Executives

4

The executive branch literally refers to those persons who are charged with responsibility for the administration of government and the implementation of laws made by the legislature. Technically, it includes the head of state, members of the government and the officials who serve them, as well as the enforcement agencies such as the military and the police. However, more usually the term is used to denote the smaller body of decision-makers which actually takes responsibility for the direction and form of government policy. Indeed, we use the term Political Executive **when referring to the government of the day, and the** Official Executive **when we are speaking of the bureaucracy whose task it is to administer the policies which ministers have laid down.**

In the first section of the chapter we are concerned with the Political Executive, in other words with the politicians rather than the civil servants. Who gets to the top? What power do they exercise? Why is that power often said to be growing? Who is more powerful, Prime Minister or President?

In the second section, we briefly review the Official Executive, examining who we can include within the ranks of the bureaucracy, how they got there and the power they exercise.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Distinguish between the Political and the Official Executive.
- What factors led to the broad trend to increased prime ministerial and presidential power in the twentieth century?
- What factors constrain the Prime Minister and President today?
- To what extent are they prevented from achieving their political goals?
- What qualities is it desirable for political leaders to possess in the television age?
- Is the personality of a leader today more important than his or her ideology?
- Compare the importance of the Cabinet in Britain and the United States.

THE POLITICAL EXECUTIVE

In a parliamentary system such as Britain, the key politicians include the ministers headed by a prime or chief minister, all of whom are members of and responsible to Parliament. In presidential systems such as the United States, the President acts as a single executive, though he appoints Cabinet members to work with him. Neither the President nor his Cabinet officers are members of congress.

The functions of executives

As we have seen, the key function of the executive branch is to take decisions and assume overall responsibility for the direction and co-ordination of government policy; in other words, executives provide political leadership. Providing leadership involves several distinctive roles, of which Heywood has distinguished five main ones:[1]

1 Heads of state (be they monarchs or Presidents), Chief Executives and government ministers on occasion undertake **ceremonial duties** such as receiving foreign visitors, staging banquets and signing treaties. In this capacity, they 'stand in' for the state itself, embodying the national will. In Britain, the Queen has a key ceremonial function, although on frequent occasions ministers – and especially the Prime Minister – are also required to meet dignitaries and engage in discussions with other heads of state or their representatives. In America, the President combines the role of Head of State and Chief of the Executive. He or she is the symbolic head of state and as such a focal point for loyalty. Again, the President has ceremonial functions ranging from visiting foreign countries to attending important national occasions.

crisis
A sudden, unpredictable and potentially dangerous event which calls for constant monitoring, good and consistent judgement, and decisive action. Most American Presidents have been only too willing to seize their chance to lead, whether it be Kennedy over missiles in Cuba or George W. Bush over the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

2 Key members of the Executive have to respond in times of **crisis**, and provide leadership. A willingness to shoulder responsibility and a facility for making difficult decisions are important assets for any could-be national leader, and it is in the **management of crises** that their mettle is tested to the limits. The potential dangers range from an upsurge of discontent at home from militant groups to terrorism abroad, from conflict in the world's trouble-spots to the need to cope with famines and earthquakes in territories which fall within a nation's responsibilities. Some Prime Ministers spend much of their time on international affairs, out of choice or preference.

Tony Blair was much involved in helping to build the international coalition against terrorism following the events of 11 September 2001, and George W. Bush was forced into more vigorous action as part of the same struggle. The Bush presidency moved into a higher gear, adopting a more assertive role at home and abroad. Given America's size and strength, the role of the President in crisis management is inevitably greater than that of the Prime Minister.

3 Members of the Executive seek to **mobilise support** for the government to which they belong, for without such support the task of implementing policy is much more difficult. This involves appearing on the media or taking other opportunities via which the ministerial case can be put across to the public. As we see on p. 71, political leaders are normally keen to take advantage of the opportunities presented by television for it can be an invaluable medium for telegenic personalities. These range from extended political interviews and 'soft interviews' on chat shows, to televised appearances in the legislature and televised press conferences. Prime Minister Blair has recently followed American style and opted for the 'presidential' press conference.

4 Above all, the most important day-to-day role of the executive branch is to control the policy-making process, a function which has expanded notably in the twentieth century with the increasing involvement of government in running the economy and providing welfare programmes. As a result of the greater degree of state intervention and regulation, **ministers are constantly involved in making decisions** on a whole range of issues which have a major consequence on people's daily lives. As part of their involvement, they introduce new policies, often requiring laws to be guided through the legislature. For this, they need the consent and approval of a majority of elected representatives, and as we have already seen in 3 above the task of winning support for governmental initiatives falls largely to them.

The Prime Minister is part of the legislature and has a phalanx of party supporters behind him or her who will usually support and vote for the measures he or she introduces. The President is not part of the legislative branch and although Presidents can recommend measures to Congress – and increasingly do put forward packages of proposals to Congress – they may have real difficulty in getting them on to the statute book. Their methods range from subtle and more blatant arm-twisting to threatened or actual use of the presidential veto, but despite such an array of means there is no guarantee that they will achieve the end required. Whereas Tony Blair was able to push through a controversial programme of welfare reform, Bill Clinton was not able to do the same in health policy.

5 Finally, **the Political Executive oversees the work of the Official Executive,** and whilst it is bureaucrats who implement the decisions which have been taken it is nonetheless usually the politicians who get the praise or blame for

what is done. Ministers take the blame for mistakes, and are responsible to the Legislature for sins of omission and commission on the part of their civil servants.

In Britain, both individual and collective responsibility have long been viewed as cardinal features of British government, even if in recent years they rarely lead to ministerial resignations or the downfall of the party in power. At times of political controversy when wrong-doing or maladministration is exposed in a department, the Prime Minister may come under considerable pressure to act, as Tony Blair was over the behaviour of his Secretary of State for Transport, Stephen Byers, in 2001–02. In America, the President and/or Cabinet cannot be brought down by an adverse vote in the legislature. The President will ride out problems within a department, even if its head has to take the flak.

The increase in executive power

In the twentieth century the power of government has been extended significantly as politicians have sought to develop new policy initiatives to please the voters. In an age of mass democracy, they cannot afford to leave the aspirations of the people unmet, and they have been forced to respond to pressing economic and social needs or else suffer defeat at election time.

Heads of state have benefited from the increasing attention of the media over the last few decades, but their powers have for a long time been largely symbolic unless – as in the case of the United States – the President fulfils a dual ceremonial role as head of state and also acts as Chief Executive. Chiefs of the Executive have major responsibilities, and their public profile is markedly higher than that of their ministerial colleagues. Much of their increase in power derives from the growth in governmental interventionism, but the globalisation of economic and political concerns has also added to their responsibilities and recognition.

Prime Ministers – sometimes known as chancellors or as first ministers (or by local names as in Ireland, where the term Taoiseach is employed) – are chiefs of the executive branch. Their power is based upon their leadership of the majority party, and they head either a single party or coalition government. Their formal powers are less than those of a US-type executive President, but their ability to hire, promote and fire colleagues offers much scope for a display of strong, personal leadership.

For first ministers, the degree of power they can exercise depends largely upon two areas:

- The relationship with ministerial colleagues in the Cabinet. Strong leaders will be able to use their patronage to reward party colleagues whom they

wish to bring into the administration and dismiss or downgrade dissenters, and will give a decisive lead to Cabinet discussions.
- Leadership of the party via which they can influence the legislature and the voters. Modern political leadership is based largely on the growth of the party system in the twentieth century. As parties have become more centralised and disciplined, leaders have been given an opportunity to assert their influence over their party supporters and rivals, and if they can keep their ministerial team united they can be in a position to stamp their personal imprint on the party. Of course, this does not always happen, and there are always other potential leaders waiting 'in the wings', so that a leader who loses the willing consent of his followers can find himself or herself in difficulty.

Heywood provides another series of reasons for the growth in prime ministerial power over recent decades, noting in particular

> **the tendency of the broadcast media in particular to focus on personalities, meaning that Prime Ministers become a kind of 'brand image' of their parties. The growth in international summitry and foreign visits also provides prime ministers with opportunities to cultivate an image of statesmanship, and gives them scope to portray themselves as national leaders. In some cases, this has led to the allegation that prime ministers have effectively emancipated themselves from Cabinet constraints and established a form of prime-ministerial government.**

The position of Prime Minister in Britain was already well established by the end of the nineteenth century, when it was described as '*primus inter pares*' (first among equals), but circumstances in the twentieth century allowed premiers to develop the potential of their office to the full and to become much more than the description implies. In particular, war leadership – whether it be in World War One, World War Two or the Falklands War – provided opportunities for a display of assertive, personal leadership. Managing a war effort requires broad shoulders, a willingness to take tough decisions and accept responsibility if things go wrong and an ability to rally and inspire the nation. It did much for the fortunes of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, for she was able to cast herself in Churchillian mould.

Today, as we see on pp. 78–80, there is talk of prime ministerial or even presidential government in Britain and the comparison with the American President has a well-established place in the minds of examiners.

American Presidents have benefited from similar factors, notably:
- The growth of 'big government' in the years after 1933, as the role of President became identified with increased federal intervention.
- The importance of foreign policy, with the development of an American world role following World War Two.
- The mass media: the media can concentrate on one national office, for the President is news – the Kennedys were almost like a royal family for

journalists. Since the 1960s, television has been increasingly important and Presidents regularly make the headlines.

In addition, the inertia of Congress, which surrendered much influence in the early post-war decades, enabled Presidents to assume a larger leadership role. The mid-1960s saw the peak of enthusiasm for presidential power, for by then it seemed as though there was a broad consensus about domestic and foreign policy (by the end of the decade, division over the Vietnam War had threatened that consensus), and Congress was willing to accept presidential leadership. It gave Truman and his successors *carte blanche* in matters of national security. Foreign policy was recognised as the President's sphere of influence and his initiatives received the near-automatic ratification of Capitol Hill.

