

What considerations must be made on who is in the Cabinet?

The Prime Minister is responsible for choosing who is in the Cabinet. It is one of their Royal Prerogative powers. There are a number of considerations a Prime Minister might make when making these decisions.

- They may choose close political allies who have been guaranteed a post. For example, Gordon Brown chose Jack Straw whilst David Cameron chose George Osborne.
- They may choose an individual who can represent an important section of their Party. For example, David Cameron chose Theresa May as a representative of the right-wing of the Conservative Party.
- They may identify some individuals with potential and have the ability to manage a Department. For example, David Cameron chose Oliver Letwin to work in the Cabinet Office.
- They may decide on a personal friend that they are close to. For example, Theresa May chose her university friend, Damien Green, to be her First Secretary of State.
- There may be some individuals that are popular figures with the public and media. For example, Theresa May chose Boris Johnson.
- A few choices will be based on a desire to retain the political identity of any new government so individuals would be brought into the cabinet who symbolise the ideology of the government. For example, David Cameron appointed Iain-Duncan Smith as Work and Pensions Secretary.
- Some people might be brought into the government simply because they were seen as good at managing a department. For example, Theresa May chose Damian Hinds as Secretary of State for Education.
- Some people are chosen because of their vast political experience. For example, David Cameron brought Kenneth Clark into the cabinet as [Minister without Portfolio](#).

In addition to these considerations a Prime Minister might want to consider the descriptive representation of the Cabinet.

In January 2018 Theresa May reshuffled her cabinet and said that it now “looks more like the country it serves”. As part of her reshuffle she boosted the number of women in Government from 30 to 37.

Since the Brexit Referendum in June 2016 the Prime Minister has also had to try and achieve a balance in the Cabinet between [Brexiters](#) and [Remainers](#).

One of the reasons that Amber Rudd’s resignation in April 2018 was so damaging to Theresa May was that it upset the [Brexiteer](#) v [Remainer](#) balance in her Cabinet.

Why are Cabinet Reshuffles so important?

Prime Minister’s regularly reshuffle their Cabinet. This means they appoint and remove members and also move ministers to different jobs. On average, a [Cabinet Reshuffle](#) takes place every two years. There are a number of reasons a reshuffle might occur:

- A reshuffle might be instigated by a vacancy in the Cabinet. Cabinet Ministers may be sacked, they may resign or occasionally they might die.

Theresa May has lost four Cabinet Members in just over six months:

Amber Rudd – Resigned from the Cabinet after admitting to misleading Parliament over the Windrush scandal.

Damien Green - Forced to resign as Cabinet Office Minister after being found to have been dishonest about pornography found on his office computer.

Priti Patel - Forced to resign as International Development Secretary in November 2017 after having unauthorized meetings with Israeli Government officials.

Michael Fallon - Resigned as Defence Secretary in November 2017 after admitting that his past behaviour towards women was unacceptable.

- A reshuffle might be an attempt to change the direction of Government Policy. By moving key figures in the Government a different emphasis can be placed on different policies.

For example, in July 2014 Michael Gove was removed as Education Secretary after continually upsetting teaching unions.

- Cabinet Reshuffle may also be simply to make sure that the Prime Minister has the best possible team in place. A Prime Minister will want to promote their allies and also ensure that the big characters in her party have important roles in the Cabinet

In June 2017 Theresa May surprisingly bought Michael Gove back into the Cabinet as the Environment Secretary. This was because as an outspoken Brexiteer, he was a dangerous character to have outside of the Cabinet.

The most famous Cabinet Reshuffle in History

The Night of the Long Knives – 1962

Although Cabinet Reshuffles take place regularly, some are more famous than others. The most famous is perhaps what is known as the ‘Night of the Long Knives’ in 1962. Harold MacMillan had been Prime Minister for five years and wanted to give his Cabinet a reshuffle.

MacMillan was one of the first UK Prime Minister to recognise the importance of image – particularly as during his premiership television sets had started to make their way into ordinary people’s homes.

On 13th July 1962 MacMillan sacked one-third of his Cabinet. One of the Cabinet Members removed was Selwyn Lloyd the Chancellor of the Exchequer. For MacMillan, the reshuffle was a disaster. His plans had been leaked to the press two days earlier.

To many it looked like a rash move – not in tune with what was traditionally expected of UK Prime Ministers.

What are the roles of the Cabinet?

The Cabinet has a number of important roles. These include:

- **Decision Making** – The Cabinet used to be the key decision-making mechanism in the Government. Despite a reduction in its importance, it remains an key decision-making machine
- **Coordinating Departments** – The Cabinet has an important role in making sure that Government departments are working effectively together and giving out the same public message. As such, it is also important in resolving disputes between Ministers, especially when a dispute has become public knowledge.

