally large parliamentary majorities. As we will see, this slipped noticeably when he was faced with a reduced majority towards the end of his tenure. Blair's style started to become more of an obstacle than a strength.

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Foreign policy and the 'War on Terror'

Two early events in Blair's premiership were highly formative in his transition from aspiring international statesman. In 1998, building on the work of the Major Government, the Good Friday Agreement for Northern Ireland was greatly accelerated by the signing of the landmark Good Friday Agreement, which was passed by referendum in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, brought an end to the conflict and created a system of power-sharing, in which representatives of the nationalist and unionist communities governed together. The IRA decommissioned their weapons and, the conflict ended.

The following year, Blair played a critical role in organising NATO forces to intervene in Kosovo, seeking to prevent genocide similar to that seen in Bosnia three years earlier. Blair's subsequent visit to Kosovo, which was repelled, saw him receive a hero's welcome, with schools chanting his name in celebration. The conflict in Ireland finally seeming secure, and the conflict in Yugoslavia appearing to be over, Blair felt clearly empowered in his approach to foreign policy.

Two years later, the attacks of September 11th redrew the West's perception of conflict and security. In response, Blair announced that 'Whatever the technical or legal issues about a declaration of war, the fact is we are at war with terrorism.' This 'War on Terror', as it subsequently became known, came to dominate much of the remainder of Blair's premiership, as it did his counterpart in the USA, President George W Bush, with whom he formed a close relationship. Alongside NATO allies, the War in Afghanistan began in October 2001 – drawing both the UK and USA into a long and deadly conflict that would claim the lives of hundreds of British troops.



Blair was often criticised domestically for his perceived as having an overly close relationship with US President George W Bush.

The perception of the War on Terror, and the relationship between Blair, Bush, and the USA, was a central theme in their 'War on Terror'. Blair's support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a clear example of the close relationship between the two leaders. Blair's administration was heavily criticised for its role in the invasion, and many questioned whether the connection between Hussein and the 9/11 attacks was a valid justification for the invasion.

As Blair sought to make the case for military action in the UK, echoing American calls for the destruction of weapons of mass destruction that posed a threat to the West, it became clear that the UK was moving towards another conflict. Significant public opposition, marked by the largest protest in British history, with over 1 million participants, alongside a large parliamentary rebellion of 139 of his own MPs, and the United Nations, didn't shake Blair's conviction that war in Iraq alongside the USA was necessary. The invasion began in March 2003.

Although the initial invasion was over within days, it quickly became clear that little progress had been made in the occupation phase of the war, and the USA and UK were unprepared for the violence. In addition, a failure to find any weapons of mass destruction stored in Iraq underlined the lack of justification for the invasion.

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war, and piled pressure on Blair, who was accused by some of fabricating evidence. The suicide of David Kelly, a weapons inspector who had allegedly questioned the claim that Iraq was known to possess weapons of mass destruction, could be seen as so much more evidence against the Blair Government. Blair had used the power of his conviction to take the country to war, and now he began to be asked about the true purpose of the conflict, trust among the electorate began to erode, and trust turned increasingly to anger as the number of British troops killed continued to rise and clear objectives – began to drag on.

On 7th July 2005, four bombs exploded on trains and a bus in central London, killing 26 people and injuring over 700. This highlighted that the threat of terrorism had arrived in the UK. Although Blair's response and the government briefly performed better in opinion polls, the view of the New Labour government transformed dramatically. By the 2005 general election, the image of a new, exciting and optimistic emergence of a far more dangerous world in which the UK had become engaged in a long-term conflict. Policies had taken on a more authoritarian tone. Blair had alienated many of Labour's traditional supporters, his military action in Iraq, while trust in him and the general public was also declining.

Talking point

What unconventional techniques did Blair use when governing? How does this compare with conventional prime minister?

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The long resignation

Much had been written in the preceding decade about the arrangement that Blair Chancellor Gordon Brown. When Blair had stood for Labour leader in 1994, Brown was his favourite before declining to run and supporting Blair's campaign. The perception of Blair handing over the premiership to Brown after two terms, meaning Blair's decision to stand for election was a point of tension between factions in the party. Although Labour won the 2001 election again, results were disappointing, with their majority cut from 167 to 66, and a significant loss of seats (only just ahead of the Conservatives). The Liberal Democrats, who were anti Blair, were gaining seats and votes from disaffected Labour supporters who were unhappy with Blair's leadership of the party in government. The loss of support was widely attributed to Blair's decision to remain prime minister, his authority was severely reduced.

Over the next two years the question of how long Blair could remain prime minister was a major issue. Much of the parliamentary Labour Party were keen to see Brown ascend to the top of the party as his popularity rapidly declining due to the ongoing fallout from Iraq. The media that had once been supportive of Blair now at best cautious about the Prime Minister's future and at worst openly hostile with regard to Blair's leadership style and his controversial relationship with the United States and his colleagues. In the end, only Blair's promise to leave office within a year, made at the 2006 Labour Party Conference, prevented an open leadership challenge. His final year in office was plagued with corruption allegations in which he was accused of handing out peerages (membership of the House of Lords) in exchange for money. By this point the Conservatives were consistently ahead in opinion polls, sometimes by as much as 10 points, and a poor showing in the 2007 local elections saw Gordon Brown elected Labour leader unopposed, and become prime minister in June 2007.

In many ways, Blair had the opportunity to become the most powerful of modern prime ministers. He experienced the power that comes from an enormous parliamentary majority, the support of the opposition, and general popularity with the voters. But it is also true that Blair felt the same pressures that can apply to a prime minister, most notably with the dramatic changes in international relations. Blair experienced the two-sided nature of personality politics, whereby the media and public opinion can position, but his own reputation suffered badly when he misjudged the public mood.

And it is perhaps true that the office changed him too – where once his primary (arguably only) concern was popularity, by 2003 his conviction to support US foreign policy was so strong that even the unpopularity of the decision couldn't change his mind. His confidence and optimism were such a defining part of his leadership style, but also perhaps a critical weakness as his popularity waned. His legacy is widely considered to have deteriorated since he left office, in large part due to the foreign policy disaster that he is regarded to have become. In addition, Blair is both disliked on the political right for his policies promoting large amounts of migration from Eastern Europe in the mid 2000s and on the left for his advocacy of free-market economic policies and military interventionism. The significance of Blair's premiership is that both sides of the political spectrum define their opposition to him. It remains hard to imagine a prime minister capable of delivering electoral success to

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Gordon Brown (July 2007 – May 2010)

Table 1: Key dates in Brown's premiership

Date	Event
June 2007	Becomes prime minister after resignation of Tony Blair
July 2007	Praised for response to failed terror attacks in Glasgow
September 2007	Northern Rock faces a bank run
October 2007	Decides not to call snap election
February 2008	Northern Rock nationalised
April 2008	Compensation promised in U-turn on scrapping of 10p
13 th October 2008	Government bails out collapsing banks RBS, HBOS and
24 th October 2008	UK enters recession
June 2009	Minister's expenses are published, causing outrage
April 2010	Recorded calling Labour voter 'a bigoted woman' while
6 th May 2010	Labour come second to the Conservatives in the general
11 th May 2010	Resigns as prime minister

Introduction

After more than a decade as Chancellor, Gordon Brown became prime minister with the heart of government than any other British premier in the modern era. Such a role required for what became a tumultuous three years in international events. Brown was praised for steering a course through the global financial crisis, and providing leadership for the international community, as many of the world's biggest financial institutions collapsed. However, he is widely remembered for his personal failings – in particular his inability to maintain a positive light in media appearances, especially in comparison to his more telegenic predecessor.

While Brown was often judged as good in a crisis, his ability to negotiate the everyday policy was less strong. A lack of public and party support led to a series of situations where dithering and U-turns served to undermine his authority and credibility in the job. With a global economy in freefall, added to a sense that Brown's premiership was the end of an era of stability in British politics. Whereas once the New Labour project was seen as solid and popular, under Brown it suddenly appeared surprisingly fragile.

This profile will assess three different aspects of Brown's premiership:

- Domestic policy
- Governing style
- Global financial crisis

'I have
presided
over
policy
celebrations
governments

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Domestic policy

Brown faced a number of incidents in his initial months in power which he was dealt with effectively. In particular, a failed double terrorist plot which took place just days after he took office provided an opportunity to showcase a change in tone from the previous administration. His understated response, dismissing the incidents as crimes of little importance, was seen as a sign that he had appeared to have tired of Blair's dramatic and grandstanding approach to the issue. One of the factors that helped Brown in his early months is a united party – which had elected him unanimously – and a large improvement in the opinion polls dubbed the 'Brown bounce'.

Nevertheless, it did not take long for the so-called Brown bounce to be worn away by weeks of speculation over whether the Prime Minister was planning to call an early election for late 2007. As Brown allowed speculation to continue without confirming or denying the rumours, many of his policy announcements and media appearances began to be judged in the context of a pre-election campaign. This was particularly badly when Brown travelled to Iraq to meet British troops during the Conservative Party conference. Former Prime Minister John Major accused Brown of 'marching to the drumbeat of an election rather than to the drumbeat of solid, proper government'.



Brown was seen during his contribution to the Iraq war.

Although Brown had initially intended to call an election that he was widely regarded as likely to win, worsening opinion poll performance due to the rampant speculation slowed his decision further, and in the end he surprisingly announced that no election would take place until the end of his term in 2010. Though deciding not to call an election that had never actually been announced may seem trivial, it cemented Brown's reputation as indecisive, chaotic and lacking in conviction – a public image that he struggled to shake throughout his premiership, especially when combined with later U-turns. It also cemented his reputation as a man who would stubbornly remain in power for the following years.

U-turn: when a government publicly reverses its position on a certain policy. U-turns are seen as negative as they make a government look indecisive.

A number of high-profile U-turns soon followed. One of the most significant was the decision to scrap the 'Pensions Protection Fund' – a scheme that had been promised to protect the UK up to the Lisbon Treaty – a further step in the process of calling a referendum, which had been promised by the previous government. More notably, the scrapping of the 'Pensions Protection Fund' – which disproportionately affected low earners – was eventually persuaded him to backtrack, announcing that the scheme would be reinstated. In addition, his support for extending the maximum period for which suspects could be held without charge to 42 days met with significant opposition, and he eventually dropped even after exhaustive efforts.

Many of these decisions were widely considered to be embarrassments of Brown's credibility among the public and his party suffered accordingly.

Brown did successfully follow up on constitutional reform that Blair had failed to complete by abolishing the 'Law Lords' – the highest court in the UK – and replacing it with a Supreme Court. Though a significant reform, this was overshadowed by the impact of the MPs' expenses scandal, in which MPs from all parties were found to have claimed money for items that were clearly not job-related, leading to widespread outrage. Brown's response to the scandal was deemed slow and out of touch, in part because his decision to be reluctant to punish his own MPs.

Activity: Assessing Brown

Make a table with two columns as shown below. Use this to list the constraints on Brown's power, as well as the mistakes he made. Use this to answer the question: To what extent did Brown's tenure as prime minister live up to the expectations of the public?

Limits on Brown's power	Mistakes

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Governing style

Although he was accustomed to the role of Chancellor of the Exchequer, it immediately as prime minister would approach government in a far more business-like way. He did, and that was to listen to the people about issues such as Iraq and the NHS. This suggested that Blair's legacy would be ignored, but it soon became obvious that Brown did his own way, and that his approach to the relationship with the USA and Europe was. In this respect, Brown was less interested in grabbing sensational headlines and behaviour that Blair had favoured, but instead focused on the management of government. He spoke to voters in politics in general and the Labour Party in particular.

Also in contrast to Blair, Brown publicly spoke of his desire for 'A Government of All the Talents'. This represented a shift in governance in two regards. Firstly, Brown sought to include not necessarily Labour supporters or allies in the running of government. This was even the case with Democrats, to whom he privately offered some government positions, though his approach was not always successful. Secondly, he sought to restore the role of cabinet government after the role of cabinet had been diminished in Blair years. He encouraged ministers to make more decisions through discussion, rather than through the opportunity to announce decisions already made. His preference for cabinet was not always successful, although Brown still remained heavily reliant on a few close allies, notably Ed Balls.

