CHAPTER 13

Political Executives and Leadership

'A ruler must learn to be other than good.'

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI, *The Prince* (1532)

PREVIEW

The executive is the irreducible core of government. Political systems can operate without constitutions, assemblies, judiciaries and even parties, but they cannot survive without an executive branch to formulate government policy and ensure that it is implemented. Such is the potential power of executives that much of political development has taken the form of attempts to check or constrain them, either by forcing them to operate within a constitutional framework, or by making them accountable to a popular assembly or democratic electorate. Political executives, and particularly chief executives, are certainly the face of politics with which the general public is most familiar. This is because the executive is the source of political leadership. This role has been greatly enhanced by the widening responsibilities of the state in both the domestic and international realms, and the media's tendency to portray politics in terms of personalities. However, the hopes and expectations focused on executives may also prove to be their undoing. In many political systems, leaders are finding it increasingly difficult to 'deliver the goods'. Debates about the nature, extent and implications of executive power are, nevertheless, linked to the wider issue of political leadership. Widely seen as a vital ingredient of politics, providing it with a necessary sense of purpose and direction, leadership has been interpreted in a variety of ways, ranging from a personal gift to a bureaucratic device. Similarly, leadership can involve a variety of styles, strategies and approaches, affecting not only how effective it is but also the relationship between leadership and democracy.

KEY ISSUES

- What is the executive branch of government? What does it comprise?
- What are the principal functions of political executives?
- How do presidential executives differ from parliamentary executives?
- Where does power lie in political executives?
- How should political leadership be understood and explained?
- Is there a crisis of leadership in modern politics?

CONCEPT

Executive

In its broadest sense, the executive is the branch of government that is responsible for the implementation of laws and policies. More commonly, the term is now used in a narrower sense to describe the smaller body of decision-makers who take overall responsibility for the direction and coordination of government policy. This group of senior figures is often called the *political* executive (roughly equivalent to 'the government of the day', or 'the administration'), as opposed to the *official* executive, or bureaucracy (p. 361). For 'core' executive (see p. 299).

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE

Who's who in the executive?

The executive is, technically, the branch of government that is responsible for the execution or implementation of policy. The division of government into executive, legislative and judicial institutions has been sustained by the doctrine of the separation of powers (see p. 313), and has been the traditional basis on which to analyse government since the time of Montesquieu (see p. 312). From this point of view, three distinct branches of government can be identified:

- Legislatures *make* law; they enact legislation.
- Executives *implement* law; they execute law.
- Judiciaries *interpret* law; they adjudicate on the meaning of law.

In practice, however, the executive's responsibilities tend to be substantially broader, as well as more complex. This complexity also extends to the composition of the executive. Members of executives have been categorized in one of two ways. First, a distinction is often drawn between the 'political' executive and the 'bureaucratic' executive. This highlights the differences between politicians and civil servants, and, more broadly, between politics and administration (see p. 363). Second, various levels of status and responsibility have been identified within executives. Whereas assemblies tend to respect at least the formal equality of their members, executive branches are typically pyramidal, organized according to a clear leadership structure.

The distinction between political and bureaucratic, or official, posts is most clear-cut in the case of **parliamentary executives**, where differences in recruitment, responsibility, status and political orientation can be identified. In parliamentary systems, the political executive comprises elected politicians, ministers drawn from and accountable to the assembly: their job is to make policy, in accordance with the political and ideological priorities of their party, and to oversee its implementation. The official executive comprises appointed and professional civil servants whose job it is to offer advice and administer policy, subject to the requirements of political neutrality (see p. 345) and loyalty to their ministers.

Nevertheless, in parliamentary systems (see p. 310) such as those in Australia, Canada, India and the UK, the political/bureaucratic distinction is blurred by the fact that senior civil servants often make a substantial contribution to policy-making and because use is commonly made of temporary, politically committed advisers. The overlap is usually even greater in **presidential executives**. In the USA, for example, the president is the only elected politician in the executive. Cabinet members are, in effect, appointed officials, and all the senior and many middle-ranking civil servants are politically partisan and temporary. In communist executives, for example in China and the USSR of old, the distinction is rendered virtually redundant by the all-pervasive reach of the 'ruling' communist party. Chinese bureaucrats are thus 'political', in the sense that they are, in all cases, ideologically committed supporters, and usually members, of the Chinese Communist Party.

In comparison with political/bureaucratic distinctions, hierarchical divisions within executive branches are easier to identify. In the first place, executives tend

● **Parliamentary executive**: An executive, typically composed of a prime minister and cabinet, that is drawn from and accountable to the parliament, and is formed through parliamentary elections.

● **Presidential executive**: An executive that is headed by a separately elected president, who enjoys political and constitutional independence from the parliament.

CONCEPT

Heads of state

The head of state is the personal embodiment of the state's power and authority. As the leading representative of the state, the head of state enjoys the highest status in the land. However, he or she is often a figure of essentially symbolic or formal significance, with real power residing in the hands of the head of government (a post that may or may not be held by the same person). Heads of state exercise a range of ceremonial powers and responsibilities, such as awarding honours, assenting to legislation and treaties, and receiving visiting heads of state. The head of state is usually either a president or monarch (see p. 292).

to be centralized around the leadership (see p. 300) of a single individual. As Montesquieu put it, 'this branch of government, having need of dispatch, is better administered by one than by many'. Two separate posts can, nevertheless, be identified, although they may be held by the same person. On the one hand, there is the head of state, an office of formal authority and largely symbolic importance. On the other, there is the head of government, or the chief executive, a post that carries policy-making and political responsibilities. Whereas executive presidents, as in the USA, Russia and France, 'wear two hats', the posts in parliamentary systems are usually separate. A prime minister serves as the chief executive, and the post of head of state is usually held by a non-partisan figurehead.

Beneath the chief executive, a range of ministers or secretaries have responsibility for developing or implementing policy in specific areas. There is often a hierarchy amongst these departmental bosses, imposed either by the importance of their policy areas (economics and foreign ministers generally hold leading positions), or by their entitlement to sit in the **cabinet** or in senior committees. As discussed further below, cabinets have responsibilities that range from the sharing of policy-making power in a form of collective leadership to the offering of advice and the broader coordination of executive policy. At a lower level are the massed ranks of bureaucrats and administrators (discussed in Chapter 16) who, at least in theory, are concerned less with policy formulation than with policy implementation. Finally, there are enforcement agencies, such as the police force and armed forces, and an array of quasi-governmental bodies, popularly known as 'quangos' (see p. 368). These are part of the executive insofar as they help to put government policy into effect, but they are staffed by personnel who enjoy at least formal independence from the government itself.

Functions of political executives

At its most simple, the task of the political executive is to provide leadership. In this sense, the executive functions as the 'commanding heights' of the state apparatus, the core of the state itself. This role extends over a variety of areas, and this means that the members of the political executive have to carry out several functions, sometimes simultaneously. The most important of the areas are the following:

- ceremonial duties
- control of policy-making
- popular political leadership
- bureaucratic management
- crisis response.

Ceremonial leadership

Heads of state, chief executives and, to a lesser extent, senior ministers or secretaries 'stand for' the state. In giving state authority personal form, they represent the larger society and symbolize, accurately or otherwise, its unity. This role is largely formal and ceremonial, and covers, for example, state occasions, foreign visits, international conferences, and the ratification of treaties and legislation. Non-executive presidents and constitutional monarchs are sometimes charged with these essentially ceremonial responsibilities, allowing other executive

● **Cabinet**: A group of senior ministers that meets formally and regularly, and is chaired by the chief executive; cabinets may make policy or be consultative.

officers to get on with the day-to-day business of government. The role is, nevertheless, of broader significance for two reasons. First, it provides a focus for unity and political loyalty, and so helps to build legitimacy (see p. 81). Second, it allows those at the top of the executive to portray themselves as 'national leaders', which is vital to the maintenance of public support and electoral credibility.

Policy-making leadership

The key function of the political executive is to direct and control the policy process. In short, the executive is expected to 'govern'. This role was substantially expanded during the twentieth century in response to the broadening responsibilities of government. The political executive is looked to, in particular, to develop coherent economic and social programmes that meet the needs of more complex and politically sophisticated societies, and to control the state's various external relationships in an increasingly interdependent world. One important consequence of this has been the growth of the executive's legislative powers, and its encroachment on the traditional responsibilities of the parliament or assembly.