In 2014 there was a clear disagreement between two senior Conservative Cabinet Members, Michael Gove and Theresa May. They had fallen out over the issue of extremism in schools and who bore responsibility for it. After mud-slinging via the media, Michael Gove was forced to apologise to Theresa May and to get back on message after a reprimand within the Cabinet by the Prime Minister.

In 2018 there was a disagreement between Boris Johnson and Philip Hammond. Boris Johnson had claimed in public that the British Government were not spending enough on the NHS.

- **Forward Planning** – The Cabinet provides an arena for discussing the direction of the Government.

What is the importance of Cabinet Committees?

In addition to the full Cabinet, there are a number of Cabinet Committees.

These Cabinet Committees and their membership are decided by the Prime Minister and are headed by either the Prime Minister or another Cabinet Minister.

Most Cabinet Committees have around five members. Some Cabinet Committees are Permanent such as the Economy and Defence Cabinet Committees. Others may be temporary, for example there was a Cabinet Committee for the 2012 London Olympics.

Key decisions are now often made in Cabinet Committees, with the decision then passed up to the full Cabinet for distribution. This has increased the power of the Prime Minister over the Cabinet because the Prime Minister strictly controls both the creation and membership of the Committees.

Current Key Cabinet Committees

European Union Exit and Trade Committee – Chaired by Theresa May

The National Security Council – Chaired by Theresa May

Immigration Committee – Chaired by David Lidington

What is the role of the Cabinet Secretary?

The **Cabinet Secretary** is the most senior member of the **Civil Service**. The current Cabinet Secretary is Sir Jeremy Heywood. He is the Head of the Civil Service and also runs the Cabinet Office. The **Cabinet Office** has three key roles:

- To support the Prime Minister as leader of the Government
- To support the Cabinet in its implementation of policy
- To coordinate intelligence of security matters

The Cabinet Secretary also sits on Cabinet Meetings and takes the Minutes of those meetings

Sir Jeremy Heywood (Cabinet Secretary) – Brief Biography

What is his background?

Born 31 December 1961, Heywood was educated at Bootham School an independent school with a Quaker background and ethos in York, before taking a BA in History and Economics at Hertford College, Oxford and an MSc in Economics from the London School of Economics. He also studied for a semester at Harvard Business School.

What did he do before?

Sir Jeremy Heywood was Permanent Secretary to two successive Prime Ministers at 10 Downing Street. He also spent over three years as a Managing Director including as co-head of the UK Investment Banking Division at Morgan Stanley. Before joining Morgan Stanley, Sir Jeremy Heywood occupied a range of senior civil service roles, including as Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister (1999–2003). Prior to that, he had a variety of senior roles at HM Treasury including:

- Head of Securities and Markets Policy
- Head of Corporate and Management Change

He also served as Principal Private Secretary to Chancellors Norman Lamont and Kenneth Clarke and had a spell at the International Monetary Fund in Washington DC. His first job in the civil service was as an Economic Adviser to the Health and Safety Executive.

What major decisions has he been involved in?

- The Cabinet Reshuffle in 2012.
- Overseeing planning for a potential ‘Yes’ vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum. Preparing the Civil Service for Brexit

How has Cabinet Government changed?

Increasingly in recent years it has been seen that the Cabinet has become as decision ratifying, rather than decision-making body. Commentators note that there are now different mechanisms and groups through which major Government decisions are made:

- **The Inner Cabinet** – This refers to informal meetings by Senior Members of the Cabinet. Such members might include the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Foreign Secretary. The existence of an ‘Inner Cabinet’ enhances the control of the Prime Minister as they are able to keep powerful figures in the Cabinet under a close watch.

During wartime it is also common for **War Cabinet** to exist. This was first used during World War One, but has also been used in major wars since.

In May 2018 a meeting of Senior Ministers to discuss Brexit was nicknamed ‘The Brexit War Cabinet’.

- **The Kitchen Cabinet** – Most Prime Ministers also have what is known as a ‘**Kitchen Cabinet**’. This group is made up of some Cabinet Members but also Special Advisors (SPADS). It provides an informal decision making mechanism, the membership of which can be more tightly controlled by the Prime Minister. In this environment unelected officials can become powerful and even dominant.
- **Cabinet Committees and Sub-Committees**– The use of Cabinet Committees allows the Prime Minister to assert his personal authority over the policies of the Cabinet. Increasingly, in recent years there has also been a growth in Cabinet Sub-Committees.
- **Bilaterals** - Bilaterals are meetings between the Prime Minister and individual Secretaries of State. The increasing number of these in recent years has been criticised as being one of the reasons why government has become less transparent.