Perhaps the biggest contrast between the two leaders, however, is their approach to public appearances. Blair lacked the charisma that had helped bring Blair to power, and his premiership is a testament to the importance of this to the popularity of a prime minister. Despite a great deal of media appearances, Brown consistently failed to inspire voters on a personal level, and was often perceived across as grumpy, distant and awkward in public. Brown often resisted the personal approach that Blair had taken on the business of government and more formal matters. On those occasions when he did attempt to engage in Blair-style politics, such as by releasing videos on YouTube, it was often perceived as forced and inauthentic. It did not help that Conservative leader of the opposition, David Cameron, was a relations expert keen to emphasise personality-style politics, whose youthful and personable approach created an image of someone far more comfortable with public scrutiny. The new Labour leader, Ed Clegg, also projected a similar image.

In this sense, Brown could be said to be a victim of his era. Previous prime ministers were expected to deploy the personal approach demanded of Brown. It could be said that the presidential style introduced by Thatcher and greatly intensified by Blair, alongside the increased media scrutiny of more trivial presentational matters, caught out a politician who was not comfortable operating under the more formal expectations of the 1960s or 1970s.

The loss of media support that Blair had enjoyed also worked against Brown. Rupert Murdoch's News International, which had stayed loyal to Blair throughout his tenure, switched its support to the Conservatives. The media thus amplified the public image of Brown as dithering, awkward and not suited to the role. A moment in the 2010 general election campaign saw Brown, it is recorded, unknown to the public, had been discussing immigration with 'a big old woman'. The incident received heavy media coverage and Brown was accused of being contemptuous towards the electorate and forced to apologise. The party saw it as another example of Brown creating an embarrassing situation by his lack of awareness that he had become a moral liability.

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Talking point

What does Gordon Brown's experience as prime minister tell us about the importance of personal presentation in sustaining popular support?

Global financial crisis

The major event that occurred during Brown's premiership was the global financial crisis. The global economy entered **recession**. This was a major issue for the New Labour government, in particular, as increased public spending on services such as schools and the NHS was needed to support a continually growing economy.

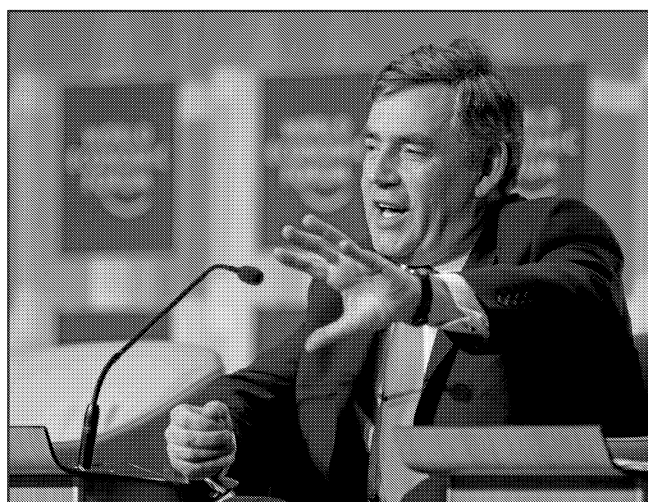
It also presented a more pressing problem: if the banks collapsed, then people's saving could disappear, investment would dry up and the economy would be plunged into chaos. Northern Rock, one of the worst affected banks, experienced the first **bank run** in the UK for over 150 years in September 2007. Brown's government took the dramatic decision to bring the bank into public ownership, thus transferring the private debt into public debt and preventing the bank collapsing. As the crisis spread, the government took the same approach for other troubled banks, and Brown promoted his approach on the world stage as the immediate solution to the crisis, taking charge of international coordination in the response to the crisis by hosting at the G20 summit of powerful nations in London in 2009. As was often the case with Brown, he managed to turn even this success into a much-remarked-upon public gaffe, once declaring in Parliament, by Freudian slip, that he had 'saved the world' (having meant to say 'saved the banks').

Bank run: when a bank's branches withdraw their funds, leading to the bank collapsing.

Bailout: the use of government funds to prevent the collapsing of a business.

Recession: when the economy is reduced.

Credit crunch: a shortage of credit. Brown years to go, had stopped lending, the financial crisis.



Brown was more successful on the world stage than domestically.

While Brown's leadership was widely regarded as critical to the initial global crisis, his handling of the almost collapsing and the added to a prevailing sense of incompetence. The recession was embarrassing for Brown. He promised that he would end the economic cycle, yet he had to bail out the banking sector, which

For all of Brown's personal popularity, the policy put forward by the Conservative government was that Labour had overspent on its finances and overspent on its government spending. The levels of government

financial crisis and subsequent recession, public opinion was clear, and Brown's leadership was not uppermost in most people's minds. The result in the end was a hung parliament. Labour's poor performance in achieving only 29% of the popular vote (almost as bad as the result, and worse than Labour's dramatic loss in 2019). The Conservatives, however, and with the Liberal Democrats demanding Brown's resignation as a precursor to a new election, his short tenure as prime minister was over.

Activity

Compare Gordon Brown with another prime minister who faced a major international deal with it, and did it derail their premiership to the same extent?

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David Cameron (May 2010 – Jul

Table 1: Key dates in Cameron's premiership

Date	Event
May 2010	Forms coalition with Liberal Democrats
May 2011	Referendum on Westminster voting system
July 2012	Conservative backbench rebellion on Lords reform
July 2013	Passage of same-sex marriage law
September 2014	Scottish independence referendum
May 2015	Wins 12-seat majority in general election
June 2016	UK votes to leave the EU in referendum; Cameron and

Introduction

David Cameron formed a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats in May 2010. This was the first coalition at Westminster since the end of the Second World War. In many observers' eyes, he was able to form a purely Conservative government after winning the 2015 general election – the first for his party since John Major in 1992. Cameron had hoped to serve a full term, memorably comparing terms as prime minister to eating Shredded Wheat in a Mark Twain 'wonderful, but three might just be too many'. As it turned out, he left Downing Street in July 2016, after failing to persuade a majority of the British people to vote in favour of staying in the EU referendum. This event brought his political career to an abrupt close.

As prime minister, Cameron created a calm and orderly working environment in Number 10, discharging government business and chairing meetings. Accusations that he was 'chillaxing' (a term often used of him) were not fair. However, he seems to have had a clear vision of a prime minister beyond promoting economic recovery and providing stable administration. His leadership of the party in opposition had been inclusive, liberal conservatism. His leadership of the party in opposition had been by modernising its image and broadening its appeal. In government, however, the philosophy on policymaking was not always easy to identify. Cameron has often been criticised for coming from a privileged upper-middle-class background, for having a sense of entitlement. It was important for him to hold power than to do things with it. He once reportedly said of becoming prime minister, 'because I think I'd be good at it.'

Cameron's approach was essentially a managerial approach – managing the relationship with the media, handling different factions within his own party and seeking a second term in 2015. His role in keeping the coalition together for five years – something which few commentators predicted – formed a significant part of his legacy. Yet ultimately his legacy has been overshadowed by the disunity brought about by the Brexit vote, both in Parliament and the country.

We will examine Cameron as prime minister in relation to three areas:

- Governing style and relationship with the cabinet
- Impact on domestic policy
- The EU referendum

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Governing style

The key fact about Cameron's position after the 2010 general election was that the Conservatives were short of a majority and, therefore, had to conclude a coalition agreement with the Liberal Democrats. As prime minister, Cameron's power was limited in ways that would not apply in the event of a Conservative government. The key relationship was with Clegg, who held a unique position as the first deputy prime minister since previous deputies, such as Geoffrey Howe in the Thatcher Government, or John Major in the Major Government, held office by right as a party leader. He could have collapsed the government by withdrawing his support, but admittedly this was always a 'nuclear option' to which he was unlikely to resort.

One consequence of forming the coalition was that it compromised the prime minister's power to hire and fire ministers. Five of the 22-strong cabinet were Liberal Democrats, and they were represented at junior ministerial level across most government departments. Cameron could not sack a Liberal Democrat minister without Clegg's approval. He also had to overlook the views of high-ranking coalition partners. Business Secretary Vince Cable survived in office after Cameron's minister's approach to immigration policy was deemed 'unwise' – something which would not have been tolerated in a single-party government.



Cameron's power as coalition prime minister was restricted by the need to work with Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg.

Coalition also meant that Cameron had to adopt an unadulterated Conservative policy on many issues. The two parties were reconciled through a series of bilateral meetings between Cameron and Clegg, and an inner group known as the 'quad', which included Cameron, Clegg, Deputy Prime Minister (Nick Clegg) and Chief Secretary to the Treasury (George Osborne). Liberal Democrats were able to moderate some of Cameron's policies. In some cases, they kept cherished Conservative policies. For example, the plan to replace the Human Rights Act with a 'British Bill of Rights' was abandoned.

The Liberal Democrats' influence on the Conservative agenda was a source of resentment among Conservative MPs who had wanted a more right-wing agenda. As the coalition had not won an outright majority, a number of MPs were willing to rebel on key issues. The largest rebellion was in July 2012, when 91 Conservatives voted against the proposed changes to the House of Lords, which were strongly supported by the Liberal Democrats. This provoked the Prime Minister to announce changes for elections to the Commons, aimed at reducing the number of seats from 73 to 60, which would have favoured the Conservatives.

Clearly Cameron was frustrated in important respects by the presence of his coalition partners. It is clear that he deeply regretted his inability to introduce an unambiguous Conservative agenda. However, Cameron's liberal instincts corresponded with those of Clegg on a number of issues. A good example was same-sex marriage, which he achieved with Liberal Democrat and Labour support. More than 100 Conservative MPs opposed the measure than voted for it.

It is also important to note that, even in coalition, Cameron retained most of the most senior cabinet posts (Chancellor, Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary) were either held by him or chaired, or appointed the majority of the cabinet committees. More than two-thirds of the cabinet committees in which decisions were taken before being ratified by the full cabinet. He was also the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a position from which he enjoyed an excellent personal and professional bond with George Osborne. This made Cameron more secure than Tony Blair, whose uneasy relationship with Gordon Brown in the same post was a constant source of friction.

Activity: The coalition prime minister

Make a table with two columns as shown below. Use this to list ways in which the coalition was a constraint on Cameron, and ways in which his power and influence were not greatly affected. Do you feel that the experience of coalition was a serious disadvantage for him or not?

The coalition limited Cameron's power	Cameron continued to exercise power

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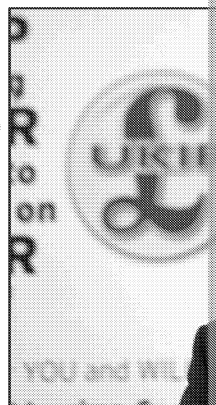
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The European Union referendum

In opposition prior to 2010, Cameron had once said that the Conservatives must 'stand up for the people' and concern themselves with the issues that mattered most to ordinary people, if not the world. Yet ironically it was to be 'Europe' that destroyed Cameron's premiership.

Cameron was a 'soft Eurosceptic', who believed in improving Britain's position within the EU through negotiation. He had some success – for example, in using his veto to block an EU treaty and securing a real-terms cut in the European budget. But these measures failed to address the growing Conservative Eurosceptic feeling, or to arrest the growing popularity of the pro-Leave United Kingdom Independence Party. In January 2013 he promised to renegotiate the terms of Britain's EU membership, and then hold an in/out referendum, if he won the next general election. This was quite a reversal for Cameron; in October 2011 he had seen off an attempt by 81 Conservative backbenchers to push for a public vote on this issue. His decision to hold the referendum was a sign that, despite his attempts to modernise the party, Cameron was still to a large extent the prisoner of the Conservative right wing. He feared that he would not win in 2015 if he did not take this drastic step, because Eurosceptics might desert to the more hard-line anti-EU UK Independence Party, led by Nigel Farage.



Nigel Farage, leader of the UK Independence Party, one of the key figures in the campaign to leave the EU.

In order to win the referendum, Cameron had to win concessions from the EU that would give the UK 'special status', protected from the march of further European integration. Yet the concessions offered by the EU in early 2016 were not enough to persuade all of his cabinet, let alone the public, that he had achieved this. With five ministers refusing to back the proposals, he had to resign. He was forced to take **responsibility** and allow members of the cabinet to campaign on both sides of the issue. In the end, however, the large, the renegotiation failed to meet the concerns of those who objected to union with Europe and wanted the UK to regain control over its own borders. Nor did Cameron's campaign to highlight the economic dangers of leaving, strike a chord with voters in deprived parts of the country, for whom the EU was a remote, elite project. Another blow was the surprise decision of the Conservative Party's most charismatic figure, Boris Johnson, to lead the 'Leave' side in the referendum.

Collecting the principles of the cabinet.