Not only do political executives usually initiate legislative programmes and help, by persuasion or direction, to make the legislative process work, but, in many cases, they also exercise a wide range of law-making powers, using decrees, orders and other instruments. However, it is misleading to imply that the political executive always dominates the policy process. Much policy, for instance, is initiated by political parties and interest groups. Moreover, by virtue of their expertise and specialist knowledge, bureaucrats or civil servants may play a crucial role in policy formulation; at best, leaving the political executive to establish the overall direction of government policy.

Popular leadership

The popularity of the political executive, more than any other part of the political system, is crucial to the character and stability of the regime as a whole. At a policy level, it is the ability of the executive to mobilize support that ensures the compliance and cooperation of the general public. Quite simply, without support from the public, or from key groups in society, policy implementation becomes difficult, perhaps impossible. More importantly, the political executive's popularity is linked to the legitimacy of the broader regime. The unpopularity of a particular government or administration does not, in itself, weaken support for the political system, but it may do so in the absence of a mechanism for removing and replacing that government. This goes some way towards explaining the widespread use of regular and competitive elections. Of course, this is not to say that unpopular and immovable executives always spell systemic breakdown. Such regimes can survive, but only by resorting to authoritarianism (see p. 277), meaning that popular compliance is brought about through repression and ideological manipulation.

Bureaucratic leadership

Its task of overseeing the implementation of policy means that the political executive has major bureaucratic and administrative responsibilities. In this sense,

chief executives, ministers and secretaries constitute a 'top management' charged with running the machinery of government. This work is organized largely along departmental lines, senior ministers having responsibility for particular policy areas and for the bureaucrats engaged to administer those areas. At a higher level, there is a need for policy coordination, which is usually accomplished through some kind of cabinet system.

However, doubts have been expressed about the effectiveness of this bureaucratic leadership. First, as political executives are staffed by politicians, they often lack the competence, managerial experience and administrative knowledge to control a sprawling bureaucratic machine effectively. Second, particular government departments can develop their own interests, especially when they forge alliances with powerful client groups. Third, the bureaucracy as a whole can develop interests that are separate from those of the political executive, encouraging it to resist the control of its notional political masters. These issues are examined in greater detail in Chapter 16 in relation to bureaucratic power.

Crisis leadership

A crucial advantage that the political executive has over the assembly is its ability to take swift and decisive action. When crises break out, in either domestic or international politics, it is invariably the executive that responds, by virtue of its hierarchical structure and the scope it provides for personal leadership. It is therefore common for assemblies to grant political executives near-dictatorial powers in times of war, and for executives to seize 'emergency powers' when confronted by domestic crises such as natural disasters, terrorist threats, industrial unrest and civil disorder. Clearly, however, the power to declare 'states of emergency' and to impose effective executive rule is subject to abuse. Not uncommonly, governments have used these powers to weaken or eradicate political opposition under the guise of constitutionalism (see p. 337).

POWER IN THE EXECUTIVE: WHO LEADS?

As already noted, the roles and responsibilities of the political executive have been substantially enhanced by the emergence of democratic politics, growing government intervention, and political and economic globalization (see p. 142). During the twentieth century, political executives acquired ever-wider policy-making and legislative responsibilities, took command of sprawling bureaucratic machines, and increasingly became the focus of popular politics and media attention. These developments have, in turn, profoundly affected the internal organization of the executive branch of government, and the distribution of power within it. By common consent, the main beneficiary of this process has been the chief executive. Heads of government now commonly have institutional responsibilities, a political status, and a public profile that sets them clearly apart from their cabinet or ministerial colleagues. Nevertheless, this image of growing centralization and the rise of personal power conflicts sharply with evidence of leadership failure, and the growing incapacity of chief executives to carry out what people have elected them to do (see p. 305). The complex dynamics of exec-

CONCEPT

Presidential government

A presidential system of government is characterized by a constitutional and political separation of powers between the legislative and executive branches of government. The principal features of a presidential system are: (1) the executive and the legislature are separately elected; (2) there is a formal separation of the personnel between the legislative and the executive branches; (3) the executive cannot be removed by the legislature (except, possibly, through impeachment; (4) the president or executive cannot 'dissolve' the legislature; and (5) executive authority is concentrated in the hands of the president.

utive power can be examined more closely by looking at the roles of presidents, prime ministers and cabinets.

In each of these three cases, however, three dimensions of power must be borne in mind:

- the *formal* dimension of power: the constitutional roles and responsibilities of executive officers and the institutional frameworks in which they operate
- the *informal* dimension of power: the role of personality, political skills and experience, and the impact of factors such as parties and the media
- the *external* dimension of power: the political, economic and diplomatic context of government, and the broader pressures that bear on the executive branch.

Presidents

A president is a formal head of state, a title that is held in other states by a monarch or emperor. An important distinction, however, must be made between constitutional presidents and executive presidents. Constitutional or non-executive presidents, found in India, Israel and Germany, for example, are a feature of parliamentary systems and have responsibilities confined largely to ceremonial duties. In these circumstances, the president is a mere figurehead, and executive power is wielded by a prime minister and/or a cabinet. This section is concerned with executive presidents, who combine the formal responsibilities of a head of state with the political power of a chief executive. Presidencies of this kind constitute the basis of what is called 'presidential government' (see Figure 13.1), as opposed to parliamentary government (see Figure 14.1).

Presidential executives may be either limited or unlimited. Limited presidential executives operate within constraints imposed by a constitution, political democracy, party competition and some form of separation of powers. Above all, the powers of the president are counterbalanced by those of a popularly accountable assembly. The best-known example of limited **presidentialism** is found in the USA, but **semi-presidential systems** like those in France and Finland also conform to this model. In unlimited presidential executives, on the other hand, the president is invested with near-unchecked powers, meaning that these regimes are, effectively, dictatorships (see p. 281). They are commonly found in one-party states that rest heavily on the support of the military. Unlimited executives can be found, for example, in Sudan, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

US-style presidential government has spawned imitations throughout the world, mainly in Latin America and, more recently, in postcommunist states such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Russia – although, apart from Russia, most postcommunist presidencies operate within what are effectively parliamentary systems. In investing executive power in a presidency, the architects of the US constitution were aware that they were, in effect, creating an 'elective kingship'. Wishing to avoid the abuse of power they believed had occurred under the British Crown, they established an intricate separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches. This was more accurately described by Richard Neustadt (1990) as 'separated institutions sharing powers'. Thus, although the president was designated head of state, chief execu-

● **Presidentialism**: Personalized leadership that is disengaged from parties or other government bodies, in the manner of an executive president.

● **Semi-presidential system**: A system of government in which a separately elected president presides over a government drawn from, and accountable to, the assembly.

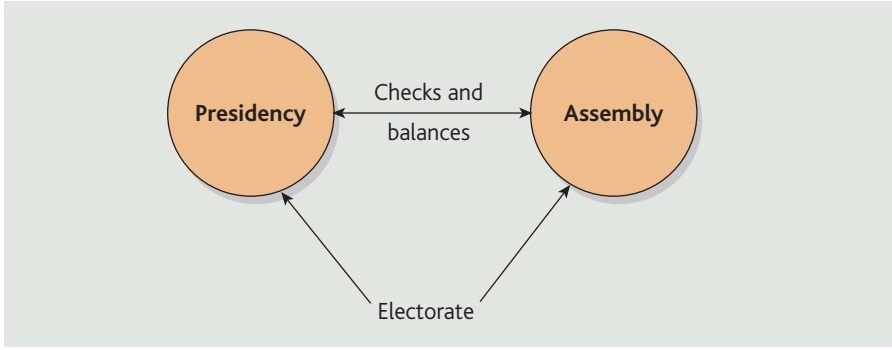

Figure 13.1 Presidential system of government (limited presidentialism)

tive, commander-in-chief of the armed forces and chief diplomat, and was granted wide-ranging powers of **patronage** and the right to veto legislation, Congress was invested with strong counterbalancing powers. In particular, Congress could declare war and override presidential vetoes, and the Senate was empowered to approve appointments and ratify treaties. Indeed, until the early twentieth century the presidency remained a generally secondary institution; such policy leadership as was required was provided by Congress.

