2.3 Prime Minister and Cabinet

1979-1990: Margaret Thatcher, Conservative
Thatcher was Presidential in style; she was the first PM to ever have a stylist, and her teeth were whitened and her hair dyed. She was very good at manipulating the media, and due to her huge majorities in Commons (397 seats in her middle 1983 election, just after winning the Falklands War), the weakness of her opposition eg. Michael Foot who dressed awfully, her famously excellent health and her economic policy ending the recession in the 1980s, she was able to make radical reforms in her time such as privatising water and electricity and hugely reducing the powers of Trade Unions. She won 3 successive general elections, and only resigned due to a vote of no confidence from her cabinet, following the infamous poll tax in 1990.

1990-1997: John Major, Conservative
Chosen by the party to succeed Thatcher, Major led them through one very decisive victory in the 1992 general election before losing spectacularly to Blair’s “New Left” Labour government in 1997. In his 7 years in office, he negotiated the Maastricht Treaty which confirmed Britain as an EU member country, however his opinion polls were never particularly high and he was seen as weak/quiet/unpresidential. Interestingly, after he had resigned (following the 1997 ge) it was discovered that during his time in office he had an affair, and this actually boosted his popularity.

Blair won the 1997 election with 418 seats. His opinion polls in the first few months of his leadership were at 93%, and he enjoyed his immense popularity and power with a huge swathe of reforms, eg. he included the Social Chapter in the Maastricht Treaty, as well as introducing a minimum wage and the HRA (2000). He was Presidential in style, which he was able to be as he was charismatic and communicative, young and healthy. His reputation was tarnished near the end of his stint as he put troops in Afghanistan in 2001 then (more radically) in Iraq in 2003, but both wars were lost and many died. His style of government was seen as ‘sofa politics’, in which he made decisions in his office and did not provide HoC with information, or encourage dialectic in Parliament. His health began to fail and he was rushed to hospital in 2003 with a suspected heart attack, which undermined his authority.

2007-2010: Gordon Brown, Labour
Brown succeeded Blair when he resigned in 2007, as they had agreed he would upon Blair’s becoming PM. Brown was Chancellor of the Exchequer under Blair’s government though, so when the credit crunch in 2008 came around his economic policies from the last decade were seen to have caused it, and he lost much of his authority. He was also presented as harsh and manic by the media, and was unable to present himself well to the public. In 2010 he lost the only general election he ever stood for, and resigned as Labour leader. He was followed by Ed Miliband.

2010-2015: David Cameron and Nick Clegg, Conservative and Liberal Democrat
The 2010 election resulted in the first hung Parliament since 1974. In the Tory-Lib Dem coalition which ensued, Cameron shared the royal prerogative power to appoint/fire ministers with Clegg, but only for Lib Dem ministers. In general, Cameron was seen as the more in control on all matters, and as a very pragmatic and calm PM. Cameron and Clegg were reported to get on well, too.

2015-2020: David Cameron, Conservative
Cameron is a prime-ministerial PM who has a history in media and PR, and thus he is a good orator who can manipulate media well. He is confident and likes to involve Parliament and encourage dialectic eg. his free vote on the Syrian Air Strikes in 2015, when he could have just used his royal prerogative powers. Some see this as good for democracy, while some think it makes Cameron seem weak and unable to control his government. He only has a very narrow majority of 12 seats.
The role/powers of the Prime Minister:

Formal powers:

1. Head of government: PM can create new departments, establish committees and has the power of patronage: to appoint new ministers, senior judges and bishops
   a. 
2. Head of the civil service:
   a. 
3. Chief foreign policy maker:
   a. Cameron negotiated our relationship with the EU in Feb 2016, resulting in Britain’s exemption from ‘ever-closer union’
4. Commander-in-chief of the armed forces: decide when to send British troops into battle
   a. Thatcher in 1982, to oust the Argentine invaders
   b. Blair in 2001 and 2003 in Afghanistan and Iraq, to support America

Informal powers:

1. Chief policy maker for government:
   a. 
2. Chief government spokesperson/public face of government: provide definitive policy explanations to the public, through the media
   a. 
3. Represent the UK to foreign states
   a. 
4. Chair of the cabinet:
   a. PM decides who is in the cabinet, as well as what is discussed at meetings