Cameron overestimated his powers of persuasion. He assumed that, having pulled off the 2005 referendum, and then in the 2015 general election, he could repeat the trick. Having decided to resign, even though he had earlier said that he would stay on whatever the result, so unambiguously for Remain, he would not be credible as the premier tasked with leading the UK out of the EU. His abrupt departure, following the loss of the referendum on which he had campaigned, demonstrates the power of external events to undermine an apparently secure position.

Europe was Cameron's greatest personal failure. The divisions associated with the referendum and 'Remain' have overwhelmingly defined his legacy. His critics argue that, not only did he not win the referendum, but he had no need to call the vote in the first place. They argue that he had jeopardised the UK's place in a union which was critical to its economic future and that he himself has argued that holding the referendum was the only way to address a long-standing issue for the UK about the country's relationship with Europe. The debate on his legacy is not likely to end soon.

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Activity

Does Cameron's downfall illustrate that, although he had led his party for over a decade, he did not understand it? Compare his loss of office with that of other prime ministers you have studied. What was their relationship with their parties?

Theresa May (July 2016 – July 2019)

Table 1: Key dates in May's premiership

Date	Event
July 2016	Becomes prime minister after David Cameron's resignation
January 2017	Lancaster House speech suggests an initially 'hard' Brexit
June 2017	Government loses majority in general election Grenfell Tower disaster
July 2018	Resignation of David Davis (Brexit Secretary) and Boris Johnson's takeover of May's Brexit deal
November 2018	Resignation of Dominic Raab (Brexit Secretary) and Sajid Javid (Pensions Secretary)
January – March 2019	Government's Brexit agreement defeated three times in Parliament
May 2019	Conservative Party comes fifth in European Parliament elections
July 2019	Leaves office after Boris Johnson is elected Conservative Prime Minister

Introduction

Theresa May's three-year premiership was one of the shortest of the post-war era, shorter than that of Gordon Brown. It was also, because of her absorption in a single, seemingly insurmountable problem of negotiating Britain's departure from the European Union – one of the defining issues of the Number 10 as a result of a Conservative leadership contest triggered by David Cameron following his defeat in the June 2016 EU referendum. In the leadership battle all but one candidate were eliminated, meaning that she was chosen as party leader by Conservative MPs without a general membership beyond Westminster being held.

May was in some ways well qualified for the post of PM. She had been a competent administrator whose holders have rarely progressed to the top job in politics. She was a hard-working administrator, hard-working with a strong sense of duty. Although she had supported the 2016 referendum, May had not been as vocal as Cameron, and many people believed that she could reconcile the two bitterly divided factions on Europe. Under pressure May was to the downside of this was a stubbornness and lack of flexibility which made it hard for her to be a team leader.

In her opening speech in Downing Street, May strove hard not to be defined solely by Brexit, addressing many of her remarks to those disadvantaged members of society who were 'left behind by managing'. Yet her words would lead to limited achievement. May's premiership was characterised by a loss of control over events and policy, through a combination of adverse circumstances and her own inaction.

We will look at three key areas of Theresa May's premiership:

- Governing style
- Handling of Brexit
- Impact on domestic policies

'People didn't want to go to the Brexit vote, they wanted to see the public working together.'

Governing style

On taking office, May used the patronage powers of the premiership to their full extent. Her personality on the government. Nine of her predecessor's ministers were sacked. At the start of her break with the Cameron era she dismissed his right-hand man, Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne. In all prime ministers, however, May did not have complete freedom to appoint ministers. Due to deep Conservative divisions over Europe, she had to appoint senior figures from both sides of the cabinet and party unity as far as possible. The leader of the 'Leave' campaign, Boris Johnson, was Secretary for two years alongside the arch-Remainer Chancellor, Philip Hammond. May's approach was to let them talk in a formal setting and letting them talk while she drew her own conclusions.

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May was at great pains to project a 'strong and stable' persona, yet this concealed introverted, rather solitary character, she trusted very few people. Her personal life was poor, bearing comparison with the feud between Blair and Brown when they were Prime Minister and Number 11 respectively. In the first year of her government she relied heavily on Timothy and Fiona Hill, officials who had worked with her at the Home Office. The single greatest mistake of her premiership, her ill-advised decision to dissolve Parliament in 2017. After they both left Downing Street, May seemed even more isolated and

The Prime Minister's aim in calling an early general election was to increase the modest 17-seat majority that she had inherited from Cameron, in order to strengthen her hand in negotiations with the EU. Events did not turn out as she had anticipated. Although the Conservative share of the vote increased to 34 per cent, the party lost 13 seats, leaving it dependent for a working majority on a **confidence and supply arrangement** with Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).



Theresa May's decision to call a snap election

The disappointing election result was due in part to May's lack of campaigning skills, which led to her being dubbed the 'Maybot'. She came over as awkward and uncomfortable in public, and she lost respect by choosing not to attend a televised debate alongside Labour's Jeremy Corbyn and the SNP's Nicola Sturgeon. May also showed a damaging lack of sensitivity in the way that she presented poorly thought-out policies to the elderly. May's authority was irretrievably damaged as, for the first time ever, a Prime Minister was forced to reconsider a key manifesto pledge in the course of an election campaign.

The election miscalculation was without doubt the key turning point in May's premiership. The loss of her regional party which represented the interests of a particular community in Northern Ireland meant that the Commons would now be subject to the conflicting views of pro- and anti-European Union members. The Prime Minister would also have to reckon with an array of opposition parties. The DUP, in order to remain in government to account, would seek to frustrate her plans for Brexit. Above all, the loss of her majority undermined May's own authority, exposing her to relentless criticism and forcing her to control the cabinet and weakened her negotiating position as she sought to deal with the EU authorities in Brussels.

Confidence and supply arrangement: a deal negotiated in the event of a hung parliament where a minority party agrees to support the government on key issues, usually in exchange for a number of votes with the government if the latter faces a no-confidence vote in the House of Commons.

Social care: the 2017 Conservative manifesto proposed to reform the way in which social care is funded. At the time, if a person was in a residential care home and had assets totalling more than £23,000, they were expected to pay the full cost of care, and the value of their home was included. Those living at home receiving care in their own homes. The manifesto pledged to take the value of the home into account in these cases. However, the measure would not be taken until after the death of the person. A cap of £100,000 on the value of the home would be protected.

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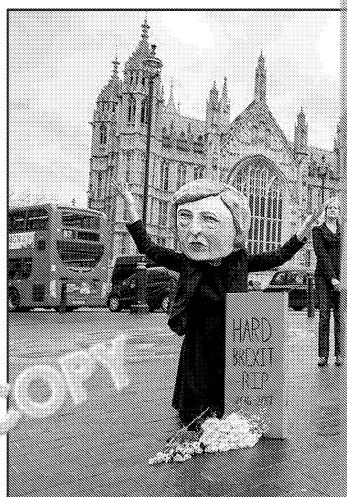


Talking point

Review what you have read so far. Is it fair to conclude that Theresa May might have done reasonably well as Prime Minister in ordinary times, but she was simply not equipped for the time of crisis?

Handling of Brexit

Theresa May created two new government departments to handle the consequences of the EU referendum: a Department for Exiting the European Union and a Department of International Trade. However, she kept the main strands of negotiations with the EU leadership in her own hands and was criticised for relying too much on an unelected official, Olly Robbins. The first of three Brexit Secretaries, David Davis, resigned in July 2018, partly because he found himself being bypassed in talks with the EU.



May's Brexit policy alienated her supporters, delivering the result she had warned against.

May's own position on Brexit shifted over the course of her premiership. In her office she was concerned to signal that, although a former Remainer, she was now a convinced supporter of leaving the EU. She outlined a clear-cut

determination to leave both the European **single market** and the **customs union** in a speech at Lancaster House in January 2017, and pleased hard-line Eurosceptics in her party by insisting that 'no deal is better than a bad deal'.

In time, however, May moved towards a 'soft Brexit' in order to safeguard the UK economy. Hard-line opponents of the EU now condemned her for not delivering what they had voted for in the 2016 referendum. They criticised her for allowing the EU to dictate the sequencing of the talks, agreeing to a £39 billion exit payment and guarantees for the rights of EU citizens living in the UK before trade talks could begin. May's Brexit agreement contained provision for the so-called 'Irish backstop', a promise to keep the UK in a customs arrangement with the EU if no trade deal had been concluded before December 2020. The EU insisted on this feature in order to protect the integrity of the single market. This alarmed those who feared the UK might be trapped indefinitely inside a customs union. Davis's successor as Brexit Secretary, Michael Gove, resigned over this in November 2018, followed by Work and Pensions Secretary Eddie Byrne, who also resigned to support the backstop on the grounds that it would treat Northern Ireland differently from the rest of the UK.

Single market
there are no customs
taxes on goods (as
as tariffs) to be paid
goods, services and
capital.

Customs union
common external
common external
entering from outside
trade treaties.

Collective responsibility
whereby ministers
decisions on government
policy.

After the loss of her majority in June 2017, the Prime Minister lacked the support to pass a controversial measure through the Commons. The withdrawal agreement was delayed until January and March 2019, the first time by the largest margin in parliamentary history. In January 2019, the cabinet also crumbled, with four ministers abstaining on a vote opposing a clear breach of the doctrine of **collective responsibility**, which would almost certainly have led to the Prime Minister's dismissal. The Prime Minister was in a stronger position. The chronic instability of her government was a record; in three years she suffered a record number of resignations. The chronic instability of her government was a record; in three years she suffered a record number of resignations.

Opposition MPs, and pro-Remain rebels within the Conservative Party, exploited the lack of a majority to seize control of the parliamentary agenda. There was no majority for any alternative Brexit agreement, other than a clear demand that the UK must not leave the EU without a deal. May was rapidly losing the goodwill of Eurosceptic backbenchers. She survived another vote of no confidence in December 2018, although it was reported that she had agreed to a second Brexit vote as the price of retaining her party's support for the time being. In January 2019, a vote of confidence moved by the Opposition in the House of Commons by a margin of 19 votes.

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A further blow to May's credibility came when she was obliged to seek an extension to the planned leaving date of 29 March 2019. This meant that the UK had to take part in the scheduled for 23 May – a demoralising experience for Conservative activists, which the formed Brexit Party take 29 of the UK's 73 seats in the Brussels parliament. To a degree, Conservative leaders in modern times, May lost the support of the party's voluntary chairmen seeking a special meeting to discuss her leadership. She avoided a ruling on a second vote of no confidence by Conservative MPs, but only by agreeing to clarify

May's inability to secure the passage of her withdrawal agreement was the root cause of her minister. On the day after the European elections, she announced that she would not be chosen a successor. This was to be Boris Johnson, who had resigned as May's Foreign Secretary in protest at her withdrawal agreement. His expressed willingness to leave the EU was endeared him to the Conservative Party membership and he was also regarded as the best chance to defeat a resurgent Labour Party under the left wing leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.

Talking point

Theresa May's downfall can be explained in terms of her loss of support in three areas: the House of Commons, the cabinet and the Conservative Party beyond Westminster. Which one of these do you feel was the most important cause of her failure?



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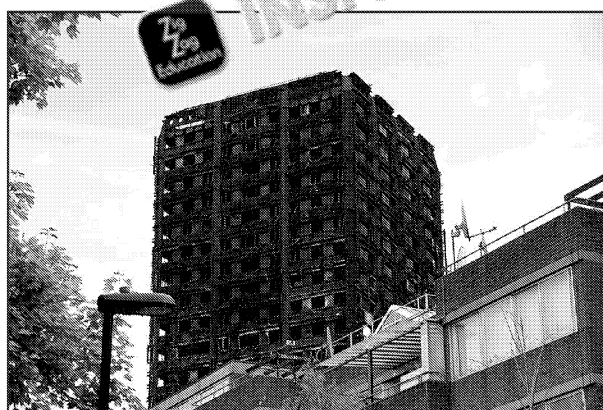


Impact on domestic policies

The government's relentless focus on Brexit, and the loss of its majority, meant that much was not realised. An important exception was the announcement of a 10-year plan for the NHS, a 3.4 per cent annual increase in funding and a higher priority for mental health care. This went ahead despite reports of misgivings from the Treasury, which had to find the money. The Prime Minister's insistence that this was a priority for the government.

There was limited progress in other areas. One of May's personal priorities on taking office was to allow the expansion of **grammar schools**, which she regarded as a means of extending opportunity for gifted children from low-income backgrounds. It was a controversial proposal, with many critics denying that it was an effective way of promoting social mobility. Grammar schools disappeared from the government's agenda after the 2017 election, probably because May realised that they would encounter too much opposition.