The status of the US presidency was then transformed by two key developments. First, a national economy developed that required the government to abandon its traditional *laissez-faire* policies and adopt a more interventionist approach to economic and social life. Second, the USA was forced to drop its policy of isolationism and accept a world role, assuming after World War II a superpower status, in a bipolar, and subsequently unipolar, world system. Since President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s, US presidents have played the role of chief legislator, and since 1945 have worn the mantle of the leader of the 'free world'. Alarmed by the ease with which President Johnson and President Nixon escalated the Vietnam War without war being formally declared by Congress, Arthur Schlesinger (1974) went so far as to proclaim the emergence of an '**imperial presidency**'.

Presidential power is, nevertheless, often fragile and insubstantial. Neustadt's classic text *Presidential Power* (1990) remains correct: the chief power of the US president is the 'power to persuade'; that is, the ability to bargain, encourage and even cajole, but not dictate. The ability of US presidents to get their way depends on four crucial relationships, specifically those with:

- Congress
- the federal bureaucracy
- the Supreme Court
- the media.

The president's relationship with *Congress* is undoubtedly the most crucial. The success of particular presidents, for instance, is often quantified in terms of their 'success rate' with Congress; that is, the proportion of their legislative

● **Patronage**: The practice of making appointments to office, or, more widely, the granting of favours.

● **Imperial presidency**: A presidency that has broken free from its constitutional bounds and threatens to dominate the other two branches of government.

programme that survives congressional scrutiny. Following the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, however, presidents have had to confront more assertive Congresses, intent on reclaiming some of their lost powers. An early example of this was the passage of the War Powers Act 1974, which meant that congressional support was required for the dispatching of US troops abroad. More significantly, the USA's relatively weak party system deprives the president of the major lever of legislative control available to parliamentary executives: an appeal to party unity. This means, as President Jimmy Carter discovered in the 1970s, that presidents can be rebuffed by Congress even when both houses are dominated by their own party.

Presidents may be weaker still when they are confronted by a Congress that is controlled by the opposition party. This was the problem that President Clinton experienced after the election of a Republican Congress in 1994. Barack Obama's influence over Congress was also severely restricted when the Democrats lost 63 seats in, and control of, the House of Representatives in the 2010 mid-term elections. The difficulty confronting the president is that, regardless of party affiliation, both Representatives and Senators are concerned primarily with the 'folks back home'. Indeed, the interest that this forces them to take in domestic affairs has encouraged commentators to speak of the 'two presidencies'. These are the 'domestic' presidency, which is typically characterized by policy failure and gridlock, and from which most presidents retreat; and the 'foreign' presidency, to which they gravitate in the hope of demonstrating their leadership credentials. Even President Clinton, elected to office on a promise to focus 'like a laser beam' on the economy, could not avoid, in Rose's (1987) words, 'going international'. This trend was further strengthened by the so-called 'war on terror' (see p. 401) following the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. The ultimate control that Congress exercises over the president resides in the power of **impeachment**, although this has only been used twice (Andrew Johnson in 1868, and Bill Clinton in 1998), and on both occasions the president was aquitted at a trial by the Senate.

In theory, the federal *bureaucracy* exists to serve the president but, in practice, it often acts as an embarrassing constraint. Although presidents make, directly or indirectly, about 4,000 appointments at senior and middle-ranking levels in their administrations, this is a minimal proportion of the total number of professional bureaucrats in the US, who number over 2 million. Moreover, it is widely argued that these bureaucrats frequently respond to interests at odds with the priorities of the administration. As Secretary of the Navy under Woodrow Wilson, F. D. Roosevelt described influencing the Navy Department as like punching a feather mattress: 'you punch and punch but it remains the same'. In his famous comment on his successor, General Eisenhower, President Truman referred to a similar problem:

> He'll sit here and he'll say 'Do this! Do that!' and nothing will happen. Poor Ike – it won't be a bit like the Army.

● **Impeachment**: A formal process for the removal of a public official in the event of personal or professional wrongdoing.

Similar difficulties exist in relation to the *Supreme Court*. Since the 1950s, the Court has played a significant role in US political life, forcing presidents to shape the political agenda, in part, by exercising influence over it. Although presidents appoint justices to the Supreme Court, these appointments may be rejected by

Focus on . . .
The monarchy debate

A monarchy is a system of rule dominated by one person (it literally means 'rule by one person'). In general usage, however, it is the institution through which the post of head of state is filled through inheritance or dynastic succession. In absolute monarchies, the monarch claims, if seldom exercises, a monopoly of political power (examples being Saudi Arabia, Swaziland and the Vatican City). In constitutional monarchies, the monarch fulfils an essentially ceremonial function largely devoid of political significance (for example, in Spain, the Netherlands and the UK).

The advantages of a constitutional monarchy are as follows:

- It provides a solution to the need for a non-partisan head of state who is 'above' party politics.
- The monarch embodies traditional authority, and so serves as a symbol of patriotic loyalty and national unity.
- The monarch constitutes a repository of experience and wisdom, especially in relation to constitutional matters, available to elected governments.

The disadvantages of a constitutional monarchy include the following:

- It violates democratic principles, in that political authority is not based on popular consent and is in no way publicly accountable.
- The monarch symbolizes (and possibly supports) conservative values such as hierarchy, deference and respect for inherited wealth and social position.
- The monarchy binds nations to outmoded ways and symbols of the past, thus impeding progress.

the Senate (as discovered by Nixon twice and Reagan once), and, once they have been appointed, judges cannot be controlled because of their security of tenure. Much of the New Deal programme in the 1930s was blocked by the Supreme Court, until F. D. Roosevelt was able to shift its ideological balance through the 'court revolution' of 1937. Eisenhower, in turn, appointed Earl Warren as Chief Justice, only later discovering his taste for judicial activism and his liberal interpretation of the constitution.

The final key relationship is that between the US president and the *media*. The media are vital to presidents who need to appeal directly to the US public 'over the heads of Congress'. In this respect, presidents such as Ronald Reagan, a former actor and journalist, have been remarkably successful in 'managing' media coverage and ensuring favourable comment. Nevertheless, presidents who live by the media may also die by them. The media are often portrayed as the USA's fourth branch of government, which prizes both its political independence and its reputation for seeking truth. The exposure of the Watergate scandal by *The Washington Post* eventually led to the resignation of President Nixon in 1974, and relentless coverage of the Whitewater affair seriously weakened the Clinton administration in the early 1990s.

The potential within presidential systems for institutional conflict was realized in early postcommunist Russia as the Russian parliament came increasingly under the control of hardliners intent on resisting President Yeltsin's 'shock therapy' reform package. Ultimately, Yeltsin's presidency survived only because of the support of the military in crushing the parliament's rebellion in October

1993, which led to the imposition of presidential rule. The possibility of the emergence in Russia of an unlimited presidential executive was, however, offset by Yeltsin's need to balance the volatile and conflicting pressures within the Russian political system. Russia's tradition of strong executive leadership was nevertheless reasserted after 1999 by President Putin. Putin established a hegemonic presidency based on what he called a 'dictatorship of law'. This system was amended during 2008–12, when Putin served as prime minister under President Medvedev, due to a constitutional restriction on residents serving for three successive terms in office.

A different form of presidential government is found in semi-presidential systems, such as those in France, Austria, Finland and Portugal. These are hybrid systems. They comprise, as in presidential systems, a separately elected president invested with a range of executive powers and, as in parliamentary systems, a government, usually featuring a prime minister and a cabinet, drawn from and accountable to the assembly. In Finland and Austria, for example, such systems operate largely through a division of executive responsibilities, allowing the president to concentrate on foreign affairs and broader constitutional issues, while the prime minister and cabinet take charge of domestic policy.

However, the system constructed in the Fifth French Republic, and completed with the introduction of a separately elected president in 1962, is significantly more complex. On the one hand, in addition to carrying out the roles that the US president plays as head of state, chief executive and dispenser of appointments, French presidents enjoy a fixed five-year term in office, and can also bring the legislature to heel by using their power to dissolve the National Assembly. On the other hand, they are seriously constrained by the need for their governments to maintain parliamentary and public support. Thus, presidents such as de Gaulle (1958–69), Pompidou (1969–74) and Giscard d'Estaing (1974–81) derived their strength largely from the control that Gaullist forces exercised in the National Assembly. However, the right to call a general election does not necessarily guarantee party control of the National Assembly, as the Socialist President Mitterrand discovered in 1986, and again in 1993, when he was forced into **cohabitation** with Gaullist governments. Similarly, despite the fact that he possessed the formal powers of an elected monarch, de Gaulle's presidency ended in resignation in 1969 after the student riots of May 1968 and a financial crisis. The fragility of presidential power was also demonstrated by the pressures on President Chirac, particularly during the period of Jospin's Socialist-led government (1997–2002).