Television and political leadership: differing styles

(see also p. 75 and pp. 257–60 in the chapter on the mass media)

The publicity and opportunities for leadership afforded via television are considerable, and some politicians have been able to exploit the medium to great effect. This can be achieved by leaders of sharply contrasting personalities. In the early years of the Fifth French Republic, Charles de Gaulle was skilful in using his televised press conferences to create what Ball refers to as 'the impression of aloof royalty, unsullied by the real world of political bargaining and compromise'.[2] He came across as a national leader who could be counted on as the father of the French people. His appeal was not in any way based upon a telegenic image of the type which is now considered so important for political leaders.

Neither did Margaret Thatcher in her early years as Opposition leader seem to possess obvious television appeal, her voice seeming shrill, her manner unduly hectoring. Abrasive and argumentative politicians can seem unattractive to the voters, and these qualities needed to be managed. Within a few years her TV persona had changed, and her weaknesses were either removed or turned to her advantage. She was able to convey her strength and resolution, and with careful coaching from professionals was successful in adopting a 'softer' style of voice and appearance to accompany her message. In choosing Tony Blair as leader, Labour saw the value in opting for someone who is media-friendly, and endowed with personal charisma. Like Bill Clinton – who was also able to deploy the medium to his advantage – he is easy on the eye and ear. Clinton was often most successful in staging a comeback via the adept handling of television.

Today, as the veteran Democratic Party consultant, Raymond Strother has noted, there are many more appealing, attractive people who get to become political leaders.[3] Conventional good looks are an advantage – fatness or baldness quite the opposite. The Americans have in recent decades chosen some leaders who are 'naturals' for the media age. John F. Kennedy had an image of youth and glamour, and was able to use television to impress the voters with his determination to get America moving ahead and conquer 'new frontiers'. Ronald Reagan was a trained actor, who looked good, and was able to deploy his soft-soap style and easy charm to convince Americans of his warmth and sincerity.

How do politicians acquire political leadership in Britain and the United States?

No one is born to be Prime Minister or President, unlike the person who becomes king or queen in Britain.

BRITAIN

Prime Ministers gain power as a result of a general election victory. As the leaders of the largest party, they win the right to form an administration. On occasion, the existing Prime Minister either resigns in office (e.g. Macmillan, Wilson) or is defeated by a rival candidate in a party leadership contest (e.g. Lady Thatcher). This creates a vacancy which is filled as a result of a leadership contest in the relevant party.

The process of getting elected as party leader

The **Conservatives** were the last of the three parties to allow party members a say in the choice of their leader. For many years up to and including the election of William Hague in 1997, the decision was made by MPs, who had the opportunity to talk to their constituents before they cast their vote. Hague introduced a number of organisational reforms, among them a scheme which first operated in 2001. MPs (who of course had had the chance to see the rival candidates at work in the House of Commons and to assess their parliamentary skills) voted on a range of candidates, which was eventually narrowed down to two: Kenneth Clarke and Iain Duncan Smith. Party members then made the final decision, in this case opting for the less-well-known Duncan Smith, the candidate widely perceived as more right-wing and anti-European.

The **Labour** leader and deputy are elected via an Electoral College, in which there are three equally represented components: the unions, the constituency representatives and MPs. Given the disparity in the size of the three components, the votes of MPs count disproportionately, the vote of one MP being equivalent to some 800 constituency votes and approaching 15,000 trade union votes. Those wishing to be candidates need nominations from 12.5 per cent of Labour MPs when there is a vacancy, or 20 per cent when they are mounting a challenge to an incumbent. To be declared elected, a candidate needs an absolute majority of the votes. The revised machinery was put to the test for the first time in 1994. On that occasion, Tony Blair was elected leader with majority support in all the constituent parts of the College. Although only a quarter of the eligible voters exercised their right, the election was widely seen as the biggest democratic exercise in European party politics, a 'million-vote mandate' as some Blairite supporters proclaimed. (952,109 votes were actually cast).

The **Liberals** were the first party to opt for some scheme for choosing their leader which extended to the party membership, as well as to MPs. **Liberal Democrat** machinery allows for a straight 'one person, one vote' ballot of all party members.

The background of those who enter Number Ten

The road to the premiership in Britain is usually a long one, Prime Ministers normally having experienced a good innings as a backbencher and then served in a variety of ministerial

posts. They become leader of the nation by first becoming the choice of their party. In the two main British parties, the leader is now chosen by a combination of MPs and party members, so that many thousands of people have been involved (see opposite) – or had the opportunity to become involved – in the decision. Once the party leader is decided, everything depends upon the outcome of the general election. The leader of the largest party becomes Prime Minister and forms his or her administration.

Of recent premiers, most have had some experience of ministerial office before they reach Number Ten. James Callaghan was elected as an MP in 1945 and served for 31 years before he became Prime Minister. Unusually, he had served in all three great office of state (the Treasury, the Home Office and the Foreign Office). John Major entered the House in 1979 at the same time as Margaret Thatcher entered Downing Street, and within eleven years had replaced her, illustrating that much depends on good fortune, right timing and the lack of an acceptable alternative. He had had a rapid rise through the ministerial ranks, serving for only two years in a major department (the Foreign Office and the Treasury). In the case of Tony Blair, he had entered the House of Commons in 1983, eleven years later was the leader of the Labour Party and within three further years became Prime Minister after a landslide victory.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Presidents gain their position by one of two basic routes. They either take the normal road to the White House, running for the presidency via the electoral process briefly described below, or else they are elevated to the presidency from the vice-presidency. About one in five Presidents reached the Oval Office not by the normal road of elections, but because they were the number two when the incumbent died, was assassinated or discredited. Truman replaced Roosevelt after he had suffered a stroke, Johnson replaced Kennedy after the dramatic shooting of the President in Dallas, and Ford replaced Nixon after his resignation as a result of Watergate and associated scandals. In Ford's case, he bears the unwanted distinction of being the only President never to have been elected to office, for at the first opportunity (November 1976, against Jimmy Carter) the Americans voted him out of office.

The people who have become President have been a very diverse group, some distinguished intellectuals of great moral force, others shallow men of dubious morality. As long as they had the basic qualification of being natural-born citizens of the United States, were at least 35 years of age and had resided in the country for at least fourteen years, they were eligible. All have been white, male and, with the exception of Kennedy, Protestant. On observing Harding (often rated the worst president of all time) in office, a critic remarked: When I was a boy, I was told that anybody could become President. Now I'm beginning to believe it'.

The process of getting elected to the presidency

Candidates firstly need to achieve the nomination of their party. The method of selecting candidates has evolved over 200 years, and three possibilities are available: via the caucus, state conventions or primaries. Primaries are state-wide intra-party elections, the purpose being to give voters the opportunity to select directly the party's candidates.

▶

Nowadays, almost all candidates for presidency begin the campaign via the primary route. The first is held in New Hampshire and most are over by late March. There is an increasing tendency for primaries and caucuses to be brought forward, because states realise that they stand a better chance of affecting the outcome if they hold elections early in the process. Usually, a clear-cut winner has already emerged by time of National Nominating Conventions in July–August, so that these bodies now really only ratify a choice which has been made months previously. Their importance has declined, the Democrat convention of 1952 being the last to take more than a single ballot to select its nominee.

Once the candidates are chosen, then the presidential campaign proper gets underway. It includes whistle-stop tours and speech-making, but nowadays the emphasis is on television advertising, appearances and live presidential debates (see p. 252). When the voter makes his or her choice in November, he or she is actually voting to choose members of the Electoral College (see p. 31), rather than directly opting for a particular presidential candidate. **NB** Candidates may run without the support of a political party, as Independents. To do so, they must present a petition, signed by a specified number of voters who support the candidacy. Ross Perot was able to get on the ballot paper in all 50 states in 1992. Some states make this difficult, as the Green nominee, Ralph Nader, found in 2000.

What are the political backgrounds of those who become political leaders in the United States?

Candidates for the White House have tended to come from the Senate or a state governorship rather than the House of Representatives, where the period of two years in office gives them little time to make their mark. Gerald Ford was the last member of the House to become President, although in this case immediately prior to his elevation he was Vice President. (Nixon had experienced some difficulty in finding anyone who wanted the job, following the downfall of his previous choice in a financial scandal.)

Kennedy was the last person to rise from the Senate to the presidency, although several senators since the 1960s have attempted to gain their party's candidacy. The main route of successful candidates has been the vice-presidency or a governorship. Johnson, Ford and Bush Snr were all Vice-Presidents immediately prior to becoming President, and Nixon had served in that office for eight years before having a further eight years in the political wilderness. Carter, Reagan, Clinton and Bush jnr were all previously state governors. Reagan was well known to Americans, his face being familiar on cinema and television screens as a movie actor, whereas Carter (the peanut farmer from Georgia) and Clinton (the Governor of Arkansas) were little known outside their states.

Strength and weakness in political leaders: changing fashions

Opportunities for vigorous leadership present themselves to some leaders more than others. But individuals as well as circumstances make a difference, for some Presidents and Prime Ministers seek opportunities for giving taking decisive action.

What qualities are needed to be a successful leader in Britain, the United States and elsewhere?

Politicians come in all shapes and sizes, although the demands of the media today make it less likely that anyone who becomes their party's nominee for the highest office will be fat, ugly or unconvincing on television (see p. 71). The tendency in any modern democracy is to choose leaders who are thought likely to be 'good on television'. Those who are not 'naturals' for the medium or at least effective in handling it, such as Michael Foot and William Hague, have often failed to be elected. In Ronald Reagan, Americans found the perfect blend of the worlds of television and politics. Ideally, leaders need wide popular appeal.

The qualities needed to obtain the leadership and stay there are varied. What is evident from a study of recent Prime Ministers and Presidents is that politicians of very different personalities can occupy high office and achieve success. Important qualities might include, among other things, affability, ability (not necessarily the highest academic distinction, but rather nimbleness and vigour of mind, and a certain astuteness), industriousness (not necessarily a massive command of detail), an ability to delegate and concentrate on essentials, a capacity for decision-making, high ideals, vision, judgement, good timing, and courage (the willingness to tackle difficult events and where necessary to give a clear steer to events). Determination and perhaps ruthlessness are also in the mental equipment of most successful politicians.