The sources of those powers:

- Royal prerogative powers:
  - Command armed forces
  - Conduct foreign policy negotiations and sign international treaties
  - Speak on behalf of the nation
  - Appoint/fire/reshuffle ministers
  - Approve appointment of bishops and senior judges and nominate peerages
- Elective authority: PM is leader of the governing party due to having won the most recent general election (mandate theory - the PM has the people’s trust and support, as they voted for him/her)
  - Support of their party, both from MPs and party members across the country (that they are PM means they probably have more support than any other party leader, at least at the beginning of the term)
  - Support from Parliament/parliamentary authority

Prime Minister’s powers are determined by context. A PM may be Prime Ministerial, or more collegiate. Prime ministerial PMs have more control over their cabinet, whereas collegiate PMs are held to account by their cabinets to a further extent - they are less dominant, and policy is controlled by the cabinet as a whole.

- “The office of the Prime Minister is what its holder chooses and is able to make of it” - Lord Asquith
- All power must be examined in its context: on institutional terms, political terms and personal terms
- Institutionally, PMs have the Royal Prerogative powers - the right to appoint/fire/reshuffle ministers, the right to declare war and unparalleled access to information
- Politically, how powerful a PM is depends on:
  - control over Parliament (in particular HoC)
- In reality, this is dependant on the size of the PM’s majority in Parliament
- During Blair’s 1997 majority of 88 seats, only one of his bills failed to pass - the incredibly controversial proposal to increase the detainment period of suspected terrorists to 90 days before their sentence was given
- Cameron could not implement some policies, such as the electoral boundaries change, due to the coalition government meaning he did not have a majority in Parl.

- **role/competence of the opposition and especially the opposition leader**
  - Thatcher was luckily faced with weak opposition leaders Michael Foot - criticised for being unreasonably socialist and dressing shoddily, and Neil Kinnock - criticised for being ginger, and mocked for falling over into a wave when on a beach holiday
  - Labour’s division today over Old Labour/New Labour, Democratic socialist/Social Democrat, Corbyn/Blairite, makes Cameron seem stronger - though less so currently, due to the EU division in his party

- **unity of their party**
  - John Major’s government was internally divided over the EU, and he was therefore limited as a leader
  - Cameron’s calling off of CCR in the context of the upcoming EU referendum can be interpreted as his being weak and unable to control his divided party

- **public popularity/‘electability’**
  - often determined by the state of the economy or if Britain won/lost a war recently. Thatcher’s winning the Falklands War and beating the 1980s recession boosted her polls
  - Blair’s sending troops into Iraq in 2003 cost him public support

- **support of their cabinet**
  - Not to be underestimated - Thatcher never lost an election. She only resigned after her cabinet’s vote of no confidence in 1990
  - Brown could not trust all of his ministers, some of whom would have preferred Blair to still be in power

- **Economic situation**
  - When it was discovered that Gordon Brown’s actions as Chancellor of the Exchequer may have led to the 2008 credit crunch, he lost much authority
  - Personally, a PM is also limited by the extent to which they have:

- **charismatic authority (term defined by Max Weber, German political philosopher)**
  - Thatcher and Blair were both famously charismatic
    - Blair’s teachers, interviewed by the BBC after he became PM, recall and confident, ‘fun’ if somewhat rebellious teenager, always popular with friends
    - Blair’s nickname “Bambi” when he first took office benefitted him greatly, as people felt he was genuine and young and enthusiastic
    - Thatcher is thought to be possibly the most confident, outspoken, authoritative PMs to ever grace Downing Street

- **leadership skills**
  - Thatcher won the Falklands War in 1982, and consequently was seen as a powerful and decisive leader who acted correctly in the face of an Argentine invasion

- **good health**
  - Thatcher had a famously ‘iron constitution’
  - Blair was rushed to hospital with a suspected heart condition in 2003, which reduced his authority for the last 4 years of his leadership
- Cameron and Blair both benefit from being taller than the average man, therefore politician. Cameron is 1.85 m tall
- ability to manipulate media
  - Neil Kinnock lacked this! He was filmed falling into the sea, and the media mocked him relentlessly
  - John Major also lacked this, as he was portrayed as weak and boring