Prime ministers

Most of the political executives in the modern world can be classified as parliamentary executives. The structure and form of executive power found in parliamentary systems differs significantly from that in presidential ones. Parliamentary executives have three essential features. First, since executive power is derived from the assembly and closely linked to party politics, a separate head of state, in the form of a constitutional monarch or non-executive president, is required to fulfil ceremonial duties and act as a focus of patriotic loyalty. Second, the political executive is drawn from the assembly, which means that the separation of the personnel between the legislature and executive found in presidential

● **Cohabitation**: An arrangement in a semi-presidential system in which the president works with a government and assembly controlled by a rival party or parties.

systems does not occur in parliamentary systems. Third, the executive is directly responsible to the assembly, or at least to its lower chamber, in the sense that it survives in government only as long as it retains the confidence of the assembly.

The external dynamics of executive power in parliamentary systems thus contrast sharply with those found in presidential ones. In short, parliamentary executives are forced to govern in and through assemblies, while presidential executives tend to rely on a personal mandate and an independent set of constitutional powers. This undoubtedly also affects the internal dynamics of power. In particular, it creates a greater pressure in parliamentary executives for collective decision-making and collaboration, often reflected in the higher status of the cabinet in these systems. However, many commentators have argued that the growth of prime-ministerial power has effectively turned prime ministers into quasi-presidents.

Prime ministers (sometimes seen as chancellors, as in Germany; minister-presidents, as in the Netherlands; or referred to by a local title, such as the Irish Taoiseach) are heads of government whose power is derived from their leadership of the majority party, or coalition (see p. 239) of parties, in the assembly. The range of formal powers with which the office of prime minister is invested are typically modest in comparison with those of executive presidents. The most important of these is the control of patronage – the ability to hire and fire, promote and demote, ministers. In the Netherlands and Australia, for example, even this power is exercised by the assembly or the majority party. As the job of prime minister can have only a loose constitutional description, it is no exaggeration to say that the post is what its holder chooses to make of it or, more accurately, is able to make of it.

In practice, this boils down to two key sets of prime-ministerial relationships. The first set is with the cabinet, individual ministers and government departments; the second is with his or her party and, through it, the assembly and the public. The support of the cabinet is particularly crucial to prime ministers who are designated *primus inter pares* (first among equals), such as those in the UK, India and Australia. This status forces prime ministers to operate through a system of collective cabinet government (see p. 298). Their power is therefore a reflection of the degree to which, by patronage, cabinet management and the control of the machinery of government, they can ensure that ministers serve under them. In contrast, German chancellors are personally empowered by Article 65 of the Basic Law (1949) to decide the general lines of government policy. However, the same article also constrains their power by stipulating that ministers enjoy autonomy in relation to their departments.

There is no doubt that the key to prime-ministerial power and influence lies in his or her position as party leader. Indeed, the modern premiership is largely a product of the emergence of disciplined political parties. Not only is the post of prime minister allocated on the basis of party leadership, it also provides its holder with a means of controlling the assembly and a base from which the image of a national leader can be constructed. The degree of party unity, the parliamentary strength of the prime minister's party (in particular, whether it rules alone or as a member of a coalition), and the authority vested in the assembly (or, at least, its first chamber), are therefore important determinants of prime-ministerial power. For instance, factional rivalry within, and then the decline of, the LDP ensured that the tenure of Japanese prime ministers was

short (17 prime ministers came and went between 1974 and 2011) and cabinets were frequently reconstructed. Similarly, Italy's fragmented party system usually forces prime ministers to play the role of a broker within what tend to be fragile coalition governments. German chancellors, for their part, are restricted by the independence of the *Länder*, the power of the second chamber (the *Bundesrat*), and the authority of the Constitutional Court, as well as by the autonomy of the Bundesbank.

There is, nevertheless, agreement that, despite their differing constitutional and political positions, prime-ministerial power has grown in recent years. This results in part from 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 of 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. For instance, in India an imperial style of premiership developed under Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv that reached its peak during the state of emergency, 1975–77. This was possible because of the secure majorities that the Congress Party enjoyed in parliament, the ruthless control exerted over the apparatus of central government, and the sway that the Gandhi dynasty continued to exert over important sections of the Indian public.

Allegations of prime-ministerial government have often been made in the UK. The unusual level of power wielded by prime ministers stems from various sources, including the following:

- the level and range of their patronage
- their control of the cabinet system, especially their ability to set up and staff cabinet committees
- their ability to dominate the assembly as leaders of the largest party, especially when that party has majority control of the lower chamber
- their position as head of the civil service, and the control this gives them over the bureaucratic machine
- their direct access to the media, which enables them to make personalized appeals to the voters.

Prime ministers stand at the apex of the administrative and political arms of government, meaning that the cabinet has been turned into a US-style advisory body that no longer exercises policy-making responsibility. The prime-ministerial government thesis appeared to have become a reality in the UK during the 1980s, as Margaret Thatcher effectively recast the nature and authority of the office. In many respects, Tony Blair's premiership after 1997 built on these foundations. What distinguished Thatcher's premiership was the fact that she saw herself as a 'conviction prime minister', her role being to provide ideological leadership and policy coherence, orientated around ideas that came to be called **Thatcherism**. Similarly, Blair strongly associated his leadership of the Labour Party with the advance of the 'modernizing' project; this saw the party rebranded as 'new' Labour and 'third way' ideological priorities displace old-style socialist ones. For Michael Foley (2000), this development exposed the degree to

● **Thatcherism**: The free-market/strong-state ideological stance adopted by Margaret Thatcher; the UK version of the New Right political project.

Focus on . . .

Prime-ministerial government: a virtue or a vice?

Prime-ministerial government has two key features. First, the office of prime minister is the central link between the legislative and executive branches of government, its holder being drawn from and accountable to the assembly, and also serving as chief executive and head of the bureaucracy. Second, prime-ministerial government reflects the centralization of executive power in the hands of the prime minister and the effective subordination of both the cabinet and departmental ministers. In this, it parallels presidentialism.

Prime-ministerial government has been criticized for the following reasons:

- It strengthens centralization by weakening the constraints formerly exerted by the cabinet and government departments.
- It narrows policy debate and weakens scrutiny by excluding criticisms and alternative viewpoints.

However, it can be defended on the following grounds:

- It reflects the personal mandate that prime ministers acquire in general elections.
- It gives government policy clearer direction by checking the centrifugal pressures embodied in departmentalism (see p. 371) and the 'nudge and fudge' of collective decision-making.

which an 'authentically British presidency' had come into existence, highlighting a wider trend in parliamentary systems towards presidentialism.

Although prime ministers who command cohesive parliamentary majorities can wield power that would be the envy of many a president, they are also subject to important constraints. By no means, for instance, do prime ministers have a free hand in terms of hiring and firing. The need to maintain party unity by ensuring that the various factions and ideological wings of the party are represented in the cabinet, and the pressure in countries such as Canada to maintain regional and linguistic representation, act as important checks on prime-ministerial power. The advent of coalition government, as under David Cameron in the UK since 2010, also constrains the prime minister's powers of patronage. Ultimately, prime ministers are only as powerful as their cabinets, parties and broader political circumstances allow them to be. This can be seen in India, where, following the excesses of the emergency in the 1970s, prime ministers such as Desai, Singh and Rao, leading coalition or minority governments, reduced the size of the prime minister's staff, were willing to respect the autonomy of government departments, and interfered less in the affairs of state governments.

It is also interesting that the power wielded by Margaret Thatcher in the UK may have been less a consequence of her indomitable character and ideological resolution than a reflection of the unusually favourable circumstances that confronted her. Chief amongst these were the weak and divided nature of the Labour opposition, the 1982 Falklands War victory, the revival of the world economy in the mid-1980s, and, partly as a result of these, the ability of the Conservatives to win three successive elections under her leadership. However, the fragility of prime-ministerial power was underlined by her removal as leader in 1990.

POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

The UK prime minister: a president in all but name?

Events: In March 2003, the Iraq War started with an invasion launched by the USA and the UK. The UK's involvement in this war was a remarkable example of prime-ministerial power. It showed the then-prime minister, Tony Blair, at his most determined, zealous, even messianic. Blair persisted with his determination to 'stand by the USA', despite mass anti-war demonstrations on the streets of London and other major UK cities, and despite suffering the largest backbench revolt against any government in over a century. What is more, this was a war of choice for Blair. Many in Washington had expected the UK to back away from military action once the Security Council of the United Nations had failed to pass a resolution specifically authorizing the war, and they had planned accordingly. The UK's involvement in the Iraq War was therefore a personal decision on the part of Blair: he did it because he thought it was the right thing to do. But he also did it because he could do it: his position as prime minister allowed him to do it.

Significance: For many, the decision to go to war was a clear reflection of the fact that the UK no longer had a prime minister, but a president. Personal leadership had replaced collective leadership – the prime minister was in charge, not the cabinet or Parliament. In a trend dating back to Harold Wilson in the 1960s and Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, Blair had been able to emancipate himself from the constraints that typically apply to a parliamentary executive. With two landslide election victories behind him (in 1997 and 2001), Blair had little to fear from a cabinet that was, in the main, unwilling to challenge his authority, or from a Parliament in which Labour's majority was so large that it effectively immunized him from backbench pressure. Although the UK does not have a separately elected executive, a combination of the media's portrayal of politics in terms of personality and image, rather than ideas and policies, and the tendency of parties to use their leaders as their 'brand image', has led to the growth of personalized election campaigns in which the victorious leader comes to claim a personal mandate on the basis of their electoral success. This has led to the growth of 'spatial leadership'; that is, the tendency of leaders to distance themselves from their parties and governments either by presenting themselves as 'outsiders', or by developing a personal ideological stance.

However, significant though these trends may be, it is difficult to argue that they have rebalanced the structural dynamics of the UK's parliamentary executive. Although Blair's decision in 2003 was, in itself, a remarkable example of prime-ministerial power, it cast a dark shadow over the rest of his premiership, ultimately leading to the end of his political career. After 2003, Blair's poll ratings plummeted, and Labour's majority in the 2005 general election was slashed from 166 to just 65. A mood of restiveness and unease took hold on Labour's backbenches and was expressed in increasingly frequent backbench revolts. Tensions also grew within the cabinet, especially as Gordon Brown and his allies became more open about pursuing their political ambitions. Shortly before the 2005 election, Blair became the first prime minister to, in effect, pre-announce his own resignation. He did this by promising that, if he were re-elected for a third term in office, he would not seek a fourth term. This promise was duly carried out when he resigned in June 2007. Presidential tendencies may have allowed Blair to make the fateful 2003 decision in the first place, but the fact that UK prime ministers are always forced to operate within a cabinet and parliamentary system meant that he was unable to escape the consequences of that decision.

Focus on . . .

Cabinet government: advantages and disadvantages

Cabinet government is characterized by two central features. First, the cabinet constitutes the principal link between the legislative and executive branches of government; its members are drawn from and accountable to the parliament, but also serve as the political heads of the various government departments. Second, the cabinet is the senior executive organ, and policy-making responsibility is shared within it, the prime minister being 'first' in name only. This system is usually underpinned by collective responsibility – all the cabinet ministers are required to 'sing the same song' and support official government policy.

The virtues of cabinet government are the following:

- It encourages full and frank policy debate within the democracy of cabinet meetings, subjecting proposals to effective scrutiny.
- It guarantees the unity and cohesion of government, since the cabinet makes decisions collectively and collectively stands by them.

However, cabinet government has been criticized for the following reasons:

- It acts as a cloak for prime-ministerial power because it forces dissenting ministers to support agreed government policy in public.
- It means that government policy becomes incoherent and inconsistent, as decisions are based on compromises between competing ministers and departmental interests.

The relative weakness of John Major's premiership, particularly in the 1992–97 period, stemmed less from his personal inadequacies and more from the greater difficulties his government had to face. Chief amongst these was a combination of the Conservatives' diminished parliamentary majority and the party's deepening rift over Europe. In contrast, Tony Blair benefited not only from his large majorities and the electoral decline of the Conservative Party, but also from the fact that, after 18 years in opposition, the Labour Party was initially more responsive to demands for strong leadership and unity. Gordon Brown's premiership, 2007–10, was blighted by both his personal limitations as a political communicator and by the severe recession that was triggered by the 2007–09 global financial crisis, which effectively destroyed Brown's and Labour's reputation for economic competence.

Cabinets

Virtually all political executives feature a cabinet of some sort. In France, the cabinet is known as the 'Council of Ministers' and, in China, it is called the 'Politburo'. A cabinet is a committee of senior ministers who represent the various government departments or ministries. This term is not to be confused with '*cabinet*', as used in France and the EU to denote small groups of policy advisers who support individual ministers. The widespread use of cabinets reflects the political and administrative need for collective procedures within the political executive. In the first place, cabinets enable government to present a collective face to assemblies and the public. Without a cabinet, government

CONCEPT

Core executive

The core executive is a network of institutions and people who play key roles in the overall direction and coordination of government policy. It usually encompasses the prime minister, senior policy advisers, leading cabinet members, cabinet committees, and staff in strategically important government departments. The core executive model gets away from the simplistic 'prime minister versus cabinet' debate, by acknowledging that these bodies operate within an institutional context. It also acknowledges the extent to which policy influence is exerted through the building up of alliances and coalitions of support.

could appear to be a personal tool wielded by a single individual. Second, cabinets are an administrative device designed to ensure the effective coordination of government policy. In short, in the absence of a cabinet, government would consist of rival bureaucratic empires each bent on self-aggrandisement, rather as occurred in the Hitler state in Nazi Germany.

The precise role and political importance of cabinets vary from system to system and state to state. In presidential systems such as the USA's, the cabinet exists to serve the president by acting as a policy adviser, rather than a policy-maker. Indeed, in the second half of the twentieth century, executive growth in the USA occurred largely at a non-cabinet level, in the form of the construction of the Executive Office of the President (discussed in Chapter 16). In contrast, the cabinet, in theory at least, is the apex of the executive in states that respect the principle of cabinet government, such as the UK, most of the Commonwealth and several European countries (including Italy, Sweden and Norway).

It is, nevertheless, difficult in practice to find examples of collective executives that operate through a cabinet or equivalent body. In theory, a form of collective leadership operates in China, reflecting the Marxist–Leninist belief that the Communist Party (CCP), rather than a single leader, is the leading and guiding force in Chinese society. In practice, the leadership system in China has been dominated by a paramount individual. In the cases of Mao Zedong, during 1949–76, and Deng Xiaoping, during 1978–97, they wielded such supreme power that they retained their position until they died. More recent Chinese leaders have combined their position with the posts of general secretary of the CCP and president of the People's Republic of China. In Germany, and commonly throughout continental Europe, a tradition of departmental specialization discourages ministers from seeing themselves as 'team players', and so counters any tendency towards cabinet government. Even in the UK system, supposedly the archetypal example of cabinet government, it is difficult to see the cabinet as a decision-making body, let alone as a democratic forum.

Not only has the rise of prime-ministerial power subverted the collective nature of UK government, but the growth in the range and complexity of government policy has also ensured that most decisions are effectively made elsewhere, and thus reach the cabinet in a prepackaged form. This highlights the important contribution that government departments make to policy formulation, as well as the impact of cabinet committees and, indeed, subcommittees. In the UK and elsewhere, the full cabinet is merely the hub of a cabinet system, comprising committees of subject specialists able to examine policy proposals in greater detail and depth than is possible in the cabinet itself. This system weakens the cabinet both because it strengthens the levers of control that are available to the prime minister, who sets up and staffs committees, and because full cabinets usually lack the time and expertise to challenge proposals that emanate from committees. The complex relationships that result from this have been explained by some commentators in terms of the idea of a 'core executive' (Rhodes and Dunleavy, 1995).