Grammar schools are secondary schools that provide a comprehensive education for a select group of pupils, which are often academically gifted.



May's slowness in meeting survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire was widely interpreted as indicating a lack of empathy with ordinary people.

There were some modest measures to help economically disadvantaged groups. May's government introduced bills to help low-income consumers and to encourage firms to publish the difference between the pay of executives and that of their workers. On the other hand, May presented herself as a caring, pragmatic leader. She was weakened by her poor handling of the Grenfell Tower fire in Kensington, shortly after taking office. She met survivors of the disaster and was criticised at the time – gave an impression of not caring for ordinary people's concerns.

May gave off conflicting signals. When she took office, she abolished the Department for Climate Change. Climate change was not a priority.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, suggesting she did not regard climate change as important. May also gave the go-ahead to build a third runway at Heathrow Airport, which environmental campaigners were opposed. However, shortly before leaving Number 10, May sought to improve her credentials by announcing that the UK was working towards net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Nonetheless, May's premiership was dominated by her failure to deliver Brexit. This was due to her mishandling of the process, switching from a hard-line Eurosceptic stance to a more pragmatic one. She struggled to navigate the competing factions at Westminster. Her miscalculations compounded her problems, leaving her virtually powerless. May persisted with a policy of Brexit and which she was powerless to navigate through the Commons. Ultimately, it led to disunity and division – not only in her own government and in Parliament, but in the country as a whole.

Talking point

Compare Theresa May's 'legacy' with that of another prime minister you have studied. That, given the shortness of her tenure and the scale of the Brexit challenge, she could be said to have achieved more than she did?

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Boris Johnson (July 2019 – September 2022)

Table 1: Key dates in Johnson's premiership

Date	Event
24 th July 2019	Becomes prime minister following resignation of Theresa May
3 rd September 2019	Expels 21 rebel Conservative MPs from the party
12 th December 2019	Wins general election with 80-seat overall majority
31 st January 2020	UK leaves EU
23 rd March 2020	First lockdown imposed on UK to deal with COVID-19 pandemic
8 th December 2021	First inoculation against COVID-19 given to UK citizen
24 th February 2022	Russia invades Ukraine
12 th April 2022	Fined £50 by police for a 'rake and tumbler' party at No. 10 in breach of lockdown rules
6 th September 2022	Ceases to be prime minister following his resignation and appointment of Liz Truss

Introduction

Boris Johnson became prime minister in July 2019 when Theresa May resigned, having failed to persuade Parliament to approve her proposed terms for leaving the EU. Johnson had resigned earlier in the year from May's cabinet in opposition to these terms.

His main intention when entering office was to 'get Brexit done'.

Johnson held a long-standing ambition to become prime minister. Following an education at Eton and Oxford University, Johnson entered political journalism, becoming Brussels correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph* and editor of *The Spectator*. In 2001 he became an MP and was quickly appointed a shadow minister. His political profile rose when he was twice elected the Mayor of London and through a leading role in the 'Vote Leave' campaign during the 2016 referendum. He was appointed foreign secretary by Theresa May when she became prime minister.

Boris Johnson was usually seen as a '**One Nation**' type of Conservative with a pragmatic approach to many issues. He developed an ability to appeal to voters beyond traditional Conservatives mainly through his persona as an entertaining speaker with a somewhat unkempt appearance. However, he had also developed a reputation for less appealing attributes including **elitism**, **cronyism**, **opportunism**, **populism**, carelessness, untrustworthiness and lying.

Despite winning a general election in December 2019 with an overall majority of 80 seats, Johnson found himself announcing his resignation in July 2022. Questions about his behaviour and actions during his time in office led to a vote of no confidence in July 2022, concluding his continued leadership was bad for the majority of Conservative MPs.

In order to assess the extent to which Boris Johnson was in control of events and his premiership under five headings:

- Governing style
- Getting Brexit 'done'
- Crisis management of COVID-19 pandemic
- Russian invasion of Ukraine
- Johnson's resignation

Each of these will focus on the extent to which Johnson was in control of the events of his premiership.

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Governing style

When Boris Johnson became prime minister, he made wholesale changes to the cabinet inherited from Theresa May. Johnson removed 17 of May's cabinet through dismissal or resignation. All three of the key officeholders – Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary – were changed as Johnson rewarded his supporters and made sure there was no opposition within the government to his plan to leave the EU by 31st October 2019.

Johnson had experienced recent leadership roles as Mayor of London (2008–16) and a campaign (2015–16). He liked to work with a small number of high-calibre experts. The people Johnson appointed were his No. 10 key advisers. These included those he had known from the 2010 campaign, such as Dominic Cummings from the 'Vote Leave' campaign.

In many ways Johnson was a presidential type of prime minister. He sought a high profile and photo opportunities around the country and abroad. He wanted to be seen as a policy maker but relied on his ministers and staff to get to grips with the details and delivery.

For the first 18 months of his premiership, Johnson did not have the numbers in Parliament to 'get Brexit done' in the way he wanted. However, this changed once he won the general election in December 2019 with an 80-seat majority. New Tory MPs from the **'Red Wall'** seats gave Johnson the credit for getting them elected, while the core of the Tory 'rebels' who opposed him leaving without a deal in October were no longer in Parliament.

Boris Johnson achieved his plan to take the UK out of the EU at the end of January this and planned to oversee the delivery of his other manifesto promises. There remain PM for 10 years.

However, he was faced with the biggest peacetime emergency of any government: the COVID-19 pandemic – and this took precedence as death rates and hospitalisation



Johnson developed a reputation for bending rules and avoiding accountability during his tenure in office.

This centralised model meant Johnson's own No. 10 advisers were given significant powers and heavily relied upon by the PM. So, when Dominic Cummings was accused of breaking the rules in May 2020, Johnson avoided sacking him by saying no rules had been broken. It was a different rule for Boris and his friends' criticism which followed later decisions on alleged wrongdoing by himself or by his colleagues.

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Johnson's pragmatic approach is demonstrated by his acceptance of a wide range of financial job support to combat the health and economic crisis of these decisions despite knowing the opposition on the right of his party. His small state views and were among the things Johnson also acted quickly in action once it was available and putting the program in place.

Johnson sought to centralise decision-making. A good example came shortly after the election. In February 2020, Johnson reshuffled the cabinet. He made clear to Sajid Javid, the Treasury Exchequer, that retaining his position was a precondition for sacking his team of advisers. He made it clear that Javid could differ from that of his colleagues, but that it was unacceptable and resigned.

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In fact, this approach to government was part of a wider strategy to avoid being held to account whenever possible. Attempts to question his approach on many issues were treated as ways to undermine him and he perceived them as undemocratic. He considered that the people had spoken, they had installed him as the political leader for the next five years and it was his role to deliver his promises in a way of his choosing. This approach was often seen during Prime Minister's Question Time where he batted away hostile questions by labelling them Westminster tittle tattle in which people were not interested. His only concern was to deliver 'the people's priorities'. In the many questions over 'partygate' Johnson reacted through denial, unawareness, or diversion. He avoided giving in-depth interviews to media who he considered were hostile, most notably the BBC. Two independent ethics advisers resigned when he effectively refused to recognise the role of the Ministerial Code in setting criteria for what was unacceptable behaviour. Johnson felt justified in saying that the Supreme Court was wrong when it unanimously ruled his action to ask the Queen to **prorogue Parliament** in September 2019 unlawful.

Partygate: a series of parties which took place in May and June 2020, contravening COVID-19 regulations. A report by the BBC (and a cabinet report) found that the parties occurred and a cabinet report found a penalty notice issued by the police, including a fine.

Prorogue Parliament: the act of discontinuing Parliament for a period of time. The power is exercised by the Royal Prerogative.

Talking point

In what way was Johnson's attempts to avoid being held to account damaging to Britain?

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Getting Brexit 'done'

In his campaign to be leader, Johnson promised party members he would 'Get Brexit Done'. The UK would leave by 31st October 2019 with or without a deal. Unlike with May there would be no more extensions.

Once he was party leader and prime minister, Johnson set about achieving his promise. In late August, Johnson announced he would ask the Queen to prorogue Parliament from 9th September to 14th October 2019. With Parliament only returning from its summer recess on 3rd September, opposition parties together with around 20 Conservative MPs considered Johnson was manoeuvring to leave the EU without a deal by sidelining Parliament. Convinced a 'no deal' would be a disaster for the country, they combined to pass legislation requiring government to get parliamentary approval for any proposed agreement, including no deal. In addition, the Supreme Court became involved in the constitutional legality of Johnson's prorogation of the legislature and on 24th September ruled that it was unlawful in advising the Queen to prorogue Parliament for the five-week period.

Johnson was confident he could overcome the deadlock in Parliament if there was an early general election. However, the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 took the decision out of the prime minister's hands and passed it to Parliament. Twice in early September he asked Parliament to vote for an election but was defeated. Political opponents felt this was another attempt to engineer a situation to allow the UK to exit EU by default and with no deal. Only when his opponents had forced him to apply to extend the leave date to 31st January 2020 did Parliament agree to a general election in December 2019.

Boris Johnson swept to victory in the election with an 80-seat majority, and this allowed him to leave the EU on 31st January 2020 with a relatively 'hard Brexit' deal. The treaty he signed left Northern Ireland (NI) remaining in the EU single market, with a customs border check created between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The situation arose because Johnson was committed both to maintaining an open border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland (established as part of the 1997 Good Friday Agreement) and signing an exit deal with the EU by 31st January 2020. The right-wing Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) were furious because NI was regulated by the EU in its trade with the rest of UK in a way England, Scotland and Wales were not. This implied they were not a fully integrated part of the UK, which would play into the hands of their political opponents pushing for a united Ireland. Johnson was aware this could be a problem but needed a little more time to convince the EU. All the solutions he suggested proved unacceptable to the EU because they compromised the single market. The DUP played their strongest card to pressurise Johnson to find a solution by threatening the power-sharing executive and causing the collapse of the Stormont government. The UK government even threatened to break international law if the EU did not agree to a change. At the time of writing (March 2023) the dispute and consequences of the Northern Ireland Protocol remain. Brexit is largely but not completely done.

Talking point

Was Boris Johnson justified in the methods he attempted to 'get Brexit done' by 31st October 2019?

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Crisis management of COVID-19 pandemic

On 30th January 2020 the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency of international concern. COVID-19 had taken hold in East Asia and all governments needed to prepare for its spread around the world.

The pandemic was the biggest health issue that any UK government has had to deal with for over 100 years. In assessing how this was dealt with by Boris Johnson it must be emphasised that a network of other institutions and individuals were heavily involved in giving advice and acting.

The UK government's measures to cope with the pandemic became focused on five key elements:

1. Lockdowns
2. Test and Trace
3. Equipping NHS with the means and materials to treat severe cases
4. Immunisation
5. Economic support schemes for jobs and businesses

1. Lockdowns

With deaths from COVID on the rise, the first national lockdown started on 26th March to reduce the spread of the virus by stopping non-essential contact and travel. In effect, people were told to stay at home unless they met the exemption criteria. Boris Johnson took a good deal of criticism for being late. Italy, Spain and France had reached this stage nearly two weeks earlier.

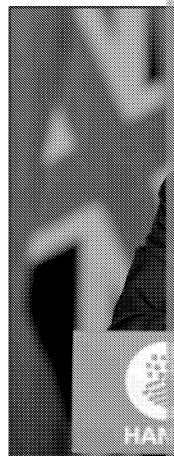
This lockdown lasted until the middle of May, when restrictions were gradually lifted. By the middle of September some restrictions were reimposed as a second national lockdown was in place, with Johnson claiming it was necessary to 'prevent a disaster for the NHS'. This lockdown was lifted at the beginning of December, but London and the South East remained. On 6th January 2021, a third national lockdown was announced. Restrictions were lifted in April, but it took until July for all legal limits on social contact to be lifted.

2. Test and Trace

Test and Trace for England was introduced at the end of April 2020, one month after the first lockdown. It was presented by Johnson and his Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock, as a programme which should prevent the need for further lockdowns. Within their party there was significant opposition, as it would significantly reduce economic output and conflict with the Conservative view on intervention.

Even though the programme was titled 'NHS' Test and Trace, the government had to rely on the private sector to run and staff it. Boris Johnson asked Dido Harding, a Conservative MP, a House of Lords member and former chief executive of mobile phone company TalkTalk, to be its head. She was given the task of convincing many firms to run testing sites, process samples and manage contact tracing calls. The programme was awarded without tendering or competition.