- general style
  - Thatcher had a personal stylist team which ‘marketed’ her very effectively
  - Cameron is suave and sophisticated, wears expensive suits and always has neat hair. He exudes statesmanship

- Even if a PM wants to be more powerful than they are, if they don’t have the popularity then they simply cannot be
  - Jeremy Corbyn is informal and peculiar in his dress sense, and speaks quietly/is often yelled over. Many people see him as too inexperienced/naive/too much of an ideologue to be electable as PM - especially compared to Cameron who is suave and smooth and experienced (though inversely some see him as phoney and obnoxious)

The importance of the cabinet: (not to be underestimated!)
- PM is the chair of the cabinet and has the right to appoint/fire/reshuffle ministers
- In accordance with CCR, cabinet meetings (usually held weekly) are the one chance ministers have to air complaints and discuss party policy. In the public eye, they must always agree with the PM to demonstrate unity
- The cabinet is designed to be a check and balance on the PM. The Cabinet and its PM can be said to be in a symbiotic relationship
- However, the degree to which any cabinet can do this successfully is dependant on both the nature of the cabinet members (whether they are allies or rivals of the PM) and the nature of the PM, and to what extent to consult/respect their cabinet
- Officially, under the Cabinet Manual produced in 2011, it is the “ultimate decision-making body of government”
- The priorities of the cabinet sometimes clash with those of the PM, as the cabinet ministers priority is always to get re-elected. Cameron, for example, has said that he will not stand for election as PM in 2020
- As the UK has no codified constitution, PMs cannot be impeached - so it falls to the cabinet to call a vote of no confidence, as happened to Thatcher in 1990, if they feel it necessary

Cameron (in relation to Parliament):
- David Cameron wants to be Prime Ministerial not Presidential in style, as demonstrated in his allowing a free vote in Parliament in 2015 over Syrian air strikes instead of merely using his royal prerogative powers. He clearly wants to engage Parliament in good dialectic, which is key, as for them to be able to scrutinise/ debate effectively, they must have access to all of the relevant information

The nature of the cabinet:
1. It is composed of 20-25 ministers, all directly appointed by the PM, and meets weekly - traditionally on Thursdays - and more often in crises
2. Ministers must either be in HoC or HoL, and will all be members of the governing party
   a. It is rare for a minister to be a peer from HoL, for it is less democratic, as the cabinet plays such a large role in holding the PM to account, yet peers have no mandate. In Cameron’s Cabinet today there is only 1 Baroness (other than the Leader of the House of Lords who always sits on the Cabinet)
b. 2010-15 had both Conservative and Lib Dem cabinet members, though always more Tory

3. Cabinet committees, generally made up of 5 or 6 ministers, deal with specific areas of policy
   a. Current notable examples include the Constitutional Reform Committee, Economic Affairs Committee, and the Europe Committee

4. The cabinet only works on the basis of CCR/CMP: Collective Cabinet Responsibility /Collective Ministerial Responsibility states that Cabinet members are allowed to disagree within cabinet meetings (meeting minutes remain secret for at least 30 years) but cannot speak out publicly against the PM, because if the cabinet appears divided, it makes the government look weak (and potentially unelectable) - “United we stand, divided we fall”. The convention also states that all cabinet ministers are collectively responsible for all cabinet decisions.
   a. If a cabinet member breaks the convention, the PM may demand their resignation if they don’t quit. In this case the member usually returns to being a backbench MP
      i. Robin Cook, ex-Foreign Secretary, resigned in 2003 over supporting the decision to send troops into Iraq
         However over recent years this had eroded:
      ii. Cameron even suspended CCR over the issue of Brexit and cabinet members including Chris Grayling (Leader of the HoC) and Iain Duncan Smith (Health and Pensions Secretary until he resigned in March 2015) have campaigned for Brexit against Cameron
      iii. Clare Short remained in Blair’s cabinet for 2 months after she spoke out against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but she did resign in the end