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to dismiss cabinets as merely 'dignified' institutions. Many prime ministers, for example, have paid a high price for ignoring the collective element within modern government. German chancellors are generally considered to be even stronger than UK prime ministers because

CONCEPT

Leadership

Leadership can be understood either as a pattern of behaviour, or as a personal quality. As a pattern of behaviour, leadership is the influence exerted by an individual or group over a larger body to organize or direct its efforts towards the achievement of desired goals. As a personal attribute, leadership refers to the character traits that enable the leader to exert influence over others; leadership is thus effectively equated with charisma (see p. 83). In both respects, however, leadership requires 'followership'. For a claim to leadership to be upheld, others, the followers, must recognise and act on that claim.

they can be removed only by a vote of 'constructive no confidence'. This means that the *Bundestag* can remove a government only by approving an alternative one, not merely by withdrawing support from the existing one (as occurs in the UK). Nevertheless, Chancellor Schmidt was forced to resign in 1982 when the small Free Democratic Party withdrew from his Social-Democrat-led coalition cabinet to join forces with the Christian Democrats, led by Helmut Kohl. Coalitions certainly add to the difficulties of cabinet management, as Italian prime ministers have regularly discovered, but a single-party cabinet can also cause problems for chief executives.

Although cabinets generally remain loyal to prime ministers for fear that divisions in a party's senior leadership spell the likelihood of election defeat, prime ministers are sometimes removed as a result of pressure from within the cabinet, or from senior party figures. Margaret Thatcher interpreted her fall in 1990 in precisely these terms. Thatcher claimed to have been ousted by a cabinet *coup* through the withdrawal of ministerial support once she had failed to secure re-election as party leader on the first ballot (Thatcher, 1993). Kevin Rudd's removal as Australian prime minister in 2010 reinforced the lesson that parliamentary leaders cannot long survive without the support of senior party figures. Faced with the declining popularity of his government and growing dissatisfaction with his own leadership, Rudd stood down as prime minister and Labor Party leader in favour of his deputy, Julia Gillard, becoming the first Australian prime minister to be removed from office by his own party during his first term in office.

THE POLITICS OF LEADERSHIP

In some respects, the subject of political leadership appears to be outdated. The division of society into leaders and followers is rooted in a predemocratic culture of deference and respect in which leaders 'knew best' and the public needed to be led, mobilized or guided. Democratic politics may not have removed the need for leaders, but it has certainly placed powerful constraints on leadership; notably, by making leaders publicly accountable and establishing an institutional mechanism through which they can be called to account and removed. In other respects, however, the politics of leadership has become increasingly significant, helping to contribute to the establishment of a separate discipline of political psychology, whose major concerns include a study of the psychological make-up and motivations of political leaders (Kressel, 1993).

This growing focus on leadership has occurred for a number of reasons. For instance, to some extent, democracy itself has enhanced the importance of personality by forcing political leaders, in effect, to 'project themselves' in the hope of gaining electoral support. This tendency has undoubtedly been strengthened by modern means of mass communication (especially television), which tend to emphasize personalities, rather than policies, and provide leaders with powerful weapons with which to manipulate their public images. Furthermore, as society becomes more complex and fragmented, people may increasingly look to the personal vision of individual leaders to give coherence and meaning to the world in which they live. Ironically, then, leadership may never have been so important, but also so difficult to deliver.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

German philosopher. A professor of Greek at Basel by the age of 25, Nietzsche became increasingly interested in the ideas of Schopenhauer (1788–1860) and the music of Wagner (1813–83). Growing illness and insanity after 1889 brought him under the control of his sister Elizabeth, who edited and distorted his writings. Nietzsche's complex and ambitious work stressed the importance of will, especially the 'will to power', and it anticipated modern existentialism in emphasizing that people create their own worlds and make their own values. He attacked conventional values based on God, truth and morality, and sought to replace these with new values and a new ideal of the human person. His best known writings include *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883/84), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887).

Theories of leadership

The question of political leadership is surrounded by controversy. To what extent is leadership compatible with freedom and democracy? Does personalized leadership inspire and motivate, or does it subdue and repress (see p. 305)? Are strong leaders to be admired or feared? At the heart of these disagreements lie differing views about the nature of political leadership. What does the phenomenon of leadership comprise? Where does leadership come from? Four contrasting theories of leadership can be identified. Leadership can be understood as:

- a natural gift
- a sociological phenomenon
- an organizational necessity
- a political skill.

A natural gift

The traditional view of leadership sees it as a rare but natural gift. As Aristotle (see p. 6) put it, 'men are marked out from the moment of birth to rule or be ruled'. From this perspective, leadership is strictly an individual quality, manifest in the personalities of what were traditionally thought of as 'men of destiny'. The most extreme version of this theory is found in the fascist 'leader principle' (*Führerprinzip*). This is based on the idea of a single, supreme leader (always male), who alone is capable of leading the masses to their destiny. Such an idea was, in part, derived from Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of the *Übermensch* (the 'overman' or 'superman'), who rises above the 'herd instinct' of conventional morality and so achieves self-mastery. In a more modest form, this theory of leadership is embodied in the idea of charisma, generally understood to mean the power of personality. The classic examples of charismatic leaders are usually seen as forceful personalities (such as Hitler, Castro, Nasser and Thatcher), although the more modest, but no less effective, 'fireside chats' of F. D. Roosevelt and the practised televisual skills of almost all modern leaders also exemplify charismatic qualities. However, unfortunately, leaders who exhibit genuine moral authority are rare.

CONCEPT

Cult of personality

A cult of personality (or cult of leadership) is a propaganda device through which a political leader is portrayed as a heroic or God-like figure. By treating the leader as the source of all political wisdom and an unfailing judge of the national interest, the cult implies that any form of criticism or opposition amounts to treachery or lunacy. Cults of personality have typically been developed in totalitarian regimes (first by Stalin) through the exploitation of the possibilities of modern means of mass communication, and the use of state repression to cultivate a form of ritualized idolatrization.

Modern political psychology adopts a similar view of leadership, in that it analyses it in terms of human personality. One of the earliest attempts to do this was the collaboration in the late 1920s between the Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and US diplomat William C. Bullitt on a controversial study of President Woodrow Wilson (Freud and Bullitt, 1967). Harold Lasswell's ground-breaking *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930) suggested that leaders are motivated largely by private, almost pathological, conflicts, which are then rationalized in terms of actions taken in the public interest. A widely discussed modern analysis of political leadership has been advanced by James Barber (1988). Focusing on what he called 'presidential character', Barber categorized US presidents according to two key variables: first, whether they were 'active' or 'passive' in terms of the energy they put into their jobs; and, second, whether they were 'positive' or 'negative' in terms of how they felt about political office. He therefore identified four character types:

- active-positive
- active-negative
- passive-positive
- passive-negative.

Examples of active-positive presidents would include Kennedy, Clinton and Obama. Active-negative presidents would include Harding and Reagan. Nixon is an example of a passive-positive president, while Coolidge and Eisenhower were passive-negative. Nevertheless, the limitations of Barber's analysis are demonstrated by the way that George W. Bush was transformed from a passive-positive president into a much more assertive and active one by the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001.

A sociological phenomenon

An alternative view of leadership sees it as a sociological, rather than psychological, phenomenon. From this perspective, in other words, leaders are 'created' by particular socio-historical forces. They do not so much impose their will on the world as act as a vehicle through which historical forces are exerted. This is certainly the approach adopted by Marxists, who believe that historical development is structured largely by economic factors, reflected in a process of class struggle. The personalities of individual leaders are, thus, less important than the broader class interests they articulate. Marx, nevertheless, acknowledged that **Bonapartism** was an exception. This was a phenomenon based on Louis Bonaparte's *coup d'état* in France in 1851, through which a personal dictatorship was established in conditions in which the bourgeoisie had lost power, but the proletariat was not sufficiently developed to seize it. Even in this case, however, Marx insisted that the Bonapartist dictatorship reflected the interests of the numerically strongest class in France, the smallholding peasantry. Similarly, in analysing Stalinism in the USSR, Trotsky (see p. 369) emphasized the degree to which Stalin's power was rooted in the dominance of the state bureaucracy (Trotsky, 1937). Sociological factors have also provided the basis for the very different idea that political leadership is largely a product of collective behaviour. In his seminal *The Crowd* ([1895] 1960), Gustav Le Bon analysed the dynamics

● **Bonapartism**: A style of government that fuses personal leadership with conservative nationalism; for Marxists, it reflects the relative autonomy of the state.

of crowd psychology, arguing that leaders are impelled by the collective behaviour of the masses, not the other way round.