For America, given its prolonged election campaigns, there are additional factors. The process of becoming American President – unless the President dies in office and the Vice-President takes over – is a long, complex and expensive one. It tests the mettle of any candidate, so that those who emerge have to be able to remain relatively unscathed after the scrutiny of a prolonged campaign. They need endurance and stamina, and to have a private life that will withstand the spotlight of media publicity, unless – like Bill Clinton – their charm enables them to convince Americans that, although not a saint, they are the right person for the job. It is a gruelling process, but it does ensure that the person who eventually emerges has, by the time he of she takes over, become a national figure in his own right. If Carter was largely unknown outside of his state in 1975, he was recognisable to almost all Americans a year later. In Britain, the main national party leaders are more obviously recognisable before reaching Downing Street, for coverage of politics centres on personalities and the Westminster scene. It is still important for them to achieve a broad appeal not just to party members and sympathisers, but to the non-committed voters at large.

Fashions in political leadership come and go. Strong leadership can inspire people and provide a real impetus to government. Colleagues, party members and voters feel that the person at the helm has a clear vision of what needs to be done, and for a time this can be very appealing – especially after a period of drift. The danger is that an assertive display of firm leadership can easily drift into authoritarianism, and the qualities once admired can seem no longer

admirable. What was once strength based on personal conviction can easily become arrogance.

The premiership of Margaret Thatcher illustrated how a leader endowed with a towering personality and firm views – assets which were initially admired by many members of the public – could become someone seen as overbearing and out-of-touch. After her leadership, many of her colleagues and people outside Westminster were pleased to see affable John Major take over. Yet when his parliamentary position was weakened after the 1992 election and his administration became beset by internal problems, there was much criticism of his dithering, indecisive leadership. Many voters seemed to want a firm hand in control, and warmed to the personal charisma and sense of direction Tony Blair was able to offer.

The Major administration illustrates the importance of the role of party leadership for any Prime Minister. Though not lacking in appealing personal qualities, he was unable to provide a sense of direction and his government seemed to drift from problem to problem – especially after the humiliating circumstances of withdrawal from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) on Black Wednesday – 16 September 1992. In his case, it was not lack of ability but a combination of unfortunate circumstances that undermined his position. His party was divided, and he could not dominate a House of Commons in which his parliamentary majority was always at risk. In addition, however, he also seemed to be deficient in what the elder George Bush once called 'the vision thing'. He seemed unable to lead people, and inspire them with the prospect of reaching a promised land. He lacked personal magnetism.

What determines the strength of political leaders?

In any country, much depends on the person at the helm. The observation of Lord Oxford on the office of Prime Minister many years ago applies to the situation in any democracy: 'The power of the Prime Minister is what its holder chooses and is able to make of it'. What the leader **chooses** to make of the office is a matter of personal style and approach. What he or she **is able** to make of it depends on personal ability and the circumstances of the day.

1 Style

Individual British and American Prime Ministers and Presidents have had differing concepts of their office, as we can see from two examples from each country. In Britain, John Major adopted a style which was more collegiate than that of Margaret Thatcher. Less of a conviction politician, he was by inclination more consensual, willing to consult and discuss issues. By contrast, Tony Blair has adopted many of the characteristics of the Thatcher era. As party leader, he has been known for his firm discipline, often derided as 'control freakery'. Party

colleagues have been expected to acquiesce in policy changes, some of which have been markedly distasteful to supporters of Old Labour – especially on welfare, the role of the private sector and trade union issues.

The Prime Minister's second election victory provided him with the opportunity to act more decisively and autocratically, and his emergence as a war leader in the battle against international terrorism has focused much attention upon his personal leadership. He has adopted a 'presidential' style, taking to the media on regular occasions and showing much concern with matters of presentation. He has tried to project himself as the voice of all reasonable elements in country who can shelter under his 'big umbrella'. He has downplayed the importance of the Cabinet and is said to be dismissive of Parliament, attending and voting irregularly. He is often charged with lack of accountability, as in his 'down-grading' of Question Time in the House of Commons.

In America, presidents Kennedy and Johnson asserted a more positive role for government than their Republican predecessor. They knew what they wanted to achieve, and put forward a bold programme for social progress. By the time Bill Clinton took over, the opportunities for the White House to display powerful leadership had been much reduced. 'Big government' was out of fashion, so that although he was naturally a leader who wanted to make things happen he found himself constrained by prevailing circumstances, most notably a resurgent and Republican-dominated Congress keen to make life difficult for him.

2 Ability

Of postwar British Prime Ministers, most have been able in some way or other. Ability is not always a matter of intellectual distinction, although a strong intellect can help. Harold Macmillan was an astute leader. In his prime, his abilities were widely recognised by those around him, as was pointed out by a colleague who observed: 'Harold Macmillan's chairmanship of the Cabinet was superb by any standards. If he dominated it (he usually did) . . . it was done by sheer superiority of mind and judgement'.[4]

John Major had many likeable qualities but intellectual prowess and public speaking were not ones for which he was greatly famed. He had other gifts, being notably effective in negotiation. James Callaghan had a reassuring manner which enabled him to see the country through difficult times, even if he was unable to give a decisive personal lead.

The men who have occupied the Oval Office have been similarly diverse, some intellectually eminent (Wilson and Clinton), some not very bright (Harding and Ford). Some have been fine speakers able to sell their policies (Franklin Roosevelt, Kennedy and Clinton), others have been poor speakers who lacked a way with words or had difficulty with them (Nixon, Ford and George W.

Bush). Their quality has been variable, but sometimes even if they were initially seen as unimpressive in comparison with their predecessor, they have grown in stature whilst in office. George W. Bush was widely portrayed as lacklustre, uninspiring and indolent in his early months as President, tainted by the fact that his presidency seemed to many people to be 'illegitimate'. Whatever view is taken of his intellectual qualities and capacity for leadership today, it is certainly true that he and his presidency were galvanised into action and moved into a higher gear after the attack on the twin towers. He took a firmer grip on events, began to shape the political agenda and – in the view of one observer – mutated 'into a figurehead who has the people behind him'. This shows the importance of the final factor, circumstance.

3 Circumstance

Some political leaders have been lucky in the circumstances of their takeover and others less fortunate. Margaret Thatcher was in many respects fortunate. The Falklands War, the Miners' Strike and the activities of the Greater London Council and Liverpool City Council provided her with dragons to slay – General Galtieri, Arthur Scargill, Ken Livingstone and Derek Hatton, among them. Moreover, the economy benefited from North Sea oil revenues, and the Labour Party was divided and led in the 1983 election by a leader (Michael Foot) who lacked popular appeal and had little idea on how to exploit the media. Her successor was less lucky. John Major took over at the end of a long spell of Conservative rule so that in many ways he succeeded to an exhausted inheritance. Within a few years it was 'time for a change'. He also suffered from the fact that Europe was beginning to intrude much more into British politics, the issue of European policy causing substantial problems for his party and administration.

The elder George Bush was primarily interested in foreign policy and won himself many plaudits at the time for his handling of the Gulf War. But within a short time, the concerns of many Americans were more to do with domestic policy and the recession than they were with events overseas. In 1992, he no longer seemed to be the man for the hour. His son, whatever the doubts his personality and ability created among many of his fellow countrymen, was called upon to lead his country through the trauma of 11 September and its aftermath. The event was the making of his presidency, even if it is difficult to judge what its effects will be in the long term.

The case of the British Prime Minister

For much of the twentieth century, writers and journalists debated the idea that the Prime Minister had acquired an unprecedented, even dangerous,

degree of power. Back in 1914, one observer, Sidney Low, noted that the incumbents of Number Ten were acquiring 'now and again, enlarged attributes, beyond those possessed as chairman of the executive board, and chief of the dominant party'.[5] He went on to observe that it was 'the increasing size of Cabinets' which 'caused the figure of the Prime Minister to stand out more prominently above the ranks of his colleagues'. RHS Crossman, a former Oxford don and then a Labour MP/Cabinet minister, elaborated upon the idea that Britain had acquired a system in which the Prime Minister had supreme power: 'The post-war epoch has seen the final transformation of Cabinet Government into prime ministerial Government', with the effect that 'the Cabinet now joins the dignified elements in the Constitution'.[6]

Such claims have been repeated frequently since the early 1960s, and many of them were made long before Mrs Thatcher ever became Prime Minister. But her performance led to a burst of renewed comment, for she appeared to stretch the power of the office to its limits. One minister who fell foul of her leadership style, Jim Prior, was to write in 1986 of the 'awesome' and 'still not fully appreciated' extent of prime ministerial power.[7] At around the same time, a left-wing critic of the concentration of power, Tony Benn, was more specific in his challenge:

> **The wide range of powers . . . exercised by a British prime minister . . . are now so great as to encroach upon the legitimate rights of the electorate, undermine the essential role of Parliament, [and] usurp some of the functions of collective Cabinet decision-making . . . In short, the present centralisation of power into the hands of one person has gone too far and amounts to a system of personal rule in the very heart of our system of . . . parliamentary democracy.**[8]

The central elements in prime ministerial power are well known but difficult to measure. They are:

- the power of appointment and dismissal of Cabinet and other ministerial offices;
- power over the structure and membership of Cabinet committees, any of which the Prime Minister may chair;
- the central, overseeing non-departmental nature of the office
- leadership of the party; and
- a high degree of public visibility.

These features operated for much of the twentieth century (certainly since 1945), but the circumstances outlined above have boosted the potential of the office and given it a much higher profile. No Prime Minister since World War Two has been anything less than very powerful, but individuals have made a greater or lesser impact upon the office. All were subject to some constraints, and even the more powerful among them were not always able to sustain the same degree of performance throughout their term.

Any Prime Minister today has a formidable display of powers at his or her disposal, but it is easy to overstate them. These powers need to be placed in context, and when this is done it can be seen that prime ministerial power can be seriously circumscribed and dependent on the circumstances of the time. It is not merely that some Prime Ministers are more powerful than others, but that any single Prime Minister will be more powerful at certain times than at others in the course of the premiership.

