



The Role of the Prime Minister



Learning Objectives

- To identify the sources of the prime minister's power
 - To explain the powers of and constraints on the Prime Minister
- To identify the functions of the Prime Minister



Key Vocabulary

Create a politics glossary list

| <i>Word</i> | <i>Meaning</i> |
|-------------|----------------|
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Sources of Prime Ministerial Power and authority

The Ruling Party

- The PM has the support of his party both in parliament and in the country in the form of ordinary members. Since his party has won the right to govern, the PM carries his party's *elective* authority with him.

The royal prerogative

- The reigning monarch retains (in theory and law), the power to carry out the functions of the head of state, such as commanding the armed forces. In a democracy we cannot allow an unelected monarch to exercise these powers and so the authority to exercise these 'prerogative powers' is delegated to the PM.

Popular mandate

- Although technically the voters are choosing the MP and a party, they are also conscious that they are electing a PM. Research suggest that the leader of the party is becoming more and more important when it comes to deciding who to vote for at an election. Thus, the victorious PM can claim to enjoy the authority of the electorate. This does not apply to PMs who came to office between elections. Thus weakening their authority. E.g. Major - 1990 and Brown - 2007.

Parliament

- The PM is the parliamentary leader and as long as he has the support of a majority of the H of C he can claim parliamentary authority.
- Some PMs have enhanced the power gained with their own personal qualities to add to the four sources of authority:
- Margaret Thatcher - enhanced her authority by becoming a dominating personality which was admired and respected.
- Tony Blair - seen as a charismatic figure thus increasing authority and power.

WDBD? - What does Boris do?

TASK;

Mind map
what roles
and powers
you think our
Prime Minister
has.



WDBD? - *What does Boris do?*

Move Boris to find out some ideas...



Patronage

Powers of the PM

- appoints ministers
- allocates cabinet posts
- reshuffles cabinet
- dismisses ministers

EXAMPLE:

Boris appointing lots of ministers to avoid/limit the number of backbench rebellions from MPs

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51491032>

Constraints

- claims of senior colleagues for inclusion and specific posts
- Labour PM required to appoint first cabinet from elected shadow cabinet
- ideological balance (talented backbenchers!)
- unintended consequences of botched reshuffles
- possibility of sacked ministers emerging as rivals for leadership

Authority in the cabinet system

Powers of the PM

- chairs cabinet meetings
- manages the cabinet agenda
- steers, sums up and determines outcome of cabinet discussions
- holds bilateral and informal meetings with key ministers
- appoints chairs and members of cabinet committees
- restructure central government

Constraints

- requires cabinet support on major or controversial issues
- senior ministers have authority and may challenge the PM's preferred policy
- problems may arise if senior ministers feel they are being ignored
- not involved in detailed policy making in cabinet committees

Party Leadership

Powers of the PM

- authority as the leader of a political party
- elected by MPs and party members
- enjoys a majority in the House of Commons

Constraints

- support of party is not unconditional
- possibility of backbench rebellions

EXAMPLE:

Rebel MPs force parliament debate on Brexit bill
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/55488234>

Public Standing

Powers of the PM

- high public profile
- communication-in-chief for the government
- political leaders in times of crisis
- represents country in international affairs

Constraints

- unpopularity with the electorate undermines authority
- may become the focus of media criticism

EXAMPLE:

Polls show Boris is popular than his party

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/50777190>

Prime Ministers' Office

Powers of the PM

- Prime Minister's Office provides advice and support
- better enables PM to direct policy and act as a communicator
- appoints special advisers
- can reorganise the structure of the government

Constraints

- Prime Ministers' Office has limited resources (staff, funding)
- power of other departments, especially the Treasury



Create a list of the role of a
Prime Minister



WANTED: Prime Minister for UK

*Job advert asks for applications to be next
Prime Minister*

*Create a job advertisement for the post of
Prime Minister.*

- *Outline key roles and responsibilities*
- *Compile a person specification
(desirable/essential qualities, skills and
experience)*
- *Pay and conditions (including
benefits/perks)*
- *Constitutional requirements*
- *(HUMOUR?)*

Things to include:

Persuasive vocabulary:

Extensive
Exceptional
Exemplary
Dedicated
Focused
Hard working
Driven

Sentence starters:

Applicants should have
In addition
Your leadership can expect a team
The public needs
Finally...
The UK government needs
Are passionate about

Remember: CL . , () ? -a closing date -the qualities needs to be
A Prime Minister -what a Prime Minister might have to do

Bronze: write at least 2 paragraphs **Silver:** write at least 3 paragraphs
Gold: write at least 4 paragraphs