By the time Test and Trace ended in July 2022, the government had allocated £3.7 billion to it. A Committee of Public Accounts Report issued in 2021 described it as an 'eye-watering' cost, nearly 20% of the 2020–21 NHS England budget. The Committee acknowledged that it was set up and staffed speedily, and it did massively increase the UK's testing capacity. However, large sections of the population did not engage with the system, a significant percentage of the capacity that was paid for was never used, and there was a poor record in turning around test results within the target period. Above all it never achieved its main objective of preventing more lockdowns.



The COVID-19 pandemic
Johnson's predecessor
conducted a quick
very high death toll

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3. Making the NHS ready to cope

An early move was to free up beds for COVID patients. Firstly, Matt Hancock, the Health Secretary, announced a plan to transfer many elderly patients to care homes. Secondly, the army was used to convert barracks around the country into hospital wards which could be used for non-COVID patients. Thirdly, the NHS implemented a 'lockdown' initiative for an increase in COVID outbreaks and related deaths, since no one was allowed to leave their homes. The new hospitals were created very rapidly, but a lack of staff meant the NHS was struggling to cope.

The need for personal protective equipment (PPE) for NHS staff treating patients with COVID-19 took hold in the country. This included items such as surgical masks, gloves, gowns and face shields.

The National Audit Office (NAO) reporting in November 2020 noted that at the start of the pandemic the UK had very low PPE stocks and failed to spot warning signs. Consequently, the government joined the scramble for equipment from around the world. Prices rose sharply. The great majority of public procurement (by value) of PPE went through the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Transparency International (TI) produced a report in April 2021 analysing government spending on UK COVID-19 procurement and in particular PPE. Between February and November 2020, they uncovered 73 contracts described as questionable because contractors had a political link to the governing party, the procurement was uncompetitive, or the contractors had no previous experience of supplying goods for PPE worth £2.9bn.

Public procurement of goods and services should be in place to ensure that the market is in a way that is competitive.

4. Immunisation

With the outbreak of COVID-19 there was a worldwide race to develop a vaccine. The UK government provided support to UK pharmaceutical companies and universities in this drive to develop a vaccine. The success of the scientific community in creating vaccines in record time was hailed by the Prime Minister. On 2nd December 2021, Johnson took credit for the UK being the first country to approve a vaccine for use, with the first jab given a week later. He claimed further credit for quickly buying the vaccine from different sources and argued his move was only possible because we were not bound by EU rules. This seemed to be based upon a decision by EU member states to purchase stocks of the vaccine according to greatest need. There was, however, nothing to stop an individual EU member state from doing so.

Johnson had begun managing the country's response to the pandemic in a very careful and measured way. It was feasible to plan and deliver vaccinations to the population, a wider field of experts was engaged (e.g. Local and Regional Authorities). The result was that most of the population was vaccinated in an ordered and efficient way over a relatively short time period. Challenges did arise, but most were overcome. Some people refused to be vaccinated.

5. Financial support

With lockdown measures being contemplated in March, the government was quick to announce measures to deal with the hardships that businesses and their workers would experience. The first was 'The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme' or 'furlough' which committed the government to a monthly limit of £2,500/month for the wages of employees who could not work due to the restrictions. The scheme lasted from April 2020 to September 2021, cost around £25.9 billion. The aim was to ensure the economic structure remained intact. The Resolution Foundation praised Boris Johnson and Chancellor Rishi Sunak for the scheme and passing it through, saying it proved a great success in protecting people from mass unemployment.

Other measures included grants to the self-employed and small businesses, interest-free loans to medium enterprises, and an 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme to support jobs in the hospitality sector. These measures were generally seen as necessary and appropriate, but the application of the scheme was not without problems and risked fraudulent behaviour. In January 2022, Lord Agnew of Oulton resigned from the Treasury and Cabinet Office citing the government's failure to tackle fraud in loan applications. He claimed that many companies he claimed were not trading when the pandemic happened.

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Activity: Assessing the UK's COVID response

List the good and bad aspects of how the UK dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. credit should go to Boris Johnson and his government for the good (most / some / a little) and rests on their shoulders for the bad (most / some / a little). Justify your decisions.

Aspect of response	Good or bad	Most

Russian invasion of Ukraine



Johnson bought his flailing premiership extra time by becoming close allies with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

On 24th February 2022, Johnson had been in power for over five weeks prior to this conflict. He saw European allies and actions they should take in the face of this disaster it would be for the UK. It was clear to the British people that the country fully backed Ukraine if it was attacked. On the same day, Johnson addressed the nation in a speech. He committed the country to defend their sovereignty.

NATO had already made a commitment to their military to fight, for the conflict to spread. Johnson

announced a package of economic sanctions, sending weapons and humanitarian aid. Johnson's relationship with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine, which was strengthened by his risky visits to Kiev. To some extent, Johnson saw the opportunity for the UK to play a leading role on the stage and perhaps form a link between the USA and EU where there was some difficulty in solving the conflict. Johnson's colleagues in government often presented him as leading the UK in the Ukraine war, but to his critics this was overblown when considering the bulk of military aid sent by the USA, and EU countries played a much greater role in providing homes

for Ukrainian refugees wanting to come to the UK had to apply and receive a visa before they had to name a sponsor in the UK who was willing to provide them with accommodation for six months. Once here, money was given to refugees to live together with their sponsors. The system was widely criticised for being too complicated and overly bureaucratic, and it was probably inevitable that countries closer to the border with Ukraine would receive more refugees. The UK government gained a bad reputation for not doing more to receive more refugees.

Talking point

Should the UK have done more to help Ukraine refugees to get to Britain? Why or why not? What role did Boris Johnson and his government play in ensuring greater numbers of refugees were accepted?

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Johnson's resignation

Johnson lost a good deal of credibility for his honesty and integrity in November 2020 when he lost a parliamentary majority to negate a House of Commons Standards Committee report that Owen Paterson had repeatedly broken lobbying rules and should be suspended for 30 days. Over 100 Conservative MPs defied the three-line whip in anger with Johnson's reputation had suffered another battering over his involvement in and handling of the Brexit section on Governing Style), and the subsequent by-election in Paterson's constituency was the first time in history, with voters giving Johnson's behaviour as the main factor in their vote. 'Partygate' trundled on inexorably, and then, on 30th June 2022, the straw that broke the camel's back became. Chris Pincher MP, a deputy chief whip, resigned following an incident at a party where he was alleged to have sexually assaulted two men. Boris Johnson had appointed Pincher to his whip's office in July 2019 and promoted him to the whip's role in February 2020.

As the media began reporting the resignation, other accusations of similar misconduct against other parties began asking questions about what Johnson knew when appointing him as whip. Johnson tried to argue that Pincher did not know of any specific complaint against Pincher, but he changed the story when he was aware of media reports of specific allegations, but that he did not progress it to a formal complaint'. In a very unusual intervention, the former Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, Lord Simon McDonald, took to the national media to correct the statement 'was not true'. He gave more detail about an earlier BBC report that said that the Foreign Office some staff had made an official complaint about similar behaviour. A subsequent investigation concluded the misconduct did occur. McDonald not only confirmed that he had been informed, but that he had been told 'face to face'.

The next morning, on 5th July, Johnson did an interview with the BBC and accepted the complaint and findings but at the time of appointing Pincher to the whip's office 'it was not the conversation'. He did accept he 'had made a bad mistake' in not acting after the complaint against Pincher.

This interview set off a wave of resignations from the government. First, Sajid Javid resigned. Then Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, resigned, and over the next two days 30 ministers and government positions followed. Most referred to the lack of honesty and integrity as the reason for resigning. Johnson's reaction was to fight back, finding replacement ministers. He had such a massive mandate from the people that it was his duty to stay. However, his resignation was inevitable and announced his resignation.

Research Task

Research the resignations of Dominic Cummings in 2020, Lord David Frost in 2021 and Chris Pincher in 2022. All three had been appointed by Boris Johnson to his governing team. Find out the circumstances of their resignations. Explain how each of these resignations may have affected Johnson's position on power.

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Liz Truss (September 2022 – October 2022)

Table 1: Key dates in Truss's premiership

Date	Event
6 th September 2022	Becomes prime minister following resignation of Boris Johnson
8 th September 2022	Queen Elizabeth II dies
23 rd September 2022	'Mini-budget' presented to Parliament
26 th September 2022	£ falls to an all-time low against the \$ sparking financial markets to panic
14 th October 2022	Sacks Kwasi Kwarteng as Chancellor and replaces him with Jeremy Hunt
17 th October 2022	Hunt reverses virtually all of 'mini-budget' tax measures
20 th October 2022	Announces resignation as prime minister

Introduction

Liz Truss became prime minister on 6th September 2022 following the resignation of Boris Johnson. Her initial intention when she came to office was to rapidly introduce a 'bold plan to grow the economy'.

Truss had beaten Sunak comfortably in the members' ballot to earn the right to be prime minister of the country. However, in the lead-up stages where only MPs voted she had not found enough support. In round one she received just 50 votes of the 358 cast. By round five she reached 121 votes, which represented less than one-third of Conservative MPs.

Truss described her parents as left wing and accompanied them on various demonstrations. At her state secondary school in Leeds, she gained a place at Oxford University to study Politics.

At university she was an active member of the Liberal Democratic Party; she became a speaker and spoke at the 1994 national conference where she promoted abolishing the minimum wage.

On leaving university, Liz Truss became an accountant and shifted her political allegiance to the Conservative Party. Various explanations for this have been voiced, including a strengthening confidence in free market economics, and a judgement about the best way to build a successful post-war economy.

She became a Conservative councillor in London before getting into Parliament at the 2005 general election. She was involved with two right-wing think tanks and co-authored a book *Britannia Unbound* which promoted free market solutions for improving the UK's economic performance.

By 2012, Truss was a minister in David Cameron's coalition government. During this time she supported Remain. When Theresa May replaced Cameron, she promoted Truss to the role of Trade Secretary. When time May resigned, Liz Truss had become pro Brexit and Johnson retained her in the role of Trade Secretary and later Foreign Secretary. These posts gave her the opportunity to be seen as a straight-talking politician with the EU over the Northern Ireland protocol and with Russia over the Ukraine. She also seemed to invite comparison with Margaret Thatcher through some of her closely copied images associated with the role of prime minister.

When Liz Truss stood to replace Boris Johnson as party leader and prime minister, she was seen as an ambitious, hard-working and determined politician on the ideological grounds that she appealed to ordinary members of the party. People who knew her spoke of her as having a self-belief in her abilities, singlemindedness, opportunism, a willingness to take risks and to make the right call at the right time. It is these characteristics we need to bear in mind as her premiership turned into such a disaster and she earned the title of being the shortest serving prime minister in UK history, lasting just 49 days.

We will look at three key areas of Liz Truss's premiership:

- Governing style
- Economic policy
- Resignation

Talking point

What case is there for changing the way we govern?

Governing style

In putting together her government team, Liz Truss was guided by her promise to deliver a policy for growth. She was clear in her mind what it would contain so only chose people to be in her team who were of like mind and who would not in any way oppose or delay it.

In selecting her cabinet, she chose to reward her supporters and removed those who had backed Rishi Sunak for leader.

Kwasi Kwarteng, a co-author of *Britannia Unchained*, became Chancellor, James Cleverley became Foreign Secretary, Suella Braverman became Home Secretary and Thérèse Coffey became Health Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister. Out went the likes of Dominic Raab, Priti Patel, Grant Shapps and Stephen Barclay.

Truss also removed Simon Scholier, the experienced permanent secretary at the Treasury. She had convinced herself that preceding Conservative radical action would grow the economy because of what she termed Treasury orthodoxy. When a story broke that she planned to sack the Cabinet secretary Simon Case as he became wary of advising against her proposals.

Truss appointed Mark Fullbrook as her chief of staff. He had run Truss's leadership association with the Conservative Party as a strategist but had no experience of a minister's workplace. Matt Sinclair became her chief economic adviser. He was a **TaxPayers' Alliance** and did work for the Institute of Economic Affairs, a right-wing think tank.

Asked during the leadership campaign whether she would appoint a new **ethics** adviser, she said the existence of 'numerous advisers and independent bodies' is 'one of the problems'. 'For me, it's about understanding the difference between right and wrong, and I am so with integrity'.