The prime ministerial government thesis can be over-stated, and it suffers from the tendency to over-generalisation. The relationships between the Cabinet, individual ministers and the Prime Minister are complex and fluid. Much depends on the personalities of those involved and on the issues and problems with which they are faced. There has certainly been a remarkable growth in the power of the executive branch of government in the last 100 years, but the distribution of power within the Executive is liable to change at any time.

The case of the USA

Presidential power has increased since the days of the Founding Fathers as people have turned to the presidency for initiatives to get things done. At times, the President has filled the vacuum left by the inertia or inaction of Congress, the states or private enterprise. The growth has not been at a consistent pace, for there was a reaction to Lincoln's autocracy and the increase in governmental power during World War One. There has been an ebb and flow of power because the presidency has flourished during emergencies which are, by definition, a temporary condition. When normality has been restored, presidential domination has come to an end. The fear of dictatorship has re-emerged, and Congress reasserted itself.

At times, Americans seem to want vigorous leadership, but they may then become troubled by the consequences of that assertiveness and yearn for a less active presidency. As Wasserman puts it: 'Americans have swung back and forth in how powerful they want their Presidents . . . [they] have walked a thin line between too much and too little power'.[9]

The modern presidency

The modern presidency really began in 1933, for the Great Depression created – or at least accelerated – a fundamental change in political behaviour in the United States. The sheer scale of economic dislocation and hardship required a national lead, and the administration of Franklin D Roosevelt was only too willing to respond. Since then, the American system has become a very presidential one and the political process now requires a continued sequence of

presidential initiatives in foreign policy and in the domestic arena to function satisfactorily.

As we have seen, there was real enthusiasm for presidential power in the 1960s. A broad spectrum of commentators welcomed its expansion. It was felt to be prudent to allow the President a relatively free hand to lead his country. There was general agreement that the federal government should have a significant role in the nation's economy and in creating and maintaining a welfare system. This growth of executive power prompted Arthur Schlesinger to argue that the concept of the constitutional presidency had given way by the 1970s to an **imperial presidency**, a revolutionary use of power very different from what had originally been intended.[10] He was largely basing his argument on the Nixon presidency and concluded that the institution no longer seemed to be controllable via the supposed constitutional checks and balances. It was an unsatisfactory position, pregnant with the possibility of the abuse of power.

imperial presidency
A label for the increased authority and decreased accountability of the presidency, at its peak by the late 1960s.

The 1970s to the present day

Such abuses of presidential power did occur – Vietnam and Watergate were but the most significant. Many Americans realised for the first time in 1974 the tremendous accretion of power in the hands of the President. The principle of a separation of powers had been incorporated into the Constitution to prevent a concentration of power in one part of the government. Watergate and the revelations of the misuse of power by the executive branch during several past presidencies reminded people of the message spelt out by the Founding Fathers – a system that placed too much responsibility in the hands of one man must offer temptations for wrongdoing.

Since then, observers have often spoke of the weakness rather than the strength of the presidency. Franck wrote in the 1980s of the 'tethered presidency', one too constrained to be effective and capable of providing the leadership America required.[11] The experience of Bill Clinton illustrated the limitations of the office. In his first term, he had two years in which his own Democratic party had a majority on Capitol Hill, yet he still found that it was difficult to manage Congress and achieve his legislative goals. Thereafter, weakened as he was by congressional enquiries into his personal affairs and ultimately by the process of impeachment, his presidency was a disappointment to those who had had such high hopes in 1992.

The President is a national leader seen by many as the leader of the Western world, a key player on the global stage. As such, the office holds enormous power. The extent to which that power is deployed will depend upon

individual incumbents. Some Presidents have adopted a deliberately unassertive style. Their style has been custodial, as they confine themselves to carrying out the powers expressly mentioned in the constitution and leaving Congress to take a lead and get things done. Others have been activists who favoured taking a personal lead. Not content with being mere stewards of national affairs, Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Bill Clinton have seen the role as one enabling them to give a personal lead. Most modern Presidents have by inclination been more activists than stewards, even if – like Clinton – they have found that the post-1970s presidency is less susceptible to a display of real leadership.

Many of Bill Clinton's 'triumphs' were more concerned with fending off attacks upon existing social programmes than taking America in a new direction. But his effective qualities as a campaigner, with a knack for appealing over the heads of congressmen to the nation at large, enabled him to show remarkable resilience and stage impressive comebacks. He used the presidential office as a pulpit from which to preach his values on issues which mattered to him, such as the family, race and even religion. Theodore Roosevelt – long before him – had adopted the 'bully pulpit' approach, in which he used a policy of active leadership to establish national goals.

Broadly speaking, the more admired Presidents have all been activists, those who used their incumbency to impose their moral authority of the nation, and deploy vision, assertiveness and crisis leadership to good effect. The nature of the presidency at a particular moment depends considerably upon the incumbent. Great men tend to make great Presidents, but the active presidential leadership of the 1960s and the habit of congressional compliance is out of fashion. It is commonplace among academics of recent years to think more about the limitations of the office than of its opportunities for leadership, even if those Presidents they admire have been those who imposed their stamp upon the office.

Neustadt and other writers have stressed the limitations on the power of the President.[12] He first argued this thesis in the early 1960s, using an anecdote about President Eisenhower to illustrate his case. Talking of the election of Eisenhower as his successor, Harry Truman observed: 'Poor old Ike. He'll sit here and he'll say, "Do this! Do that!". And nothing will happen. Poor Ike – it won't be like the army. He'll find it very frustrating.' The experience of recent years has made Neustadt's argument seem considerably stronger than it did when it first appeared.

Prime Minister and President compared

For years, it has been a regular part of discussion on the British and American systems of government to compare the two offices and to decide which is the

more powerful, the Prime Minister or the President. In Britain, academics have paid consistent attention to the premiership and written of 'government by Prime Minister', 'prime ministerial government' or of 'presidential government'. So what are the similarities and differences of the two offices and which is the more powerful?

An obvious difference is that in Britain the ceremonial and political roles are separated, so that the monarch is the titular head of state while the Prime Minister is the chief executive or political head of the government. In America the roles are combined in one person, a consideration which imposes considerable demands on the incumbent, but means that he or she has many opportunities to appear on social occasions and attract favourable media coverage. The Prime Minister is relieved of certain time-consuming duties, such as receiving ambassadors and dignitaries from abroad, and there may be an advantage in separating the ceremonial and efficient roles, pomp from power. But wearing both hats gives the President a dimension of prestige lacking in the office of Prime Minister, for he or she is only a politician whereas the President is both in and above the political battle, more obviously representing the national interest.

The holders of both offices have a similar responsibility for the overall surveillance and direction of the work of executive departments of government, and there are advantages of the Prime Minister over the President and vice versa. The Prime Minister is part of a plural executive, and he or she and the Cabinet are collectively responsible to the House of Commons. He or she may, of course, have acquired a real ascendancy over colleagues, and the impact of Margaret Thatcher's tenure in office showed the extent of prime ministerial dominance. Yet the British Cabinet is bound to be concerned in most major decisions during the lifetime of a government.

In the USA, the Cabinet is much less significant, and several Presidents – whilst not formally dispensing with the Cabinet – have been casual about holding meetings and and have treated its suggestions in a cavalier manner. Their Cabinet colleagues tend to be people drawn from the world of business, the ranks of academia or other professions, and return there once their term in office has expired; they have no personal following of their own in Congress or in the country. Cabinet members in Britain have a greater political standing in their own right, and are less easily ignored; they may be contenders for the party leadership.

A key factor in the comparison of Prime Minister and President is that the former is a more powerful party leader. He leads a disciplined party, whereas the President does not. This means that whereas the President can find difficulty in getting his proposals enacted into law, perhaps because of states rights, the views of Congress or the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister, given

a reasonable majority, is likely to get most of his or her programme through. In as much as the reputation of a government may depend on what it can achieve, the Prime Minister has far more chance of implementing the proposals he or she wants. Margaret Thatcher could reform the health service along the lines she favoured, whereas a few years later Bill Clinton could not. As Walles observes: 'Whereas a prime minister . . . with the support of party, is ideally placed for authoritative action, a president . . . often lacking the full support of his party in the legislature . . . is poorly placed to translate policies into working programmes.'[13]

In the area of foreign policy, both people are generally in charge of the direction of the government's external relations. On their own or through the appropriate departments, they declare the tone of the nation's foreign policy. There are differences in their position, however, for the President must have any treaty approved by two-thirds of the Senate, and if the policy requires legislative back-up, he or she may have difficulty in getting this through the Congress.

On the other hand, whereas the President may decide administration policy alone or in conjunction with the Secretary of State, a British Prime Minister is much more likely to put his or her policy before the Cabinet where views can be expressed. There may be individual opportunities for the Prime Minister to bypass the full Cabinet and take key decisions in a Cabinet Committee, but in most cases the Prime Minister appoints a Foreign Secretary with whom he or she is in agreement or on whom the Prime Minister feels his or her views can be imposed.

The Prime Minister is of course always liable to be defeated in the House, and therefore may not see out the term. Similarly, as with Margaret Thatcher, the incumbent of Number Ten can be removed when in office. In both cases this is rare. The occupant of the White House has a guaranteed fixed term in office, unless he or she does something very wrong, as over Watergate. The advantage in security of tenure is with the President, although when it comes to choosing the date of the next election (and manipulating the economy to create the 'feel good' factor), the advantage is with the Prime Minister.

Within the two political systems, the Prime Minister has the edge in domestic policy, because of his leadership of a disciplined, centralised party in a political culture which is orientated towards party government. He can get things done and he has considerable freedom of action in terms of how he wishes to do it. By comparison, presidential powers are more constrained. In foreign policy, Prime Ministers such as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair have usually been able to get their way, whatever opposition they have faced. Labour leaders in particular may face hostile elements in their party and Cabinet but, as long as they are perceived as an electoral asset, they can override them. In contrast,

despite the War Powers Act, Presidents have been able to carry out short-term military forays, commanding American forces without much significant opposition. Presidents dominate the conduct of foreign policy.