How did the Cabinet change under Tony Blair?

Some of the most significant changes in the way the Cabinet operated came during the Prime Ministership of Tony Blair, between 1997 and 2007. He operated what has been called a **Sofa Government**. This was where key decisions would be made by a small group of advisors, away from the rest of the Cabinet. Importantly, these figures were not elected, they were not accountable to anyone apart from Blair himself.

Tony Blair’s Sofa Government

Jonathan Powell - Downing Street Chief of Staff (Unelected)

Alastair Campbell - Downing Street Director of Communications (Unelected)

Sally Morgan - Director of Government Relations, in charge of smoothing relations between Mr Blair and the Labour Party, a vital role in the run up to war (Unelected)

Peter Mandelson – Elected Cabinet Member Geoff

Tony Blair's biographer Anthony Seldon coined the term 'denocracy' to describe Tony Blair's style of government.

Changing Cabinet Tendencies

- In 1945 Clement Atlee held two meetings a week.
- However, from 1969 there has only been one session in normal circumstances.
- In the 1970s there were around 60 meetings a year.
- However, Tony Blair averaged 40 meetings, many of which lasted less than an hour.
- One Cabinet meeting held by Blair in 1997 lasted only 30 minutes.

How has Cabinet Government been marginalised?

There are a number of reasons why Cabinet Government may well have been marginalised:

- The personal authority and power of the Prime Minister alone had grown in contrast to the collective power of the Cabinet in preceding years.
- The Cabinet itself had become something of a 'network', with meetings being ceremonial more so than anything else. The real work tended to occur elsewhere, meaning that the Cabinet's involvement in actual work tended to be minimal.
- There has been a shift in policy-making functions to 10 Downing Street itself, therein extending Prime ministerial control and subverting any real Cabinet power.
- The Prime Minister still conducts much government business on a bilateral basis, insofar as reaching agreements with ministers on policy, prior to meetings, and then presenting the decision to the full Cabinet.

What are the factors that influence the success of the Cabinet?

There are a number of factors that affect the effectiveness of Cabinets. These include:

- The working habits of the Prime Minister.
- The personnel chosen to be part of the Cabinet, particularly in reference to their experience.
- The popularity of the governing party/parties as a whole.
- The policies put forward by the Government.
- The issues facing the Government (i.e. when issues of National Security emerge).

Does Britain have a Prime Ministerial, Cabinet or Presidential System of Government?

Political commentators have increasingly argued that Britain has moved away from having a Prime Ministerial and Cabinet style of government to having a Presidential Government style of government.

Michael Foley said in his work 'The Rise of the British Presidency':

"The Premiership, which has become an increasingly conventional term, is itself replete with suggestions of a singular office in form and substance"

A **Prime Ministerial Government** is one in which the Prime Minister is dominant over the Cabinet and Parliament. A **Cabinet Government** is one in which the Government works more collectively and the Prime Minister acts mostly as a facilitator for government. In a **Presidential Government** the leader has massive personal authority and acts as De Facto Head of State. There have been examples of these different facets in recent years.

The following characteristics would be associated with Cabinet Government:

- Cabinet is directly accountable to Parliament
- Government policy is decided collectively by cabinet with the Prime Minister being ‘first among equals’ and merely acting as a facilitator
- Government is carefully co-ordinated by Cabinet Members
- Cabinet collectively manages parliamentary business
- Cabinet Members are left to manage their department as independently as possible

The following characteristics would be associated with Prime Ministerial Government

- PM is more than ‘first among equals’ – they dominate/dictate cabinet business.
- PM dominates policy making – cabinet becomes a rubber stamp.
- PM makes full use of prerogative powers.
- PM acts as principal spokesperson – media focus on PM.
- PM supervises individual departments – ministers must clear important decisions with the PM.

The following characteristics would be associated with a Presidential Style of Government

- PM behaves as if they were Head of State.
- PM controls all major policy developments.
- PM has massive personal authority.
- PM is the focal point of government and the state.

Comparison of National Leaders

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Britain</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>USA</u>
Media Visibility	High	High	High
‘Normal route’ to power	Parliament	Civil Service	Governor
Election	Party	Popular	Popular
Term	Insecure	Fixed: 4 Years	Fixed: 4 Years
Constitution	Unitary	Unitary	Federal
Checks on Power	Slight and Informal	Cohabitation	Congress & Supreme Court
Domestic Policy Involvement	High	High	Traditionally Limited, but now High
International Policy	EU Member	EU Member	Superpower