I think there's a danger in politics of being too risk-averse.' – Liz Truss

With her team in place, Truss was ready to return to the 'fundamental Conservative principles of growth and shrinking the state'. With only two weeks to go to the election she calculated there was a chance.

decisively. Two days after Liz Truss became prime minister, Queen Elizabeth II died, and parliamentary activity to a virtual standstill. Although she had some formal activities, they took up much time. With the official mourning lasting until 20th September, the new government had more time than anticipated before her plan for growth was **presented to Parliament**. **Kwarteng, her Chancellor, Matt Sinclair, her economics adviser, and one or two others** went through the plans and adding further **supply side** measures.

Talking point

Are cutting taxes and shrinking the state the fundamental policies of the Conservative Party? Are there any other policy positions?

TaxPayers' Alliance founded in 1998, it advocates cutting taxes and reducing the size of the state.

Ethics adviser 'The Index of Public Good' interests' of the PM on ministerial appointments.

Supply side helps businesses grow – usually by reducing taxes and cutting the size of the state.

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Economic policy

On 23rd September 2022, the 'growth plan' or 'mini-budget' was presented to Parliament by Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng. Apart from one large spending commitment (to support consumers with their energy bills over the next two years), the rest was essentially about tax cutting. The 45% rate of higher income tax was abolished, while the previous government's tax measures were radically altered. Proposed increases in corporation tax, dividends and National Insurance were reversed, while the plan to introduce a health and social care levy was abandoned.



Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng
cutting agenda which
have collapsed the
we

There was nothing in the plan which explained how the money was to be raised, and yet Kwarteng told the House of Commons that the proposed cuts would not lead to any less money for public services. The conclusion drawn was that the government intended to borrow the money.

Interest rates across the world were already rising to combat inflation caused mainly by COVID-related global supply issues and energy problems created by the Russia–Ukraine war. Truss had been told on many occasions that her plans to fund tax cuts by borrowing in the hope of getting higher growth was a very risky strategy. It would add to inflation, raise interest rates further and make servicing the national debt more expensive. Rishi Sunak had spelt this out to her during the leadership debate, but she dismissed it as 'project fear' and 'scaremongering'.

Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR):
a public body set up in 2010 to provide independent analysis on the public finances.

The reaction to the 'mini-budget' from the financial markets was mixed. Some were worried by the scale of borrowing and the need to raise interest rates, while others welcomed an independent **OBR (Office for Budget Responsibility)** accompanying the plan. They became further concerned when Kwarteng said he envisaged more tax cuts taking place.

The exchange value of the pound against the dollar fell sharply. The rate of interest the government had to pay when selling bonds rose sharply. The Bank of England said they needed to 'deliver a significant response' to calm the markets. This meant buying bonds at the time they were coming to maturity in their attempt to reduce the inflation rate. The purchase of bonds did return the value of the pound to some extent, but the Bank of England governor made clear their response was only going to last two weeks. In Truss's court; she could only be confident the markets would stay calm if she put in place a credible plan. She tried first to send the right signal through an announcement by Kwasi Kwarteng to turn on plans to cut the 45p top rate of tax, but this was not enough. The saving was far less than the cost of the money they were borrowing for the government. On 14th October, with the mini-budget about to expire and pressure from senior backbench MPs, Liz Truss sacked Kwasi Kwarteng and replaced him with Jeremy Hunt.

Research

The growth plan promoted by Liz Truss was based upon the premise that cutting taxes would stimulate economic growth. By accessing the site of an appropriate think tank such as the Adam Smith Institute or a pressure group such as the Taxpayers' Alliance, investigate the path by which the plan was made. Can you see any problems with the case made?

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Resignation of Liz Truss

After sacking her Chancellor, Truss held a news conference to say that parts of the mini-budget went further and faster than markets were expecting, adding there would be some reductions in public expenditure and the previous government's increase in corporation tax would go ahead.

On 17th October, Jeremy Hunt gave a televised emergency statement saying, 'it is not right to borrow to fund a tax cut' and indicating most cuts given in the mini-budget would be scrapped, the energy price cap would only be for six months not two years, and there would be some cuts in public expenditure.

Several Conservative MPs were now calling for Truss to resign, challenging her mandate on which she was elected was clearly dead in the water. There were rumoured to be 100 MPs who received notes expressing no confidence in her. A poll showing the party still losing support and a YouGov survey of Conservative Party members wanted her to resign.



Truss announces her resignation, just 50 days after being appointed by the Queen. She holds the ignominious record of being the shortest-serving PM, by a wide margin, in more than 300 years of British politics.

In an evening television interview, Truss was sorry for the mistakes she had made but remained committed to the government. She said it was not clear to what she would survive the situation. Many Conservative MPs would be disastrous for the party if Truss remained leader so soon after resigning. She feared his return. However, she had support from the start, and she had done nothing to appeal for support. She had placed in cabinet to support her.

On 20th October, she held a meeting with her cabinet and shortly afterwards, she announced her resignation. Those who called the meeting to resign were not too surprising if they had collected sufficient opposition to go.

In her public announcement she stated 'We set out a vision for a low tax, high growth economy, the advantage of the freedoms of Brexit. I recognise though, given the situation, I cannot continue as Prime Minister. Therefore, I am resigning as Leader of the Conservative Party.'

Within a week Rishi Sunak became leader in a surprise election and replaced Liz Truss.

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Talking point

What effect do opinion polls rating a prime minister's performance have on a prime minister's future of the country?

Activity

Using this resource, list the policies and events you feel Liz Truss was in control of. Decide which two items on your list were most responsible for leading to Liz Truss's resignation.

Rishi Sunak (October 2022 – July 2024)

Table 1: Key dates in Sunak's premiership

Date	Event
October 2022	Becomes Conservative Party leader and thus UK PM
January 2023	Issues his 'five pledges' for 2023
January 2023	Fined by the police for not wearing his car seat belt
March 2023	Introduces Windsor Framework to replace Johnson's contention
December 2023	Loses whipped vote in the Commons on infected blood scandal
January 2024	Agrees new deal with DUP to restore government at Stormont
May 2024	Calls general election
July 2024	Loses 2024 general election, with the lowest ever Conservative vote share Remains as Opposition leader until a new party leader is elected

Introduction

Rishi Sunak was born in Southampton in 1980. He entered Parliament in 2015, becoming the youngest MP in 2017. He won the Conservative Party leadership in October 2022 and so became the fifth Conservative Prime Minister in eight years. There was no leadership election because other potential candidates were not seen as viable. He is the first leader of colour and first Hindu PM. His relative youth (as the youngest PM since Margaret Thatcher) and inexperience perhaps played a part in some of his later political difficulties. As Chancellor during the COVID pandemic who presided over the furlough giveaway and other costly but widely praised measures, Sunak was popular and his energy, optimism and persistence were admired. However, as PM he lacked the legitimacy and personal mandate of election, and he also lacked the charisma of some of his predecessors. He was seen as a 'details man', always well-briefed and disciplined with a managerial and pragmatic style of leadership. He inherited the unpopular legacy of PM Johnson's broken promises, serial dishonesty and 'Partygate' scandal (though he himself was later fined by the police for involvement in it); and he had to address the damaging economic consequences of PM Truss's short tenure. He promised to restore stability and pledged a government of 'integrity, professionalism and accountability'.



Rishi Sunak

This profile will assess four aspects of Sunak's premiership:

- The economy
- A divided party
- Governing style
- Decline and defeat

'This government has set a new professional level. Trust me, I know.'
– Rishi Sunak

The economy

Sunak's early career experience as a hedge-fund manager at Goldman Sachs, combined with his family's personal wealth gave him a keen knowledge and interest in economics. The main problem was the economy itself. A decade of austerity after 2010 was compounded by the financial crisis. He was seen as a committed neo-liberal. Her 'mini-budget' proposed large but unfunded cuts to public services, which caused financial markets to plummet while interest rates, mortgage costs and inflation peaked at over 11% in November 2022. In addition, the COVID pandemic had led to high government spending – under Sunak as Chancellor – and had contributed to the economic problems of the last 70 years. Brexit – which Sunak had strongly supported – caused the economy to stagnate (see the independent Office for Budget Responsibility) and it was increasingly unpopular as the war in Ukraine was invaded in February 2022, causing sharp rises in global oil and gas prices. A former Conservative PM Harold Macmillan reputedly replied when asked what we should do about the economy: 'I don't know, but I know it's a problem'.

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'Events, dear boy, events'.) The resulting cost-of-living crisis, together with the largest fall in real incomes since WWII, were voters' main concerns when Sunak came to power. There were widespread, often prolonged and broadly popular public sector strikes by doctors, nurses, firefighters, teachers, transport workers, posties and others. The junior doctors' strikes continued even through the 2024 election campaign. According to opinion polls, the Conservative Party had lost its valued reputation for economic competence. However, by the time of the 2024 election, inflation had fallen back to 2%, economic growth was creeping up (though it was still under 1%) and interest rates seemed likely to go down soon, so Sunak argued that the economy had 'turned a corner'.

Activity

Compare and contrast Sunak with other Prime Ministers who have faced international crises, and how successful were they?

A divided party

The pro-Brexit result of the 2016 EU referendum emboldened right-wing Conservative Party Eurosceptics, while increasing the popularity of small, more right-wing parties – notably UKIP / Brexit / Reform UK, all successively led by Nigel Farage. PM Sunak had to expend considerable time, energy and political capital trying to manage his profoundly divided party. Conservative factions proliferated, especially on the right. Like PM David Cameron, therefore, in some respects Sunak was a prisoner of his vocal and combative right wing. For example, Suella Braverman as Home Secretary just six days after she had been sacked by PM Sunak for sharing confidential information on her personal email. Her new appointment angered the right-wing of the party, and Opposition leader Keir Starmer accused Sunak of doing a deal with a right-wing party faction European Research Group inside. Meanwhile, neo-conservative (PopCons) called for big tax and welfare cuts – instincts which Sunak rejected immediately, though tax cuts and £12 billion welfare cuts were promised in the 2024 budget.

Sunak also had to contend with the culture wars stoked against the 'Guardian-reading, tofu-eating wokerati' (Braverman), which riled centrist MPs in the party such as the One Nation Conservatives. Sunak himself was socially conservative on gender issues and immigration.

'It's really simple. Sex means biological sex... Our children shouldn't be taught gender ideology in schools.' – Rishi Sunak

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Sunak visits Border Force in Dover

However, both 'legal' and 'illegal' immigration increased under Sunak's premiership. He pursued a policy of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda without assessing if it was safe. In 2023 the Supreme Court ruled the plan illegal. Rwanda was not a safe country – prompting legislation which declared Rwanda to be a safe country. Decision-makers to treat Rwanda as a safe country ignore court rulings which said otherwise.

'We will pass new laws to stop small boats from coming to this country illegally and swiftly removed.' – Rishi Sunak

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Meanwhile, some of his MPs – mainly on the right – were quietly jostling to replace Badenoch, who was a member of a WhatsApp group of fellow MPs called ‘Evil Plott Dorries’, remained loyal to Boris Johnson and criticised Sunak for ‘squandering’ Johnson’s legacy. They also did not forgive Sunak for being among the first to resign from Johnson’s government. ‘His approaches to governance which, said Sunak, were ‘fundamentally too different’ – Johnson’s. There were also defections of some well-known MPs (as well as Tory donors) to other parties. Elphicke to Labour and Lee Anderson to Reform UK. Even former editor of *The Daily Telegraph* called himself ‘an instinctive wet of the old Heseltine-Clarke persuasion’, in other words, a Tory. ‘I’m putting faith in Labour to do better than we’ve done,’ he said, ‘I’m putting faith in Labour to do better than we’ve done.’

Talking point

To what extent does a substantial majority in the Commons help or hinder a Prime Minister?

Governing style

Supporters of Sunak’s leadership described it as thoughtful, cautious and prudent, but critics said he was hesitant, indecisive and weak. He was slow to discipline or sack ministers who breached ministerial responsibilities, such as Suella Braverman, Gavin Williamson and Dominic Raab. He was also slow to take action against MPs such as Liz Truss, who backed Nigel Farage at a far-right summit in the Netherlands. He declared that ‘the UK is controlled by Islamists’. He did (unlike Liz Truss) appoint an ethics adviser. The Democrats compiled a list of 17 possible breaches of the ministerial code in 18 months under PM Sunak, none of which he referred to his ethics adviser. Deputy Liberal Democrat leader Daisy Cooper said that ‘brazen disregard for the rules has torn up standards in public life and eroded trust in our political system’. Sunak also made many policy U-turns, largely to placate the right wing of his party: for example, dropping mandatory house-building targets, abandoning the promise to ban ‘conversion therapy’ (which seeks to change a person’s sexual orientation), scaling back the HS2 high-speed rail link and ditching some net zero policies.