Of course, there is a difference between comparing the two offices within their respective systems of government and comparing their power in terms of world leadership. In terms of global importance, the President possesses unsurpassed power. He is the leader of the more significant country in international terms, with enough nuclear capacity to wipe out civilisation.

Has the British premiership become presidential in character?

It is important to distinguish between what is meant by prime ministerial government and what is implied by the term presidential government. There is a strong case for saying that the office of Prime Minister has grown in importance under the influence of a number of strong Prime Ministers. This is not the same as saying that those incumbents have necessarily been presidential in character.

There are clear similarities between the two roles. Prime Ministers have developed powers and a larger apparatus which bear some resemblance to those of the American President. The way in which Prime Ministers use the media is a good example. Blairite spin doctors have seen the opportunities for media manipulation, Alistair Campbell and others being keen to lean on television producers and journalists to get favourable coverage. They have recognised that one way of getting their message across is to speak to the nation directly. Presidents have very direct access to the media and can speak to and for the nation as they require.

Recent Prime Ministers have seen the opportunities presented by television in particular, understanding that the medium is infatuated with personalities. They are often keen to appear 'above the fray' of battle, in the way that Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair have often seemed to talk of what the government must do, as though they were in some way detached from it. This enables them to retain an aura of dignity and authority, and stay 'unsullied' by the daily reports of stories damaging to the administration. 'Teflon Tony' was a label which stuck to Mr Blair for some years, whatever mire or difficulties his ministers became involved in. In this respect, he was following the example of President Reagan who made himself into a kind of 'outsider', detached from the governmental process in Washington and able to dissociate himself from anything which might endanger his popularity.

Reagan's was a very personal leadership which Michael Foley has described in his study of *The Rise of the British Presidency*.[14] He calls it '**spatial leadership**' and illustrates it by paying particular attention to the comparison with Reagan

and Thatcher. He notes the way in which both were able to express their country's suspicion of government and politicians. She relished her role as the individual fighting against ineffective colleagues. Tony Blair has also experimented with the televised press conference as a way of talking directly to the press and to the nation, rather than having his message interpreted by journalists when they write their possibly biased accounts. Presidents have made varying use of such conferences, the more telegenic among them – particularly Kennedy and Clinton – being able to enhance their reputation by an impressive and polished performance.

spatial leadership
A reference to the way in which recent US Presidents have tried to increase their position in Washington by creating distance between themselves and the presidency.

One way Prime Ministers such as Thatcher and Blair may seem presidential is by trying to present themselves as national leaders of all the people. Their use of new or developed means of support is another. Just as Margaret Thatcher used the Cabinet Office and her relationship with the Cabinet Secretary to strengthen her control, so too the Blairite development of the Prime Minister's Office is a further indication of a wish to increase his influence and control over policy-making and to ensure that the government is run from a powerful nerve-centre, in what Hennessy calls 'a command premiership'.[15]

Foley is very aware of the differences between the two offices, in particular the fact that the President is also head of state, has direct authority from the people and cannot be removed by the legislature except for misconduct. But he detects similarities and concludes that the office of Prime Minister has become presidential but in a uniquely British way. The constitutional position of the two offices does not make for any real convergence, so that Britain has a distinctive presidential model in which the position of the Cabinet cannot be ignored – even if on occasions Prime Ministers by-pass it in making decisions on individual policy matters.

Support for the Prime Minister and President

The main support for the British Prime Minister is provided by the Cabinet (see the box on pp. 88–9). The relationship between the leader and the colleagues he or she appoints is a fluctuating and evolving one, but the Prime Minister would always consult Cabinet colleagues even if at times it is after a key decision has been made. In an umbrella sense, if we use the term Cabinet to include the Cabinet meeting, discussions in the inner Cabinet, Cabinet committees and in bilateral meetings with individual ministers, the Cabinet remains a body of enormous importance.

All Prime Ministers like to gather around them a collection of close friends and advisers, people whom they can trust even if the choices lack any formal

position of power. Not surprisingly, this kind of loose and informal 'kitchen Cabinet' can cause much resentment among others in the party, both ministers and those outside the government.

The Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office

Philip Gould, a key figure behind the scenes in the Blair administration, believes that the Prime Minister needs 'his own department that is powerful, talented and fast enough to cope with the speed of changing circumstances . . . without it, good government will become increasingly elusive'.[16] On the other hand, many would say that the Prime Minister in effect has his or her own department, in the Prime Minister's Office which has become a de facto, but not formalised Prime Minister's Department. Large numbers of advisers can be brought in at any moment to help keep the Prime Minister informed on policy developments and the potential difficulties ahead. In particular, there is an emphasis on presentation. The increased role of the Press Office indicates the importance attached to this area.

Prime Minister's Office (PMO)

The PMO has grown in importance in recent years and is now staffed by some 35–40 people who work in four different sections:

1. **The Private Office**. This is run by the PM's principal private secretary, a civil servant. It manages the PM's engagements and relations between Parliament and Whitehall, as well as keeping him or her up-to-date with important developments.
2. **The Political Office**. This links the PM with Parliament and the Party, and advises him or her on matters of political tactics, as well as preparing speeches and important documents necessary for the PM to carry out engagements.
3. **The Policy Unit**. Twelve advisers, mainly drawn from outside of government, who work on short- term appointments. They are there to give policy advice, and under Tony Blair the Unit has a key role. In Peter Hennessy's words, this helps to give the 'justified impression of No. 10 becoming more like the White House'. They are joined by two career officials.
4. **The Press Office**. These five or six people handle relations with television and the press. Press Secretaries such as Sir Bernard Ingham under Margaret Thatcher and Alistair Campbell under Tony Blair can be very influential.

The British Prime Minister also has the support of the Cabinet Office. The support given by the Office has helped to strengthen the Prime Minister's hand by providing the kind of oversight and leadership that departmental ministers, immersed in the minutiae of detail, cannot match. In particular, the axis between premier and Cabinet Secretary has been an important one in recent administrations.

The role of the Cabinet in Britain and America

The Cabinet is not mentioned in the American Constitution, although all Presidents have had one. However, the Cabinet has much lower status than in Britain. If anything, its influence is in decline, and has been since the 1930s. It is up to each individual President to employ it as he prefers and some Presidents such as Reagan in the early years of his administration have been keen to use it as a useful sounding-board and source of ideas. He tended to go round the table and invite individual views. He also experimented with Cabinet councils of five or six members which acted as committees to deal with topics such as economic affairs and human resources, a system comparable to the British system of Cabinet committees. Bill Clinton formed committees of Cabinet and sub-Cabinet members, as in the case of the National Economic Council. The purpose was to better integrate departmental heads and White House officials around particular policy areas.

In Britain and America there is much interest in who is appointed to the Cabinet, for the nature of the appointments gives some idea of the likely tone and style of the administration. Prime Ministers rely on their Cabinets to a greater or lesser extent. John Major used his Cabinet more extensively than his predecessor, and made less use of cabinet committees and bilateral discussions with ministers. Tony Blair uses Cabinet to impose his will, not always staying once his views are known. His meetings are brief and the style less collegiate. He expects cooperation and loyalty from ministers, and emphasises team spirit.

In both countries, Cabinet membership is usually around 20, the British Cabinet usually being slightly larger with 23–25 members, the American one slightly smaller. Whereas the present Bush Cabinet has 19 members, the latest Blair one has 23. In both cases the heads of important government departments will be included. In Britain, there are also a number of non-departmental ministers some of whom play more of a coordinating role and assume special responsibilities placed upon them. In America, other than the President, Vice-President and 14 departmental heads, the other members usually included are the ambassador to the UN and the Director of the Office of Management and the Budget.

Prime Ministers and Presidents include whom they wish, for Cabinets are their personal creation. In Britain, the Prime Minister is constitutionally free to make any appointments he wishes to, but they are politically limited. They choose members of their own party, certain of whom effectively choose themselves, for they are men or women of party standing, key figures in their own right. It was inconceivable that Tony Blair would have omitted John Prescott or Gordon Brown in 1997, just as a Major Cabinet without the rivals he defeated for the leadership (Michael Heseltine and Douglas Hurd) would have been unlikely.

In Britain, most members of the Cabinet are elected politicians, answerable to the House of Commons, although a proportion of members sit in the House of Lords. US Cabinet appointees have not been elected, are not figures of prominence within the party and are not members of Congress. Presidents will bear in mind certain considerations:

- They will normally be careful to ensure that nominees for Cabinet positions are acceptable to the Senate.
- They may choose nominees because of their personal loyalty to the President, or to repay political debts. In particular, Presidents may wish to reward prominent politicians who helped in the national campaign. However, they do on occasion choose someone from the other party: George W. Bush has included a Democrat, Norman Mineta (one of the Asians, see below).
- They will usually be keen to achieve some geographical balance, with representation of regions different from their own. (For example, as a northern liberal himself, Kennedy included a southern segregationist.) A broad social balance is desirable, and recent Presidents have been careful to acknowledge the existence of women and different ethnic groups such as the black, Hispanic and Jewish communities. George W Bush selected a surprisingly diverse Cabinet which includes two African- and two Asian-Americans, a Cuban-American, and an Arab-American. He also included four women.
- [If they are Republican] they tend to include appointees from a business background, so that Nixon, Reagan and Bush Jnr have all included people from the worlds of commerce and manufacturing.

> The Cabinet in 2003 is a veritable tycoon's club, by far the wealthiest in US history; 12 out of 19 qualify as millionaires in Sterling and others such as Cheney, Powell and Rumsfeld are very affluent. Democrat Presidents rely more on academia than business.

Once they have been appointed to the Cabinet, British politicians often stay in some Cabinet office for the duration of the administration, even if they are reshuffled. Several of them serve in a series of Cabinets, if the party is long in power or returns to it within a period of a few years from the last spell in office. A few go on to become Prime Minister or deputy Prime Minister. In America, once Cabinet members have been taken from relative obscurity and served their President for the lifetime of his or her administration, they return from whence they came, often having made little impact on the public at large. They are not leading political figures in their own right. Only two people have moved directly from the Cabinet to the presidency: Taft (Theodore Roosevelt's Secretary of War) and Hoover (Harding's and Coolidge's Secretary of Commerce).