An organizational necessity

The third theory of leadership sees it in largely technical terms as a rational, or bureaucratic, device. In this view, leadership is essentially an organizational necessity that arises from the need for coherence, unity and direction within any complex institution. Leadership therefore goes hand-in-hand with bureaucracy (see p. 361). Modern large-scale organizations require specialization, which, in turn, gives rise to a hierarchy of offices and responsibilities. This bureaucratic leadership conforms to what Weber (see p. 82) called legal-rational authority, in that it is essentially impersonal and based on formal, usually written, rules. The rise of constitutional government has undoubtedly invested political leadership with a strongly bureaucratic character by ensuring that power is vested in a political office, rather than the individual office-holder. This, nevertheless, conflicts with democratic pressures that force political leaders to cultivate charisma and emphasize personal qualities in order to win and retain power.

A political skill

The final theory of leadership portrays it very much as an artefact; that is, as a political skill that can be learned and practised. Political leadership, in this sense, is akin to the art of manipulation, a perhaps inevitable feature of democratic politics in an age of mass communications. This can be seen most graphically in the cults of personality that have been constructed to support the dictatorial leaderships of figures such as Mao Zedong (see p. 304), Colonel Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein. Indeed, many of the classic examples of charismatic leadership can, in practice, be seen as forms of manufactured leadership. Stalin, for example, bolstered his own popularity by building up an elaborate cult of Lenin in the 1920s; he erected statues, renamed streets and towns, and placed Lenin's embalmed body in a mausoleum in Red Square. During the 1930s, having carefully linked himself to Lenin's heritage, Stalin transferred this cult to himself. Similarly, Hitler's performances at the Nuremburg rallies were carefully stage-managed by Albert Speer. His every word and gesture were carefully rehearsed and choreographed; the whole event was designed to build up emotional tension that would be released by Hitler's appearance.

Modern democratic politicians have no less strong a need to project themselves and their personal vision, though the skills appropriate to the television age tend to be refined and sophisticated compared with those suitable for mass rallies and public demonstrations. The heightened optimism that greeted Barack Obama's first election victory in 2008 and his inauguration the following year, and his unusually successful early period in office (especially over the issue of health care reform), were often linked to his capacity to deploy two important leadership skills. First, an astute and highly fluent public speaker, Obama was able to convey professionalism and gravitas whilst also, as appropriate, using humour and self-deprecation. Second, he demonstrated strong **emotional intelligence**, the capacity that, according to Greenstein (2009), is the key to establishing a successful leadership style. Emotional intelligence reflects the

● **Emotional intelligence**: The ability to handle oneself and to build successful relationships, based on an understanding of one's own and others' feelings.

Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) (1893–1976)

Chinese Marxist theorist and leader of the People's Republic of China, 1949–76. Mao was the son of a peasant farmer in Hunan. He initially worked as a librarian and teacher. In 1921, he helped to found the Chinese Communist Party and, in 1935, became its leader. As a political theorist, Mao adapted Marxism–Leninism to the needs of an overwhelmingly agricultural and still traditional society. His legacy is often associated with the Cultural Revolution (1966–70), a radical egalitarian movement that denounced elitism and 'capitalist roaders' (these inclined to bow to pressure from bourgeois forces), and that resulted in widespread social disruption, repression and death. Maoism is usually understood as an anti-bureaucratic form of Marxism that places its faith in the radical zeal of the masses.

ability to draw on four key competences or skills: self-awareness (the ability to read one's own emotions), self-management (the ability to control one's emotions and marshall positive emotions), empathy (the ability to sense, understand and react to others' emotions) and relationship management (the ability to use these skills in combination to have the greatest impact in any situation) (Goleman, 2005). In Obama's case, these skills were used in an attempt to balance a commitment to bipartisanship against support for an underlying vision of the federal government as an agent of social justice that harked back to Franklin Roosevelt's 'New Deal' and Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society'. However, a possible drawback of such 'soft' leadership skills (in many ways, these are akin to 'soft' power (see p. 428)) is that they may so increase levels of hope and expectation that eventual disillusionment with the leader becomes inevitable.

Styles of leadership

A style of leadership refers to the strategies and behavioural patterns through which a leader seeks to achieve his or her goals. Quite simply, leaders are not all alike: leadership can be exercised in a number of different ways. The factors that shape the adoption of a particular leadership strategy or style are, of course, numerous. Amongst the most obvious are the personality and goals of the leader, the institutional framework within which he or she operates, the political mechanisms by which power is won and retained, the means of mass communication available, and the nature of the broader political culture. Three distinctive styles of leadership have been identified (Burns, 1978):

- *laissez-faire* leadership
- transactional leadership
- transformational leadership.

The chief feature of *laissez-faire* leadership is the reluctance of the leader to interfere in matters outside his or her personal responsibility. Such leaders have a 'hands off' approach to cabinet and departmental management. An example of such leadership could be found in the Reagan White House, and the relatively

Debating . . .

Should personalized leadership always be feared?

Questions about leadership become particularly controversial when leaders draw less on their office and its formal powers and more on their own personal qualities and characteristics. When leadership becomes more an individual rather than an institutional phenomenon, does it become sinister or threatening? Or is personalized leadership more meaningful, even inspiring, than 'bureaucratic' forms of leadership?

YES

Recipe for authoritarianism. The fact that, as democracy has advanced, political leadership has increasingly been 'depersonalized' (by being subject to constitutional and institutional constraints) is no coincidence. When a leader's authority derives more from his or her personality than his or her office, government power is apt to be abused. This reflects the longstanding concern that as charisma (charm, or the power of personality) is not based on formal rules or procedures, potentially, it has no limit. In line with Lord Acton's warning that 'absolute power corrupts absolutely', leaders may also become more greedy, selfish and insensitive to the views of others to the extent that they feel they can manipulate them.

Infantilizing society. Personalized leadership may not only affect leaders but also followers, the public at large. Charismatic leadership has a near-mystical character, operating as it does through the belief that leaders possess special, even god-like qualities. As the relationship between leader and followers has a quasi-religious dimension, it generates uncritical loyalty, amounting perhaps to devotion. Personalized leaders are obeyed not because of what they say or do, but because of who they are. The rise of personalized leadership therefore infantilizes society, instilling a political passivity and unwillingness to engage in questioning, argument and debate that is incompatible with a healthy democracy.

Doomed to fail. Leaders who come to power largely as a result of personal gifts or qualities tend to be poor leaders whose political careers typically end in failure. Personalized leaders 'shine' in the theatre of politics, where their oratorical (and, often, televisual) skills are most in evidence, but their administrative and policy-making skills may be much less developed. Moreover, their capacity to engender optimism and enthusiasm may mean that they build up hope and expectation to a level that cannot be fulfilled, thereby making disappointment inevitable. Finally, when leaders believe they can persuade anyone of anything, they become susceptible to hubris and self-delusion.

NO

Charisma and democracy. The idea that charismatic leadership is irreconcilable with democracy is a gross over-statement. While no one would deny that charisma continues to be significant in the democratic age, its political character has changed fundamentally. Rather than being aloof, domineering and bombastic, modern charismatic leaders cultivate 'soft' qualities, hoping to be liked rather than feared and trying to resemble ordinary citizens rather than overlords. What is more, however attractive a leader's personality and however fluent and persuasive a communicator he or she may be, no modern leader has the capacity to use their personal skills to escape from the electoral and constitutional constraints of a democratic system.

Leadership with a human face. Leadership works only if it is personal. Leaders must move us: they must ignite our passions and inspire the best in us, and, in the process, help us recognize the potential of our society. They do this not simply because of the office that they hold, but because they are living, breathing human beings, who are capable of articulating a narrative that is meaningful precisely because it derives from the leader's life, values and sense of vision. Perhaps the foremost attribute of leadership in contemporary circumstances is the ability to formulate and, most importantly, communicate a message that resonates with large sections of the electorate.