‘It’s not
the price

In his November 2023 reshuffle, Sunak gave former PM David Cameron (no longer in the Commons) brought him into Cabinet as Foreign Secretary. This won the Prime Minister some experience and a cool head, but it angered some of his MPs – was there no suitable alternatives? Opposition MPs also complained that they would be unable to hold the Foreign Secretary to account in the Commons during a time of exceptional international unrest.

Sunak also sometimes seemed to lack political nous. One example was when he rebuffed a trans jibe at PMQs even though he thought that the mother of a murdered transgender woman was in the Commons public gallery. Also, in December 2023 – despite his relatively comfortable position in the Commons – he lost a whipped vote in the Commons, on his government’s slow response to the invasion of Ukraine.

Sunak had come to power seeking to contrast himself with the careless dishonesty of Liz Truss. His critics accused him of lacking integrity, professionalism and accountability, and of rewarding loyalty and appeasing cautious backbenchers.

Activity

Is it fair to describe Sunak as a ‘weak’ Prime Minister? List some of the difficulties

Due to circumstances	Due to decisions

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Decline and defeat

PM Sunak did have some successes: he largely avoided economic recession; restored calm to UK–EU relations; maintained the UK's staunch support for Ukraine against Russia; and finally legislated to quash the convictions of the falsely convicted sub-postmasters, the victims of the infected blood scandal. In January 2024, Conservative MP Simon Clarke resigned but conspicuously got no public support from his colleagues.

However, from early 2023 onwards, the opinion polls showed Labour with a consistent lead over the Conservatives. Sunak's party suffered bad losses in the 2023 and 2024 local elections, and two parliamentary by-election defeats by Labour and the Liberal Democrats with swing to Labour. In total, the Conservatives lost all but one of the 14 by-elections won by Sunak's 18-month tenure. Including party suspension and defections, by June 2024, the Conservatives had fallen from 80 to 38.

Meanwhile, perhaps eyeing the opinion polls, almost 80 Conservative MPs declared their intention of standing at the next election. In January 2024, Sunak said his 'working assumption' was that the election would take place in the second half of the year'. It was therefore widely expected that the election would be held in 2024 or even earlier; but Sunak shocked almost everyone in May by calling a general election. He claimed the economy might have been 'turning a corner', but most of the portents were not good. His MPs were baffled and angry. Sunak also had to concede that no planes would be sent to Rwanda before the election. His election timing was widely seen as a miscalculation. The election campaign and static opinion polls – sealed his fate.

Talking point

Should Sunak have pursued the Rwanda policy? Why / why not?

The six-week campaign began inauspiciously for Sunak when he made the election announcement from Downing Street, drenched in pouring rain (with no umbrella). The stark visual metaphor was 'Drowned and Out'. There were further missteps. Sunak's decision to leave early for France angered many traditional Tories. His visit to the Titanic Quarter in Belfast was seen as 'captain of a sinking ship'. There was also 'Gamblegate': an election betting scandal in which party candidates and officials (as well as 'close protection' police officers) were investigated by the Electoral Commission and the police for allegedly placing bets on an election date which they knew would be held before it was publicly announced. Sunak was slow to disown the party candidates and officials to 'take leave of absence'. This reinforced public perceptions of 'one rule for them, not for us'. The Conservative Party campaign, meanwhile, resorted to a series of outright fibs during the campaign, including rebranding their online party press office as an independent fact-checking site and producing inaccurate information about Labour's plans. Sunak felt obliged to deny that he would quit even before the election was held; and to promise that he would remain as an MP for the next five years whether his party won or lost the election.

Meanwhile, Nigel Farage won extensive media coverage after he announced that he would stand for leadership of Reform UK and standing for election in Clacton. Reform UK's average of 16%. Otherwise, the campaign did little to shift the opinion polls.

On 4th July, the Conservatives won just 121 seats – their worst ever result – while Labour won 222 of 174. There were at least four main reasons for this outcome: firstly, a widespread loss of faith among voters after 14 years of Conservative governments which had not seen significant improvements in living standards or public services; secondly, a low turnout of 59.9% (due to complacency and anger); thirdly, the Conservative Party, which was plagued by disunity, dishonesty and finally, there was Sunak himself. He had lost to Liz Truss in the September 2022 election and his warnings about Truss's tax plans as 'fairytale economics' proved correct); and

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in October without any election, so he lacked the legitimacy of a personal mandate. He found him to have a net favourability score of -56 (equal to his party); worse even though not reaching Truss's record -70 at the end of her short tenure. (Keir Starmer). To Sunak's supporters, he strove valiantly to cope with international crises and domestic challenges, but he had failed his own tests of professionalism, integrity and accountability, as well as

Lewis Goodall (in the *i* newspaper 28.6.24) said that we should not feel sorry for him. *'When historians speculate as to how it could be that the Conservative Party move from power to opposition in 2024 they will identify several key moments: the appointment of Rishi Sunak; the Partygate; Truss; and the general election campaign of 2024. Sunak had a hand in all of them.'*

However, Sunak's premiership demonstrated how PMs are not wholly in control of events. They are at the mercy of party pressures and external events as well as personal weaknesses.

Talking point

Who was more responsible for the Conservatives' 2024 election defeat – the Prime Minister or the Party?



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Exam-style Questions

Question 1

Explain and analyse three factors that enable a prime minister to dominate

Question 2

Source 1

The Conservative Party's majority after the 2019 general election was 80. Neither John Major, David Cameron nor Theresa May was able to win a majority in Parliament, yet Boris Johnson has done so. It is also the largest majority in Parliament since the 2001 general election, in which Tony Blair's Labour won a second consecutive landslide.

For many it seemed as though the days of giant parliamentary majorities were behind us. Two hung parliaments and a less than convincing majority in 2015 seemed to have confirmed this. Such a situation is highly unusual in British history and had been dealt with in different ways. David Cameron decided to call a snap election, the best way forward and his first term was indeed surprisingly stable and successful despite seven parliamentary defeats, though electorally disastrous for his coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Theresa May took a different approach in her coalition arrangement with the Democratic Unionist Party, though ultimately it resulted in a record-breaking 33 parliamentary defeats. There is no doubt that her government's thorny issue of Brexit exacerbated her troubles in securing the support of her own party.

Johnson's short period governing as a minority administration was turbulent, as he lost 12 parliamentary votes in a period of only two months. Since then, he has won every parliamentary vote, but that hasn't prevented a series of challenges to his early premiership, from the dramatic resignation of his Chancellor to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The big question is whether the Johnson government plans to use its large majority to resume what Lord Hailsham once famously described as 'elective dictatorship'.

Analyse, evaluate and compare the arguments in the above article to determine whether a prime minister requires a strong parliamentary majority to govern effectively.

Question 3

'The cabinet is not effective at limiting the power of the prime minister.' Analyse and evaluate this statement.

Question 4

'The involvement of prime ministers in crisis management has weakened the role of the cabinet.' How far do you agree with this statement?

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Mark Schemes

Indicative Content for Question 1

- A dominant prime minister can be defined as a leader who has control over the government, as opposed to a pre-eminent prime minister, whose authority is based on their reputation within government.
- The primary way in which a prime minister can govern dominantly is through a majority government. The more likely a prime minister is able to secure a majority government, the more likely they are to govern independently of constraints. An example could be Margaret Thatcher's electoral success and strong polling ensured that her agenda and authority were maintained throughout most of her tenure, despite significant divisions in her party.
- A prime minister may also dominate governance due to their reputation or position. The prime minister is highly regarded by their MPs, or presides over a relatively stable government, less likely to experience constraints on their power. Conversely, John Major's power was undermined by divisions within his own party over Europe, and by his MPs' lack of confidence.
- A prime minister may also have a dominant position in government due to their personal qualities. Tony Blair implemented a highly personalised approach to governance, which was ahead of that of his party. This gave him greater political capital once in office, as he was more dependent on his own personal qualities. In addition, his frequent use of patronage to appoint and allies to important positions in government had the effect of further reducing constraints on his authority. This approach to governance can be said to have furthered Blair's dominance.

9-mark Question Checklist

Level	Mark	Description
3	7–9	• <i>AO1 (knowledge)</i> Demonstrates in-depth knowledge of political ideas, institutions and systems, and the issues with careful choice of knowledge. Gives extensive examples, where necessary, that support knowledge of political ideas, institutions and systems. • <i>AO2 (analysis)</i> Well-structured and organised answer on three clear points. Answer is relevant to the question at hand and is authoritatively expressed. Answer is concise and to the point.
2	4–6	• <i>AO1 (knowledge)</i> Demonstrates sound knowledge of political ideas, institutions and systems, and the issues with careful choice of knowledge, which, however, may be limited. Generally gives extensive reasoning and appropriate examples, which support knowledge of political ideas, institutions and systems. Further examples may be given. • <i>AO2 (analysis)</i> Mostly well-structured and organised answer on three clear points. Answer is relevant to the question at hand. Answer is concise and to the point, but may be too descriptive.
1		• <i>AO1 (knowledge)</i> Demonstrates a limited range of knowledge of political ideas, institutions and systems, and the issues with knowledge, but this may be inaccurate or incomplete. Gives some examples to support knowledge of political ideas, institutions and systems. • <i>AO2 (analysis)</i> Analysis rarely stretches beyond description and does not appear to be well-structured and organised. Analysis and organisation are weak.
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Indicative Content for Question 2

- The past decade has seen a series of close election results that had made the 'dictatorship' feel like an issue of the past.
- Yet it has still been possible for government to function reasonably effectively, pointing to David Cameron's coalition. The small number of parliamentary dissolution years suggest a relatively stable government despite no party having a majority (though what the source doesn't tell us is the extent of compromise that may be required to achieve this).
- The source also highlights that despite his large parliamentary majority since 2010, Johnson has still faced difficulties governing even relatively early on in his term, due to the impact of international events, in this case the coronavirus pandemic, which has had a considerable impact on the country. This demonstrates the way in which even a minister can lose a large majority and strong polling, and relatively quickly after a general election. This could be 9/11 during Blair's premiership, or the financial crisis during Brown's.
- In addition, the source suggests that it was not simply parliamentary arithmetic that led to many problems, but that she had to resolve an especially difficult political issue, Brexit, which was an existential issue for many in her party, and she was faced with a difficult decision. She had overseen a less unusual and divisive parliamentary term than Blair's.
- However, there are lots of other indications in the source that a parliamentary majority is not enough to ensure effective governance.
- The fact that May's quantity of losses in Parliament was 'record-breaking' suggests that this did indeed lead to ineffective governance. Her biggest mistake is widely regarded as her decision to call the 2017 general election.
- In addition, the dire electoral consequences for the Liberal Democrats since 2010, to the extent to having to govern within the limitations of coalition, in which no party has a majority, further suggests that a lack of majority reduces the effectiveness of government in maintaining public popularity.
- Finally, the fact that Johnson was virtually unable to govern as a minority administration until the general election, yet has had no issues in implementing his agenda since winning the general election, provides us with convincing evidence to support the view that a strong majority is not enough to ensure effective governance.
- A convincing conclusion would be that a strong parliamentary majority is not enough to ensure effective governance. Clearly the behaviour and opinions of cabinet members, the development of legislation on controversial subjects, and the development of international relations are all important factors. At the same time, however, it is reasonable to conclude that a strong majority is an important factor.