In Britain, the Cabinet is the main decision-making body. It takes decisions, coordinates policy and acts as a court of appeal when agreement cannot be reached in Cabinet committee. Even if the Prime Minister is very powerful, the role of the Cabinet is still a major one, although commentators debate the balance of power between the premier and his or her colleagues. Ultimately, Prime Ministers need Cabinet backing. The American Cabinet is an advisory body only and in the final analysis the President may choose to ignore it. Legend has it that Lincoln asked his Cabinet to vote on an issue and when the result was unanimity in opposition to his own view he announced his decision: 'seven nays and one aye, the ayes have it'. Major decisions remain in his hands, which may enhance his power in relation to the Prime Minister but also leaves him very exposed. The role can be a lonely one, for he cannot count on the support of party notables. If he wants it, the President looks elsewhere for policy advice, coordination and support. He may choose to consult his Cabinet, but does not feel bound to do so. Often he will view members as spokespersons for their departments who have little or nothing to contribute on other matters.

In Britain, the doctrine of Collective Responsibility applies to Cabinet members. They are expected to show unanimity in public and to defend agreed government policy. In the USA, there is no such doctrine, and disagreement in public is more apparent. Over policy towards Iraq and Saddam Hussein in particular, the present Bush administration is noted for its very public divisions, the Vice-President and Secretary of Defense taking a more unilateralist and often hawkish view, the Secretary of State a multilateralist one. The Secretary of State and the Defense secretary have also taken a different line on European Union defence policy. Presidents see no particular reason why Cabinet members should be interested in or agreed upon all aspects of policy. As Kennedy remarked when speaking about Cabinet discussion: 'Why should the postmaster sit there and listen to a discussion of the problems of Laos?' No Cabinet member feels the need to rush in and defend a colleague, whereas in Britain – however much the leaks may expose deep rifts and tensions – there is a general need to accept that in public members should tell the same story. Party and the realities of power tend to at least mute their disagreements.

The American and British Cabinets are very different bodies. The American Cabinet contributes much less to the system of government. There are, in Walles' phrase, 'no party pressures to induce a sense of collectivity . . . [and] no electoral demands [to] impose an outward unity'.[18] Presidents often become disillusioned with their creation, so that Carter who initially favoured a strong Cabinet and allowed it to meet frequently in the first two years was by 1979 inviting all of his Cabinet secretaries to resign. There was no question of him and his team sinking or swimming together.

The British Executive is to a much greater extent based on the idea of Cabinet government. In a parliamentary system, there is not the same focus on the person who leads the team, although the exact relationship between him or her and Cabinet colleagues is a variable factor. Increasingly, in many such systems, more use is made of Cabinet committees and the operation of the Cabinet as a whole may be bypassed. It is more of a ratifying body, than the place where key decisions are taken. In a presidential system, the emphasis is on the single chief executive, departmental heads follow their own agenda and Cabinet meetings are – as Hague describes them – often 'little more than a presidential photo-opportunity'.[19]

Support for the President

Presidents do not have the degree of backing and support from the Cabinet that Prime Ministers are accustomed to receiving. However, they have other and extensive sources of help, many of which are located in the Executive Office of the President. Its component elements have changed since its creation in 1939, but central to its work are the White House staff, those personal appointees of the President upon whom he relies for general strategy and policy advice. Such is the power of members of this inner coterie (Haldeman and Ehrlichman under Nixon; Meese, Baker and Deaver under Reagan) that they can sometimes deny access to the President even to members of the Cabinet.

From the earliest days, it was obvious that the new Office would be highly significant, but even so the extent of its impact on American government today

The Prime Minister and the President: a summary

Issue	*Prime Minister*	*President*
A parliamentary versus a presidential system of government	Prime Minister part of legislature and answerable to it. Must defend himself or herself in House of Commons – e.g. QuestionTime.	President detached from legislature and not required to justify his or her performance before Congress – unless impeached. Does deliver State of the Union speech there.
Chief of the executive branch or head of state?	Chief of the Executive only – smaller ceremonial role.	Chief of the Executive and Head of State – dual role makes job more burdensome but also enables the President to appear as embodiment of the people.
A single executive: position of the Cabinet	Prime Minister has to work with the Cabinet, which meets regularly, and share collective responsibility withit, even if he or she mayon occasion choose to side-line it when key decisions are made.	President has a Cabinet but it has considerably less status in American politics. He or she might not consult it when making key decisions. It does not include several powerful politicians, personalities in their own right.
Security of tenure – length of time which can be served in office	May serve for as long as the public and party want him or her, but in practice this is rarely more than for 7–8 years, in most cases; service might not be continuous.	Limited by Constitution to two whole terms, though may also finish out the existing presidential term if Vice-President.

could not have been judged. At the time, it comprised barely 1000 staff, whereas today the total exceeds 5000. But the extent of its operations and of its importance is not to be judged by numbers alone, but more by the centrality of its position in the workings of the executive branch. It has become what Maidment and McGrew call 'the principal instrument of presidential government'.[17]

Today, the President relies on the Executive Office to come up with the background information, detailed analysis and informed policy recommendations that he needs to enable him to master the complexities of his task. It has taken its place at the heart of the administration, giving him the advice he depends upon, conducting many of his dealings with Congress, and helping him to publicise, and supervise the implementation of, his decisions. He is freed to deal with top-level matters of the moment and to engage in future planning.

Issue	*Prime Minister*	*President*
Party leadership	Strong party leader: can count on support of back benchers in most circumstances. Also, powerful party machine behind him, to rallyparty beyond Westminster.	Cannot count on party loyalty or support – e.g. in voting lobbies of Congress. National party leadership much weaker. Impact of federalism/separation of powers.
Ability to achieve desired policies and implement programme	High success rate for governmental policies, in terms of amount of programme implemented. Even controversial programmes usually pass into law.	Presidential policies might not be carried out: several Presidents have difficulty with Congress (e.g. Clinton and health reform).
Role in foreign policy and management of crises: national strength	Several Prime Ministers have been very powerful in time of war: opportunity for strong leadership. But l globa influence of Britain has declined postwar; lack offormer industrial or military might.	Presidents tend to thrive on crisis management – e.g. Kennedy and Cuba, 1962, George W Bush and crusade against terrorism following 11 September. Country most powerful in world. USA leader of free world and able to act strongly to try and enforce its world view.

The Executive Office is an umbrella under which exist a number of key agencies which cover the whole range of policy areas and which serve him directly. The Office of Management and the Budget already existed in 1939, but otherwise only the White House Office has been there since the original machinery was set up. Elements have changed in different administrations, but central to the work of the Office are the White House staff to whom we have referred.

The vice-presidency

The Vice-President assumes some of the ceremonial tasks of the President, and represents him or her on formal occasions, whether it be the funeral of a foreign leader or the commemoration of some past event. The role can amount to more than this. For some Presidents, their deputies can be useful in an advisory capacity on matters of politics and policy. Jimmy Carter made more use of Walter Mondale than had been usual in the past, because he needed the support of a Washington 'insider' who could give good advice based upon his knowledge and experience. Reagan allowed Bush to attend many meetings and to represent him in many engagements. However, activity and influence are very different, and whereas Mondale was allowed more say in the decision-making process this was much less true of his successor.

Al Gore was probably the most influential Vice-President in American history. Not only did he preside over important projects such as the 'Reinventing Government' initiative. He also took an active interest in issues ranging from the environment to science and technology, and gave Bill Clinton his advice upon them. Often, he would remain in the Oval Office when all other advisers had departed, so that his voice was the last the President heard. He is said to have been allowed considerable influence over the composition of the revamped Cabinet at the beginning of the second term, the idea being that this would give him influential supporters in key positions to help him prepare his bid for the November 2000 contest. The Gore experience indicates that vice-Presidents take on ad hoc assignments, their number and character depending on the use the President wishes to make of them. Bill Clinton gave his deputy the task of conducting a national review of the workings of the federal bureaucracy. Other Presidents have been much less willing to use their running-mate.

There has been discussion in recent years of 'a new vice-presidency'. Yet in spite of the growing trend towards providing Vice-Presidents with a more worthwhile role, for much of the time they are effectively 'waiting in the wings' in case their services are called upon to assume the burden of the presidency. They stand in readiness to assume command, in the event of death (either through natural causes or assassination), or through resignation or removal from office.

THE OFFICIAL EXECUTIVE (the bureaucracy)

The bureaucracy has been described as 'the state's engine room',[20] advising on and carrying out the policies determined by the Political Executive. The structure of bureaucracies has come under increased scrutiny in recent years, in line with the changing view about the role of government which became fashionable at the end of the twentieth century as the ideas of the New Right came into ascendancy. The task is to 'steer' rather than 'row', to concentrate on broad policy and leave the implementation and delivery of services to others. Here, we examine the role of bureaucracies, the way in which they operate and the attempts by their political masters to make them work efficiently and achieve control over them.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Who are the bureaucrats and what is their role?
- How does the recruitment of bureaucrats differ in Britain and America? What problems do the systems of recruitment create?
- What have been the main developments in the structure and development of the British and American bureaucracies in recent decades?
- Why have British and American governments been increasingly concerned about the operation of bureaucracies in recent years?
- How can political control over the bureaucracy be secured?

The bureaucracy

As society became more complex in the twentieth century, government expanded and a huge **bureaucracy** developed. New bodies were created, some with uncertain jurisdiction. Once in place, these organisations competed for mastery over a particular area of concern, and departments and agencies fended off other organisations which tried to poach their territory.

By the term bureaucrats, we refer to the thousands or even millions of people who operate in the Executive Branch, whose career is based in government service and normally work there as a result of appointment rather than election. Often known as civil servants, they serve in organisational units such as government departments, agencies and bureaux. Wherever they work, they operate under common regulations, with matters such as recruitment, pay, promotion, grading and other conditions of service being determined by a central body. In Britain, it is the Civil Service Commission; in the United States, it is the Office of Personnel Management.