The role/function of the cabinet:
1. Formalise and legitimise official government policy
2. Deal with disputes in different government departments/committees/funding
3. Meet in special sessions to deal with crises
   a. In response to the 2007-09 banking crisis, Brown set up a National Economic Council within the cabinet
4. Decide how to portray policy to the media
5. Arrange the business of Parliament, in conjunction with the party whips
6. Occasionally formulate policy (usually only at the PM’s instigation)
   a. Decision to bid for the 2012 Olympics was a cabinet decision

PM powers over their cabinet:
- Patronage: the PM appoints, and can at any time fire, all ministers
- CCR: rebellious ministers put their careers in jeopardy
- ‘Bilateral agreements’: PM can form policies with MPs not in his/her cabinet
- Cabinet committees: PM can chose to form policies/make decisions with selected members of the cabinet, and exclude others
- As chair of the cabinet, PM can chose what the cabinet discusses at meetings

Elastic band theory: (prof. Bill Jones and prof. Dennis Kavanagh)
★ The powers that all PM’s have, as part of the job description, represented by a loose elastic band, are:
   ◦ Prerogative powers
   ◦ Leader of the executive arm of the state
   ◦ Head of Parliament
   ◦ Face of their party
★ Depending on the context of the time, this role may be stretched/they may be more assertive over their cabinet. This is symbolised by stretching the elastic band, so it gets more tense
In states with codified constitutions it is clear when the band has been stretched too far, whereas in
the UK it is much more difficult to tell when a PM is being overmighty/pushing boundaries because
the constitution is so vague
★ So, in the UK it falls to the cabinet, the opposition, the judiciary and the media to ensure a PM does
not become ‘ultra vires’
★ Generally speaking, on PM’s expanding their role does not make that expansion permanent - like an
elastic band, it springs back again after. It is common for a more dominant PM to be followed by a
more parliamentary one

Presidential politics vs Prime Ministerial politics:
● President is directly elected whereas PM is chosen by the party
● A President is a figurehead, singled out from their party/government, whereas a PM is merely the
boss of the party, ‘primus inter pares’ - first among equals
● PMs therefore have more dialectic with their cabinet/are more collegiate than a President would be
  o Dec 2015 Syria vote Cameron allowed a free vote, which demonstrated that he is ‘primus
  inter pares’ not Presidential, as he could have just used his prerogative powers. Arguably he
  therefore set a trend, and in the futures PMs will have to to consult their cabinet - therefore
  be more primus inter pares - before declaring an act of war
● There is NO President in the UK; however, arguably over the years PMs are becoming more
  presidential in style
● In order to be presidential in style, PMs must have the right context (as examined above) and be able
to make something of that context - they must be simply dripping with charismatic authority

Is Presidential style politics on the rise in the UK?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, PMs are becoming more presidential/overmighty/dominant/ultra vires/elective dictatorship in style:</th>
<th>No, they are ‘primus inter pares’/ first among equals/ cabinet-style/ parliamentary/ collegiate-style:</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1. PMs distancing themselves from Parliament  
  a. Blair who only voted in 8.6% of votes in Parliament between 1997 and 2001. He also reduced PMQs from twice weekly to once  
  2. PMs becoming more dominant over their cabinet  
  a. Thatcher was dominant over her cabinet  
  b. Blair barely consulted his cabinet - he changed cabinet meetings to informal political discussions. In 2002 the cabinet only met 38 times, and produced only 4 formal papers. ‘Sofa government’  
  3. Growth of individual ‘spatial’ leadership (term defined by Foley) and PMs presenting themselves as separate from their party  
  a. Thatcherism, the fact that Thatcher’s parents were middle | Limitations affecting all PMs:  
  1. Uncodified constitution means that no PM’s influence is permanent, as Parliament is sovereign (not the PM nor the constitution itself) therefore legislation can all be changed as the PM changes  
  2. Parliament (esp. HoL when there is a large majority in HoC) holds government to account, and Cabinet may too  
  3. Fixed 5-year term Parliaments (since 2011) take away the control any current PM would have over the context of the time an election is held  
  4. The electorate can technically vote out the PM at any time, and in reality PM must always consider how to be re-elected  
  5. The PM does not have a separate electoral mandate - they are elected on the back of their party manifesto and because enough of their MPs were elected |
class grocers and she was presented as different from/above the normal middle class, privately-educated MP