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25-mark Extract Checklist

Level	Mark	Description
5	21–25	• <i>AO1 (knowledge)</i> Demonstrates in-depth and extensive knowledge and understanding of political ideas and systems. Supports analysis of the issues with careful choice of accurate knowledge, which may at times be developed with sophistication. • <i>AO2 (analysis)</i> Well-structured and organised answer, consistently focused on answering the question. Analysis is evenly weighed and authoritatively expressed. Comparisons between points of view are structured. Judgements are based on well-chosen and clearly presented examples, incorporated and relevant. • <i>AO3 (evaluation)</i> Sound evaluation leads to well-supported conclusions with clear links to the facts and analysis. Pertinent points of view, which may include those within the source, are considered to form logical arguments though evaluation may need to be developed.
4	16–20	• <i>AO1 (knowledge)</i> Demonstrates sound knowledge and understanding of political ideas and systems. Supports analysis of the issues with accurate knowledge, which may at times be developed with sophistication, though some could be developed further. • <i>AO2 (analysis)</i> Clear answer, containing analytical points consistently focused on answering the question. Analysis is weighed and clearly expressed, but may not be fully developed. Comparisons between points of view are clear and relevant. Judgements are based on pertinent examples, incorporated and relevant. • <i>AO3 (evaluation)</i> Clear evaluation relates conclusions to the facts and analysis, although not fully supported. Pertinent points of view, which may include those within the source, are considered to form logical arguments though evaluation may need to be developed.
3	11–15	• <i>AO1 (knowledge)</i> Demonstrates a range of knowledge and understanding of political ideas and systems. Supports analysis of the issues with knowledge, but factual errors are present. Comparisons between points of view are in some balance, but are mainly descriptive. • <i>AO2 (analysis)</i> Structured answer, consistently focused on answering the question. Analysis is present, and not entirely one-sided, though often knowledge is substituted for analysis. Comparisons between key points are present with limited explanation. Judgements are based on relevant examples, incorporated and relevant. • <i>AO3 (evaluation)</i> Conclusions related to the facts and analysis are presented, but with limited support. Pertinent points of view, which may contain those from the source, are presented, although not fully supported.
2	6–10	• <i>AO1 (knowledge)</i> Demonstrates limited range of knowledge and understanding of political ideas and systems. Supports analysis of the issues with knowledge, but factual errors are present. Comparisons between points of view are developed with some balance, but are mainly descriptive. • <i>AO2 (analysis)</i> Answer somewhat structured, with limited focus on tackling the question. Analysis is absent or one-sided, though tend to be descriptive and often unsubstantiated. Comparisons between points of view is largely absent or unclear. Analysis of the source is mainly descriptive. • <i>AO3 (evaluation)</i> Conclusions not entirely absent, but generally unrelated to the facts and analysis. Pertinent points of view, such as those in the source, are mentioned, although without support arguments.
1	1–5	• <i>AO1 (knowledge)</i> Demonstrates limited knowledge and understanding of political ideas and systems. Much of what is presented is inaccurate, extraneous and fails to support analysis. Comparisons between points of view are developed descriptively with little attempt at balance. • <i>AO2 (analysis)</i> Answer largely disorganised, failing to tackle the question. Attempts at analysis are unsubstantiated and imbalanced. Links between points are absent or imbalanced and rare. • <i>AO3 (evaluation)</i> Conclusions, where included, are unrelated to facts and analysis. Pertinent points of view, such as those in the source, are largely absent.
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Indicative Content for Question 3

- Cabinet plays an important role in the functioning of government, and therefore is effective in limiting the prime minister's power.
- A good example of this could be Theresa May: her cabinet represented a range of differing views on the issue of Brexit. Because her cabinet was composed in order to have legitimacy to continue as prime minister without frustrating either faction and maintaining a majority in 2017. However, it also meant that she could not approach Brexit without having to listen to the views in her cabinet, thus limiting her own power significantly.
- Another good example could be Margaret Thatcher. Her 18-year rule as Conservative prime minister after she lost the support of her cabinet on key issues. The loss of cabinet support was a context which led to her resignation as prime minister. This demonstrates that the cabinet can also end the tenure of even a very powerful prime minister.
- In order to govern, the prime minister must also be accountable to their cabinet. A good example of a prime minister who was not accountable to his cabinet, and as a result lost power, was Tony Blair among his party after 2001.
- However, there are numerous examples of cabinet not being an effective check on the prime minister's power.
- A clear example would be the way in which both Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher were able to stay in power without ramifications. Because they had large majorities in Parliament and popular support, they did not require the input of their cabinet in order to govern. This gave them the ability to limit their power.
- In addition, Boris Johnson appointed a cabinet in 2019 that largely represented the Conservative Party and excluded the other. This would suggest that the cabinet is not effective in scrutinising the prime minister as there is little difference in opinion.
- A likely conclusion would be that cabinet is only effective in limiting the prime minister's power if they are lacking popular support among the public or a majority in Parliament. If the prime minister has both of those factors in their favour, the cabinet is highly ineffective in limiting the prime minister's power.
- Synoptic links may include the way that the prime minister's power is related to the level of legitimacy given (or not given) to the prime minister as an election winner, the level of support the prime minister has from the party, and the party-political interests up to the prime minister.

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Indicative Content for Question 4

- Crisis management events since 1979 include the Falklands War (Thatcher), the Iraq War (Blair), global financial crash (Brown), COVID-19 and Russia–Ukraine markets upheaval (Truss). There is a need to choose two or more of these and explain what came about.
- Outline why such events can be so problematic for a prime minister. Prime ministers have a mandate to carry out a programme through either winning a general election or a contest. By their nature, no mandate exists for the actions a prime minister takes in response to unforeseen crises. In addition, they are likely to be diverted from their existing priorities.
- Whichever event is chosen, discuss the situation of the PM when the crisis broke. For example, in the COVID-19 crisis arose, Boris Johnson had recently gained a large majority in a general election, 'done' and was looking to deliver on his manifesto commitments such as 'level up'. Margaret Thatcher was midway through her first term, standing very low in the polls, in deep dissension, and unemployment rising.
- Analyse the approach taken by the PM to the crisis – were they quick to take action and did they meet with opposition from within and/or outside their party? How did the wider world approach it? For instance, it can be argued that the Argentine crisis was a sharp and sudden crisis involving a clear and direct challenge to the UK, whereas the 2008 financial crisis was a complex issue making a clear and decisive response much more difficult for the UK. It is also not immediately clear what impact it would have on the UK or what actions could be taken.
- In deciding whether the prime minister was weakened (or strengthened) in the crisis, choose appropriate indicators. These may include resignations from government, by-elections, opinion poll shifts, media reaction, failure to get policies through, the result of the general election following the crisis. There is a need to assess how much damage was done, and how much was due directly or indirectly to the crisis management episode.
- In summing up, it is probably reasonable to conclude that the Falklands War made Thatcher become more powerful. The financial crisis involving Liz Truss led rapidly to her resignation, 'Black Wednesday' led to a direct and quick reduction in Major's power and his removal from office four years later. The Iraq War, and its aftermath, is seen to have damaged Blair's standing as a popular and respected leader with a consequent reduction in his power. In 2007 came about partly because of his role in the Iraq crisis. Gordon Brown's influence rose from his role in dealing with the global financial crisis. However, the 2008 UK meant he had little scope for continuing to keep the economy moving upwards. Blair's Chancellor. His opponents were effective in laying the blame at his door. A major factor in him losing the 2010 general election. Neither the COVID-19 crisis nor the Russia–Ukraine war was a key factor leading to Johnson's resignation. It was not so much his personal behaviour which caused his downfall. The self-inflicted damage he did to himself in his honesty and integrity over 'partygate' was central to his loss of power.

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25-mark Essay Checklist

Level	Mark	Description
5	21–25	AO1 (knowledge) Demonstrates in-depth and extensive knowledge and understanding of political issues and systems. Supports analysis of the issues with careful choice of evidence. AO2 (analysis) Well-structured and organised answer, consistently focused on answering the question. Analysis is evenly weighed and authoritatively expressed in a clear and well-structured. Judgements are based on well-chosen evidence. AO3 (evaluation) Sound evaluation leads to well-supported conclusions with clear judgements. Pertinent points of view are considered and evaluated in order to reach a conclusion.
4	16–20	AO1 (knowledge) Demonstrates sound knowledge and understanding of political issues and systems. Supports analysis of the issues with accurate knowledge. However, there may be some inaccuracies. AO2 (analysis) Structured answer, containing analytical points and consistently focused on answering the question. Analysis is evenly weighed and clearly expressed, but may not be fully developed. Key points are clear and relevant. Judgements are based on pertinent evidence. AO3 (evaluation) Clear evaluation relates conclusions to the facts and analysis, although judgements may be limited. Pertinent points of view are considered and evaluated in order to reach a conclusion.
3	11–15	AO1 (knowledge) Demonstrates a range of knowledge and understanding of political issues and systems. Supports analysis of the issues with knowledge, but with factual inaccuracies. AO2 (analysis) Structured answer, consistently focused on answering the question. Analysis is present, and not entirely one-sided, though often knowledge is not fully developed. Links between key points are present, but with limited explanation. AO3 (evaluation) Conclusions related to the facts and analysis are presented, but judgements may be limited. Pertinent points of view are presented, although their use and relevance may be limited.
2	6–10	AO1 (knowledge) Demonstrates limited range of knowledge and understanding of political issues and systems. Supports analysis of the issues with knowledge, but with extraneous points. AO2 (analysis) Answer somewhat structured, with limited focus on tackling the question. Analysis is either entirely absent or one-sided, though tend to be descriptive and not analytical. Links between key points are largely absent or unclear. AO3 (evaluation) Conclusions not entirely absent, but generally unrelated to the facts and analysis. Pertinent points of view are mentioned, but without explanation or support arguments.
1	1–5	AO1 (knowledge) Demonstrates limited knowledge and understanding of political issues and systems. However, much of what is presented is inaccurate, extraneous and irrelevant. AO2 (analysis) Answer largely disorganised, failing to tackle the question. Attempts at analysis are unsubstantiated and imbalanced. Links between points are absent or unclear. AO3 (evaluation) Conclusions, where included, are unrelated to facts and analysis. Judgements are largely absent.
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Model Answer for Question 2

Introduction

As Source 1 explains, there have been a series of close election results over the years which have (in theory) strengthened the power of Parliament relative to the government. The salience of the issue of 'elective dictatorship' that was described by Lord Hailsham – that a majority government in decline has recently been reversed by the result of the election – as the Conservatives secured a comfortable majority. This period in politics is, therefore, determining whether or not effective government requires a strong parliamentary majority.

Argument against

Point 1: There are some reasons presented in the source to doubt the claim that a strong parliamentary majority is necessary for effective government. Perhaps the most obvious point to make is that the government has not functioned effectively during the coalition, years despite the majority party possessing a majority. Source 1 explains that the coalition was relatively stable and successful and was only defeated in 2010, suggesting most of its legislative agenda was implemented without difficulty.

Point 2: The source also highlights that, despite the fact Johnson now has a large majority, his government is still seen highly unstable and significantly destabilised by international events – in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic. This serves to demonstrate how dramatic an impact international events can have on a government, even with a large majority, public popularity and having recently won a general election. Similar to the impact of the financial crisis on Gordon Brown's premiership, or the chain of events that led to the end of Blair's premiership.

Point 3: In addition, the source also suggests that it was not simply parliamentary majority that caused May so much difficulty governing during her time as prime minister, but also that the complex and difficult political issue of Brexit. It could be argued that it is unlikely Theresa May would have been able to pass her legislative agenda in Parliament if it wasn't entirely focused on a highly divisive issue which was considered existential by most parliamentarians. This argument suggests that the circumstances and circumstances can also make effective government less effective.

Argument for

Point 1: The source also presents good reasons to support the claim that effective government requires a strong parliamentary majority, however. Most obvious among these is the fact that May's government struggled with difficulty securing parliamentary support and 'faced a record-breaking 33 parliamentary defeats'. These suggest that her government was highly ineffective, and the fact that her party did not win the 2017 general election is clearly a major reason for this. Her decision to call the 2017 general election, which she subsequently lost her majority in Parliament, is widely regarded as her biggest mistake.

Point 2: In addition, the source highlights the dire electoral consequences for the Liberal Democrats governing alongside the Conservatives and without a majority in Parliament. This was a coalition that was not effective, at least in terms of public popularity. The Liberal Democrats fell from their position as the UK's 'third party', and have continued to receive poor results in elections. This loss of support is widely attributed to the significant compromises they made as a junior coalition partner, and should serve to question the effectiveness of playing such a role.

Point 3: Finally, the fact that Johnson was virtually unable to govern as a minority government after the 2019 general election, losing a significant number of his parliamentary votes, and yet has had no difficulty in passing his legislative agenda since winning a majority at the 2019 general election, provides us with a strong argument to support the claim that effective governance and strong parliamentary majorities are necessary for effective government.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it could be said that a strong parliamentary majority is not the only factor necessary for effective governance, as international events and circumstances, the behaviour of the government, and of parliamentary opinion regarding controversial legislation, and public popularity all are capable of disrupting prime ministers even with large majorities. However, the source would appear to support the view that a strong parliamentary majority is essential for ensuring effective government, and without a strong majority a prime minister will struggle to pass their agenda in an effective manner.

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