The task of bureaucrats is to carry out the ongoing business of interpreting and implementing the policies enacted by the government. There are several aspects to their work:

- they give advice to their political masters concerning the direction and content of policy;
- they implement policy, turning legislative policy goals into actual programmes;
- they administer policy, an often routine role although it involves exercising a degree of discretion; and
- they are regulators who develop rules and regulations.

bureaucracy

Technically, a hierarchical organisation in which offices have specified tasks and employees are assigned responsibilities, based on their merit, knowledge and experience. Term often used as a synonym for administration or rule by the officials who conduct the detailed business of government, advising on and implementing policy decisions. Bureaucrats behave according to specific rules so that treatment of each case they handle is relatively predictable and fair.

Bureaucrats do more than follow orders. Because they possess crucial information and expertise, senior figures act as partners in making decisions about public policy. Because of the power of their position, the problem of management and control of bureaucracies has become a central issue of modern democratic government. Unelected, their work needs to be regulated by politicians, the elected decision-makers, who are concerned to rein in their power.

The bureaucracy in Britain and the United States

Appointment and ethos

The development of the bureaucracy has varied from country to country. In Britain and the United States, there was a major reform of the system of appointment in the nineteenth century and a constant feature of recent decades has been a new emphasis on managerial efficiency.

Britain

In Britain, following the Northcote–Trevelyan enquiry (1854), reform was introduced to ensure that those key figures in the civil service whose work required intellectual ability should be appointed on the basis of merit rather than nepotism (favouritism shown to relatives of those in power). Competitive examinations were introduced, open to all suitably qualified persons, from 1870 onwards. Since that time, appointment on merit has been the order of the day, although since the 1980s there have been allegations that promotion in the higher civil service has been influenced by political leanings. In the 1980s, there were suggestions of a 'politicisation' of officialdom, with the Thatcher government keen to advance the careers of those who were 'one of us'. Leading officials became closely identified with the policies pursued by

ministers, thus threatening the principle of political neutrality. These suggestions have again surfaced under the Blair administration.

After 1870, the civil service developed along distinctive lines. It was generalist in character, with certain qualities of mind (intelligence, education, experience and personal skills such as the art of judgement) being seen as more important than expertise in a specialist subject area. Recruitment was to the service as a whole, rather than to a specific post. Officials could be moved from one department to another, thus developing the idea of a unified service. In addition, the bureaucracy was noted for three qualities which have been much written about ever since:

- **Permanence.** The job was viewed as a career, rather than as a temporary position based on political patronage. Civil servants do not change at election time, as they do in the USA. This permanence is associated with experience and continuity, so that an inexperienced incoming government will be able to count on official expertise. Permanence, coupled with confidentiality, means that civil servants can speak frankly to ministers, without fear of dismissal. It makes a civil service career seem attractive.

- **Neutrality.** As a result of the permanence, it was essential that any official should serve any government impartially, whatever its political complexion. Officials must not let their personal political leanings affect their actions. They must carry out decisions with which they personally may disagree and not involve themselves in any partisan activity. If they were to be partisan, this would make it difficult for them to remain in office and serve as permanent officials.

- **Anonymity.** Civil servants were to stay silent on issues of public policy, their political masters (the ministers) being accountable for their actions and discussing issues in the public domain. If officials became public figures, this would endanger their reputation for neutrality, for they could become identified with a particular policy. They might then be unacceptable to a new administration. Identification might also prevent them from offering frank advice to ministers: if they knew that they could be named they might feel the need to be very discreet.

These traditional characteristics have been called into question from the late 1980s onwards. Partly this was because of the managerial reform undertaken by successive governments (see pp. 99–101), but it was also related to the monopoly of one party in power. Conventions which developed under alternating governments gradually lost their force, particularly when strong Prime Ministers sought to change the culture of Whitehall. Business advisers to the Thatcher government saw anonymity as having its own disadvantages, such as concealing poor advice and reducing the incentive to act efficiently. They

also argued that permanence meant officials lacked any appreciation of other modes of working and removed the incentive to change or improve.

The United States

As in Britain, appointment based on favouritism to those of similar political inclinations was the order of the day for most of the nineteenth century. President Andrew Jackson (1829–37) is credited with the development of a '**spoils system**' by which it was seen as legitimate to reward personal and political friends with public office in the federal bureaucracy ('to the victor go the spoils'). Appointments were made on the basis of patronage, 'who you knew, rather than what you knew', and membership of the successful party was important in gaining government jobs. Pressure for change culminated in the passing of the Pendleton Act (1883), which required candidates for some positions in the public service to pass a competitive examination. Ability, education and job performance became the key criteria for appointment, rather than political background. Today, 95 per cent of federal civilian jobs are covered by 'civil service rules' laid down by the Office of Personnel Management. Appointment is to a specific department or job, so that the civil service is specialist rather than generalist. These posts are permanent, so that – as in Britain – there is continuity and stability in administration.

spoils system
A patronage system for filling appointive public offices with friends and supporters of the ruling political party.

The American civil service is also expected to be politically neutral, as in Britain. Officials are unable to take part in overt political activity. However, neutrality is undermined by the fact that several thousand posts in the federal civil service remain in the gift of the President. He or she can nominate more than 3000 senior civil servants to serve in the administration and these include the heads of the fourteen major departments (the secretaries), as well as assistant and deputy department secretaries, deputy assistant secretaries and a variety of other appointive positions. Political appointees are not expected to be neutral and they can be blamed for policy failures. Once in office, their tenure of office depends on how the White House judges their performance.

In making political appointments, the President is likely to choose personnel whom he regards as loyal and competent, and who share his political outlook. Abernach notes that whereas in the past many appointees had been people who had established good connections with interest groups or congressional committees, in the Reagan era 'ideology was the key'.[20] Sharing a number of Thatcherite attitudes (see pp. 99–100), he established an appointment system which ensured that appointees would be faithful to him and pursue his objectives of reduced governmental activity.

Yet the importance of political appointments in the United States can be exaggerated. They may seem to provide the President with an opportunity to change the direction and character of government policy, but in reality the number of appointments he and his aides can make amounts to only a small percentage of those who work for the federal bureaucracy. Overall, Bill Clinton chose less than 0.2 per cent of the total civilian, non-postal federal work force. Moreover, the appointments have to be made in the brief period between the day of the presidential election and Inauguration Day. Inevitably, the President must concentrate his or her attention on appointments at Cabinet level and leave many of the rest to other members of the team.

Size and organisation

The size of any bureaucracy is broadly linked to the demands placed upon it. In the twentieth century, the responsibilities of government were significantly widened, as voters began to expect more from those who ruled over them. Accordingly, civil service employment increased dramatically. By the end of the century, there was a new emphasis on streamlining government, as ministers had reduced expectations of what governments might or ought to try to achieve.

Britain

There are now well under 500,000 civil servants, a marked drop on the number in the early 1980s. Many of these are clerical or managerial staff, distributed in government offices up and down the country. The ones who concern us most are those who belong to the top administrative grades, often referred to as the 'mandarins' or, collectively, as 'the higher civil service'. These 750–800 senior officials are based mainly in the large Whitehall departments such as the Treasury, the Home Office and the Foreign Office, although some work in the Next Step agencies which were introduced in the 1990s (see p. 100).

The United States

The American civil service expanded considerably during the days of the New Deal, as 'big government' came into fashion. Today, some 5 million people work in the Executive Branch, 60 per cent of them civilians, the rest being military personnel. America has a decentralised bureaucracy, only 12 per cent of federal officials working in Washington, the rest being based around the country. The federal administration is organised around most of the same vital functions which exist in any other national bureaucracy. The administrative apparatus responsible for fulfilling them is divided into three broad categories.

- **Government or executive departments.** There are fourteen cabinet-level departments, which vary greatly in size. By far the most important department is the State Department, but others include the Treasury, the Defense Department, and the Justice and Interior departments. They are sub-divided into bureaus and smaller units, often on the basis of function. Within the Commerce Department, there is the Bureau of the Census, and others such as the Patent and Trademark Office.
- **Independent agencies.** Many agencies help to keep the government and economy operating smoothly. They include several types of organisation with differing degrees of independence. Some (such as the Veterans Association) are executive agencies which provide special services to the people, whilst others are regulatory commissions which supervise particular sections of the economy (e.g. the Environmental Protection Agency).
- **Government corporations.** These are a cross between business corporations and regular governmental agencies and manage projects of massive public importance, such as the St Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation and the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Influence: civil service power

In recent decades, it has often been suggested that the work of civil servants goes beyond the mere task of giving advice and implementing decisions. They exert significant influence over the policy-making process, helping to create and shape rather than just advise on public policy.

Britain

In theory, civil servants advise and ministers decide. Ministers weigh up the options available to them in the light of the evidence given to them. They take the praise and blame for the decisions made and for the way in which they are implemented, via the doctrine of individual ministerial responsibility. However, the reality is somewhat different.

Ministers are very reliant on the performance of the civil servants who work in their department. They are transient. They come and go, perhaps serving for a full administration or maybe being moved after a couple of years. By contrast, their officials may have been in the department for a long time and have developed considerable expertise. They become familiar with the realistic range of policy choices available and know the advantages or otherwise of various lines of policy. Their views will reflect a 'departmental view', but this may conflict with the government's or minister's priorities. In this situation there is scope for conflict between them.

Much has been written about 'mandarin power', mandarins being the very senior officials who have close and regular contact with ministers. It is

suggested that often, because of their ability, experience and expertise, they exert a powerful influence over what happens in a department, especially over the policies that emerge. Radical commentators and MPs (and premiers such as Margaret Thatcher who wanted to 'get things done') are wary of mandarins, seeing them as a conservative force hostile to necessary innovation. At worst, they might frustrate the minister and be obstructive, concealing information.

The United States

In America, there has long been discussion of the difficulties of taming the bureaucracy. Because the President normally appoints people who share his outlook to key positions, it might be expected that he would achieve control over the bureaucratic process. Yet this often does not happen, for once in position, those appointed may 'go native' and become part of the administrative machine, rather than agents of the President's will. As with relations with Congress, Presidents soon find out that it is important to persuade, for they lack the power to command. In the frustrated words of President Truman: 'I thought I was the President, but when it comes to these bureaucracies I can't make 'em do a damn thing'.