Being above politics. Personalized leaders are able to distance themselves from the political and institutional context that may otherwise define them. This is most evident in relation to party politics and the danger that, being a party leader, a president or prime minister may use their position primarily to advance the interests of their party and its associated groups. Whereas party leadership entails partisanship, so leading to a one-sided approach to politics, personalized leadership opens up the possibility of bipartisanship, as the leader is able to rise above party divisions and appeal to a wider body of people and groups.

slight interest that Reagan took in the day-to-day workings of his administration. George W. Bush, similarly, was strongly inclined to delegate responsibilities to key advisers, but the so-called 'war on terror', launched in 2001, forced him to adopt a more forthright leadership style. A *laissez-faire* style is not irreconcilable with ideological leadership, but it certainly requires that ideological goals constitute only a broadly-stated strategic vision. The strengths of this approach to leadership are that, because subordinates are given greater responsibility, it can foster harmony and teamwork, and it can allow leaders to concentrate on political and electoral matters by relieving them of their managerial burdens. On the other hand, it can also lead to the weak coordination of government policy, with ministers and officials being allowed too much scope to pursue their own interests and initiatives. The Iran–Contra affair, for example, demonstrated how little President Reagan knew about the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency officers and White House officials for whom he was supposedly responsible.

In contrast, *transactional* leadership is a more 'hands-on' style of leadership. Transactional leaders adopt a positive role in relation to policy-making and government management, but are motivated by essentially pragmatic goals and considerations. Prominent amongst these are likely to be the maintenance of party unity and government cohesion, and the strengthening of public support and electoral credibility. Such leaders act as brokers who are concerned to uphold the collegiate face of government by negotiating compromises and balancing rival individuals, factions and interests against one another. In the USA, Lyndon Johnson and George Bush Sr could be seen as transactional leaders, as could Harold Wilson and John Major in the UK. This is, above all, a managerial, even technocratic, style of leadership, its advantage being that it is fiercely practical and allows scope for tactical flexibility. Its central drawback, however, is that such leaders may be seen as opportunistic wheeler-dealers who are devoid of firm principles or deep convictions. This was illustrated by George Bush's damaging admission during the 1992 US presidential election that he did not understand what he called 'the vision thing'.

In the third style of leadership, *transformational* leadership, the leader is not so much a coordinator or manager as an inspirer or visionary. Not only are such leaders motivated by strong ideological convictions, but they also have the personal resolution and political will to put them into practice. Instead of seeking compromise and consensus, transformational leaders attempt to mobilize support from within government, their parties and the general public for the realization of their personal vision. Howard Gardner (1996) suggested that a leader is 'an individual who creates a story'. The effectiveness of such a leader hinges on the degree to which the leader in question 'embodies' the story, and the extent to which the story resonates with the broader public.

General de Gaulle, for instance, recast the nature of political leadership in France as much by presenting himself as a 'father figure' and 'national leader' as by establishing a presidential system in the form of the Fifth Republic. A very similar style was adopted in the UK by Margaret Thatcher, whose avowed aim when coming into office was to run a 'conviction government'. The continued use of terms such as 'Gaullism' and 'Thatcherism' bears witness to the enduring impact of these leaders' ideological visions. Tony Blair in the UK also adopted a transformational stance by recasting the Labour Party as 'new' Labour, in the

CONCEPT

Populism

Populism (from the Latin *populus*, meaning 'the people') has been used to describe both distinctive political movements and a particular tradition of political thought. Movements or parties described as populist have been characterized by their claim to support the common people in the face of 'corrupt' economic or political elites. As a political tradition, populism reflects the belief that the instincts and wishes of the people provide the principal legitimate guide to political action. Populist politicians therefore make a direct appeal to the people, and claim to give expression to their deepest hopes and fears.

process ensuring that his government pursued 'third way' rather than old-style socialist priorities. Not uncommonly, transformational leadership is linked to populism, reflecting the desire of such leaders to demonstrate that they are articulating the concerns and interests of 'the people'. Although the strength of transformational leadership is that it provides a basis for pushing through radical programmes of social, economic or political reform, it may also encourage a drift towards authoritarianism and lead to ideological rigidity. It is thus possible to see Thatcher herself as one of the casualties of Thatcherism, in that in 1990 she paid the price for her domineering leadership style and her unwillingness to change policy priorities, even when these had become electorally unpopular.

Regardless of the leadership style they adopt, there are reasons to believe that modern political leaders face greater challenges than their predecessors did. This is important, because attitudes towards leaders, and the perceived effectiveness of leadership, do much to influence people's general view of the political process. The first difficulty that leaders face is that modern societies have perhaps become so complex and enmeshed with global influences that politicians find it almost impossible to get things done. Leaders are therefore doomed to disappoint, to fail to live up to expectations. Indeed, virtually all political careers end in failure perhaps because would-be leaders can only rise by building greater expectations than they have the capacity to fulfil.

Second, leaders suffer because old ideological and moral certainties are breaking down, and this makes it more difficult to construct compelling narratives that have wide popular resonance. Third, modern societies are becoming more diverse and fragmented. Political leaders are therefore finding it increasingly difficult to construct a political appeal based on a common culture and a set of shared values. Fourth, and finally, a cultural gap has perhaps developed between the political and the non-political worlds. Political leaders are increasingly career politicians whose lifestyles, sensibilities and even language are remote from the concerns of private citizens. Far from being seen as providing inspiration and articulating popular hopes and aspirations, modern leaders tend to be viewed as self-serving and out of touch. To the extent that this is true, people become alienated from conventional politics, and perhaps look elsewhere for a source of political leadership.

SUMMARY

- The executive branch of government is responsible for the execution or implementation of policy. The political executive comprises a core of senior figures and is roughly equivalent to 'the government of the day' or 'the administration'. The bureaucratic executive consists of public officials or civil servants. However, the political/bureaucratic distinction is often blurred by the complexities of the policy-making process.
- Political executives act as the 'commanding heights' of the state apparatus and carry out a number of leadership roles. These include representing the state on ceremonial occasions, offering policy-making leadership in relation to strategic priorities, mobilizing popular support for the government or administration, overseeing the bureaucratic machine, and taking the initiative in the event of domestic or international crises.
- Presidential executives concentrate executive power in the hands of a president who combines the roles of head of state and head of government, but confronts an assembly that enjoys constitutional and political independence. Prime ministers in parliamentary systems operate through two key sets of relationships: the first is with their cabinets, ministers and departments; the second is with their parties and the assembly from which their power stems.
- The power of chief executives has been enhanced by the tendency of the media and electoral politics to focus on personality and image, by the opportunities to display statesmanship provided by international affairs and summitry, and by the need for political and ideological leadership within an increasingly large and complex executive branch. Their power is, nevertheless, checked by the importance of government and party unity, the need to maintain support in the assembly, and the difficulty of controlling the sprawling bureaucratic machine.
- Political leadership has been understood in various ways. It has been interpreted as a personal gift based on individual qualities such as charisma, as a sociological phenomenon in which leaders express particular socio-historical forces, as an organizational necessity rooted in the need for coherence and unity of direction, and as a political skill that can be learned by leaders intent on manipulating their colleagues and the masses.
- Leaders have adopted very different strategies to achieve their goals. *Laissez-faire* leadership attempts to foster harmony and teamwork by broadening the responsibilities of subordinates. Transactional leadership allows leaders to act as brokers, and balance rival factions and interests against each other. Transformational leadership places a heavy emphasis on the mobilization of support through the leader's capacity to inspire and to advance a personal vision.

Questions for discussion

- In what circumstances may heads of state play a significant political role?
- Is the only power that a chief executive possesses the power to persuade?
- Are presidents or prime ministers more powerful?
- Is collective cabinet government a principle worth preserving?
- Are leaders 'born' or 'made'?
- Is the task of leadership becoming easier or more difficult?
- Should strong leaders be admired or feared?
- Are cults of personality a feature of all political systems, not just dictatorial ones?
- Do we get the political leaders we deserve?

Further reading

Elgie, R., S. Moestrup and Yu-Shan Wu (eds), *Semi-Presidentialism and Democracy* (2011). A wide-ranging collection of essays that examine the workings and implications of semi-presidential systems.

Gardner, H., *Leading Minds* (1996). A fascinating exploration of the nature of leadership, and the skills and strategies deployed by leaders.

Helms, L., *Presidents, Prime Ministers and Chancellors: Executive Leadership in Western Democracies* (2004). A useful discussion of executive leadership that compares the USA, the UK and Germany.

Poguntke, T. and P. Webb., *The Presidentialization of Politics* (2007). A major examination of the 'presidential logic of governance', that also considers cross-national differences.