4. Populist government, soundbite politics (since HoC televised in 1989) and media all pave the way for Presidential, commodified characters to be successful
   a. Miliband and bacon sandwich were unsuccessful
   b. Neil Kinnock filmed falling on the beach
   c. Since the first televised leadership debate in 2010, candidates for PM must personable and charismatic

5. Increasing importance of communications/relationships abroad, including with America, define how successful a PM is
   a. Cameron is particularly tall and thus has authority and respect amongst international politicians

6. Michael Foley concludes that PMs are becoming more presidential in style in keeping with “the rapid development of leadership politics” around the world today

7. The increase is international outlook is a global pattern, relevant in the UK since Churchill’s frequent meetings with Roosevelt and Thatcher’s with Reagan and Gorbachev, and should not be attributed to Americanism/presidential style politics

Limitations on some PMs, dependant on context:

8. Cameron allowed a free cabinet vote over the EU referendum

9. How overmighty a PM can be depends on the style of the opposition, and of the leader of the opposition
   a. Neil Kinnock was weak against Thatcher
   b. Labour is divided today and thus are a weak opposition (reflected in Osborne's 2016 budget cut, which leaned towards pleasing Tories rather than pacifying Labour)

10. PMs can only be successful with the support of their cabinet, which must not be underestimated! Any cabinet technically can overrule their PM
   a. In 1990 Thatcher’s cabinet forced her to resign with a vote of no confidence. The cabinet acts as a check and balance where a codified constitution/impeachment would

11. Also depends on the political context of the time, partially outside of their control
   a. Blair has such a huge majority in HoC that really the only check and balance on him was the Treasury (led by Brown), so he could do more than he would have been able to, even as charismatic as he was, with a smaller majority

What factors must a PM take into account when appointing cabinet ministers?

Personal attributes of the minister:
- If they are a close ally of the PM
  - George Osborne ran David Cameron’s 2010 leadership campaign, and has been Chancellor of the Exchequer ever since
- If they are a potential rebel (due to CCR, admitting them to government may control them)
  - Vince Cable was Lib Dem Business Secretary from 2010
- If they deserve a reward for significant support in the past
  - Oliver Letwin is currently the minister in charge of the Cabinet Office. He has been an active Tory MP since 1997
- If they represent a significant portion of the party
2.3 Prime Minister and Cabinet

- Theresa May
- If they are experienced and qualified for the job, and hard working
- David Willetts served the 2010-14 cabinet, nicknamed “two brains” for his intellect. He was a very hard-working MP - by the age of 40 he had been a whip, Cabinet Office Minister and Paymaster General

Team attributes:
- If opposing views/all factions within the party are expressed, to form good dialectic and represent all
  - Major had to have representatives from all varying political stances as his party was so divided. Kenneth ‘Ken’ Clarke was Chancellor of the Exchequer, absolutely pro-Europe, whereas Michael Portillo was the Euro-sceptic acting as Secretary of State for Defence. This is one of the reasons that he could not control his cabinet, as he could never placate them all
- Social diversity
  - In Cameron’s current Cabinet meeting, 10/30 ministers are female
  - In coalitions, both parties must be represented
  - In 2010 there were 18 Tory ministers and 5 Lib Dem ones

Past Questions:
June 2015
To what extent are modern Prime Ministers now Presidents in all but name? (40)

June 2014
With reference to the source, what is a government reshuffle?
With reference to the source and your own knowledge, explain the factors a prime minister considers when appointing or dismissing ministers
To what extent do Prime Ministers control the decisions made by their government?

Jan 2013
With reference to the source, describe how the introduction of fixed-term Parliaments has affected prime ministerial power
With reference to the source and your own knowledge, explain three reforms, other than fixed-term Parliaments, which could limit the powers of the prime minister
To what extent have UK prime ministers become more ‘presidential’?

June 2013
Has the experience of a coalition government strengthened or weakened prime ministerial power? (40)

June 2012
With reference to the source, outline how coalition government has affected appointments to the Cabinet
With reference to the source and your own knowledge, explain why collective responsibility is an important aspect of UK government
How important is the Cabinet?

Jan 2012
Are British prime ministers as powerful as is sometimes claimed?

June 2011
Is the UK Prime Minister now effectively a President? (40)