The American bureaucracy has a large degree of freedom, each agency having its own clientele, power base and authority. Much of that authority derives from Congress which creates or destroys agencies, authorises and approves reorganisation plans, defines powers, and appropriates agency funds. Yet even Congress is unable to control the operation of bodies once they are established and many of them have a life of their own. There is popular suspicion of bureaucratic power and many commentators suggest that federal bureaucrats misuse or even abuse it.

Organisational and attitudinal reform: controlling the bureaucracy

Britain

Under Margaret Thatcher, change in Whitehall was 'in the air'. As Prime Minister, she was instinctively suspicious of the civil service. She associated a large bureaucracy with the 'big government' of the consensus years (see pp. 192–3) which she so despised. She wanted to roll back the frontiers of the state. This involved curbing a civil service that had become unnecessarily large and was urging or pursuing misguided policies. Moreover, she was suspicious of the power and type of senior civil servants, some of whom might use their permanence and expertise to develop their own view of what was needed, rather than assist in carrying out the wishes of the government of the day. Not only were they excessively powerful, they were also sometimes poor managers, ill-equipped for the task of running a large department. They often

lacked training in management skills, many being generalist all-rounders rather than expert administrators.

Among other things, she tried to bring in people at the top who were 'one of us'. Several early retirements enabled her to sweep away several long-serving officials. She also brought in outside advisers such as Sir John Hoskyns and Sir Derek Rayner, businessmen who might help to transform the ethos of the civil service and place a new emphasis upon managerial efficiency. The development of the Next Step agencies was an important part of this process.

Sir Derek Ibbs was appointed during the late Thatcher years to run an Efficiency Unit. Ibbs was dissatisfied with the pace of change in the civil service and in 1988 produced the very influential report, 'Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps'. It wanted the creation of a slimmed-down, better-managed civil service. He argued that the civil service was too vast and complex to be managed well as one organisation. Departments varied and needed their own systems of management. Accordingly, he recommended a division of work. New agencies would be responsible for 'blocks' of executive work (operational matters), and a smaller 'core' civil service would work in the departments to 'sponsor' the agencies and to service ministers with policy advice and help. All government departments have been affected by Ibbs' thinking. Gradually, throughout the 1990s, the functions of departments were handed over to these new bodies. There are now about 150 and most civil servants work in them, rather than in departments. The agencies are headed by appointed chief executives, often very well-paid individuals brought in from the business world.

In 1997, the incoming Blair administration accepted the idea of such agencies. The old days of hierarchical departments staffed by permanent officials had long gone. By the time of Tony Blair's arrival, it looked as though Whitehall was in a state of continuous upheaval. He wishes to deliver effective public services. He was anxious to achieve 'performance targets' and was more interested in reaching them than in worrying about the means by which this might happen. Cutting waiting lists for hospital appointments was a goal, as was cutting class sizes in infant schools. Ministers were less interested in the department or agency which delivered the outcome, than in ensuring that it was attained. He wanted to see the civil service act as an efficient enabling body, in the same way that councils had become enabling authorities in the 1980s. The White Paper *Modernising Government* (1999) discussed the role of central and local government, and the role of the private sector in service delivery.

To improve policy coordination and implementation and get away from the 'short-termism' of traditional governmental thinking, the Prime Minister has

established the Performance and Innovation Unit in the Cabinet Office. Specifically, it was to examine cross-governmental policies, sorting out departmental disputes. The Prime Minister is committed to 'joined-up' government, and uses non-departmental ministers to ensure that officials plan for the future and work with those in other departments.

To open up government, the Prime Minister is keen on changing the culture of senior civil servants. He suspects that many are resistant to new thinking and doubts the quality of some of them. Above all, he fears 'departmentalitis', the idea that civil servants have adopted a policy view and keep to it whichever party is in power. To break the stranglehold of traditional attitudes, he is keen to see new people brought in from outside the service. His fondness for political advisers illustrates his enthusiasm for changed thinking. The idea is to enable ministers to get a grip on their officials. Advisers add a political dimension to the opinions gained from civil servants and are there to help ministers who are in danger of being too susceptible to official advice. Most ministers are keen on this more independent source of advice.

The United States

In the United States, efforts have also been made to make the bureaucracy more efficient and more responsive. Presidents may seek to exert control by various means. They establish commissions and enquiries to scrutinise the operation of the bureaucracy, amalgamate or reorganise departments and make use of political appointees in a bid to advance policy initiatives. But they find the task difficult, not least because of the fragmented nature of officialdom, functioning as it does via the network of departments, bureaux, agencies and commissions. Ronald Reagan was deeply suspicious of bureaucrats and introduced a series of changes including privatisation of some operations, contracting out and the handing over of some federal programmes to the states. In addition, cuts were made in personnel in areas such as welfare.

In 1993, Bill Clinton gave his Vice-President the task of reviewing the bureaucracy and making recommendations to improve its efficiency and flexibility. His report *Reinventing Government* (1993) pointed to the wastefulness of many governmental organisations, the traditional preoccupation with familiar working practices and the lack of incentive for experimentation and innovation. Recommendations included cutting red tape, placing more emphasis on customer service, delegating more authority to those operating at lower levels of government and pruning unnecessary expenditure.

The bureaucracy in Britain and the United States: a summary

	Britain	*United States*
Key personnel	Permanent secretary and higher civil servants who serve for several years and acquire wealth of knowledge and expertise, derived from functioning under different party administrations.	No comparable job to permanent No comparable job to permanent secretary; senior figures are political appointments of incoming administration.
Use of outside personal advisers	Less used in past, though recent governments have employed more in a bid to ensure that the political will of ministers is reinforced as they seek to impose a sense of direction on their departments. Act as minister's eyes and ears.	Secretaries of various departments surrounded by a coterie of appointees, political figures who help departmental heads to impose their will on the career civil servants below them. System most evident in Executive Office, especially White House Office where advisers act as a counter-bureaucracy.
Traditional principles	British civil service noted for its permanence, neutrality and anonymity. Now less neutral and anonymous, with increasing comment about a 'politicisation' of service under Thatcher and Blair administrations. Senior civil servants now liable for interrogation by select committees, making them more accountable.	95 per cent permanent civil service, politically neutral, though appointments made by President undermine the idea. Political appointees not anonymous or neutral, but discussions between departmental heads and their advisers are kept secret to allow officials to 'think the unthinkable'. Never same reluctance to allow officials to appear before congressional committees.
Power and influence of bureaucracy	Increasing comment in recent years about influence of civil service over policy-making. Suggestion that they wield real political power and dominate their political masters. But theory remains that civil servants advise and ministers decide. Minister takes praise or blame for conduct of department and its officials, answering in Parliament for what is done.	Bureaucracy not a single, monolithic institution, and various elements of bureaucracy differ in the degree of independence they exercise – e.g. bureaux in departments have great autonomy. Bureaucracy a powerful institution, large and complex, often seen as burdensome by American public. All senior members are appointed by the President who can remove them, but once in office often act independently.
Recent characteristics	Increased politicisation. Use of political appointees. Use of agencies and other unelected bodies. Appointment of chief executives in agencies in gift of government of the day.	Characteristics of modern British bureaucracy long familiar in United States – e.g., politicisation/ political advisers.

Conclusion

Political executives have a key role in political life for it is members of the government who devise policies in the light of information and advice they receive, and get them on the statute book. The Official Executive has the task of implementing the policies the political executive has devised.

Because of the expansion of governmental activity in the twentieth century, the powers of the Executive have grown, and the Chief Executive is today far more powerful than a hundred years ago. Various other circumstances ranging from television to the new importance of international summitry and overseas visits have provided political leaders with a new pre-eminence, and they are no longer national leaders alone but also world statesmen. Because of these trends, many writers discern a trend towards prime ministerial government in parliamentary systems, and comment on the extent of presidential power in countries such as the USA. Such offices are indeed very powerful today, but the extent of that power and influence can vary according to the incumbent and the circumstances of the time.

Official executives have expanded in size and influence as a result of changes in economic, social and political conditions. The number of civil servants broadly increases in accordance with the tasks imposed on them. The twentieth century was an era of huge growth but in recent years there has been an emphasis on streamlining officialdom and ensuring that it works with greater efficiency and responsiveness.

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USEFUL WEB SITES

For the UK

www.open.gov.uk The official government web site, covering the whole government structure.

www.number-10.gov.uk 10 Downing Street. As with the above, but more emphasis on the centres of power.

www.cabinet-office.gov.uk Cabinet Office.

www.civil-service.co.uk Statistics and information, as well as details of recent changes.

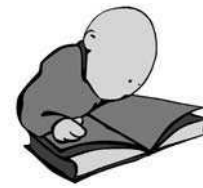
www.britishcouncil.org British Council. Coverage of recent changes in civil service and governance of UK.

For the USA

www.whitehouse.gov/ Official presidential site for the White House. Useful for following the day-to-day activities of the President, including daily briefings and press releases, as well as materials from the Executive Office of the President, the Council of Economic Advisers and other such bodies.

www.whitehousehistory.org White House Historical Association. General overview of the presidency and the White House; offers a virtual tour of the White House, showing its objets d'art.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS



1. To what extent is it true that executives have gained at the expense of legislatures?
2. Compare the methods by which British Prime Ministers and American Presidents attain their office and the backgrounds of those who reach the top in Britain and the United States.
3. 'The idea that the British Prime Minister has become a presidential figure like the American incumbent ignores the substantial differences in the two roles.' Discuss.
4. How accountable are British Prime Ministers and American Presidents to the legislature and to public opinion?
5. To what extent does party act as a restraint upon the British Prime Minister and the American President?
6. Discuss the view that not all heads of government are effective political leaders.
7. Consider the ways in which the Executive in Britain is different from the Executive in the United States.
8. Compare and contrast the role of the Cabinet in British and American government.
9. What is the political significance of the different ways by which senior civil servants are recruited in Britain and the United States?
10. How do politicians seek to control the bureaucracy in Britain and the United States, and with what measure of success?