

What are the powers and limitations on the prime minister's assignment

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A Prime Minister is the most senior minister of cabinet in the executive branch of government in a parliamentary system. The Prime Minister of any government has different powers and limitations when it comes to governing any body of people. In both Barbados and Britain, the Prime Minister who governs their society has specific powers and limitations by which they abide. Sometimes these powers and limitations may or may not lead to Prime Ministerial Government. In the Caribbean, the prime minister has greater dominance over the executive than in Britain.

The Prime Minister Barbados is generally more powerful in relation to the executive or Cabinet than the prime minister of Britain in relation to that executive or Cabinet (Munroe, 2002). Barbados has a parliamentary system of government patterned on that of Britain meaning that Barbados is a parliamentary democracy modeled on the British system. Barbados like the United States and unlike Britain has a written constitution. This means that Barbados' basic political arrangements are set down in one document.

A constitution is the fundamental authoritative document or statement that sets out the main powers and functions of the government of a state. The Prime Minister, who is the Head of Government and his Cabinet, is located in the executive branch of Government. " The purpose of the executive branch is to formulate the policies of government, to gain legislative or other approval for these policies, and to implement them when they have been formally approved" (Sandiford, 2000: 62). The Prime Minister of Barbados has thirteen basic powers. These powers include " choosing ministers to be members of his cabinet.

It should be noted that after a change of Prime Minister or after a general election, all ministerial positions become vacant and are at the disposal of the incoming Prime Minister; presiding over meetings of the Cabinet; advising Governor-General on assignment of responsibilities to the different ministers, including transfer, promotions, and dismissals; exercising patronage; forming and re-organizing the structure of government; presenting and defending the major policies of the government in parliament, and else where; advising the Governor-General on the dissolution of parliament and the holding of elections; determining the size of his cabinet; determining the “ sense”, “ mood”, and “ feeling” of the Cabinet and the Government; co-ordinating the work of the various government departments; taking the initiative in developing new policy thrusts; in parting and reflecting the image of the party which he leads; taking the lead in national, regional and international issues, including emergencies” (Sandiford, 2000: 63).

The powers of the Prime Minister depend on their individual leadership style and personality, but also relationships with political problems and how they deal with difficulties within government. They are four types of leadership styles they are reformers, egoist, innovators and balancers. In Britain there is no written constitution outlining the powers of the Prime Minister as opposed to in Barbados. The British Prime Minister has the power to appoint, reshuffle or dismiss ministers, which is thought to be the Prime Minister’s most important power. He or she also has the power to create peers and to make appointments for example top civil servants, ambassadors, bishops and judges.

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The Prime Minister also has powers over ministerial conduct, whereas rules are laid out in the ministerial code, powers relating to government business for example setting the agenda for Cabinet meetings, setting up Cabinet committees and choosing whether or not to circulate minutes or papers, powers over information for example deciding whether or not to inform Parliament about government activities and using the lobby system to inform the media, powers in international relations and power to terminate a Parliament or government. The British Prime Minister acts as a link among the Cabinet and the Queen. He or she keeps the Queen well informed about all significant decisions of the Cabinet. Both Prime Ministers have powers as well as limitations. The powers and the limitations on the Prime Minister in Barbados are basically the same as the ones for the Prime Minister in Britain. This is so because Barbados' parliamentary system began in Britain. There are limits to the powers of a Prime Minister despite what would appear to be their exalted position within British Politics.

The Prime Minister does have many powers but probably the one great limit to these powers comes from the party he represents. While the limits on the British Prime Minister are ministerial appointments, they require some recognition of the need for political balance and administrative competence. There is pressure (from colleagues or the media) to appoint certain people and all Prime Ministers at least listen to advice from senior colleagues before making appointments. The Prime Ministers ability to control the flow of business is restricted. Apart from drawing up the party manifesto, most Prime Ministers do not initiate policy- they have a small staff and most expertise and detailed information is located in individual departments.

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Another factor that limits a Prime Minister's power is the fact that he is seen to be publicly responsible for any major mishap that occurs during his time in power. The potential for a revolt in the Cabinet, though historically rare, is another limitation on a Prime Minister. Membership of the Cabinet depends on the Prime Minister and it would be rare for a politician to 'bite the hand that feeds him'. This is seen as rare and but in truth and in fact John Major experienced problems with his Cabinet. In a prime ministerial government the prime minister is dominant in terms of the executive. The Prime minister is the most senior minister of cabinet in the executive branch of government in a parliamentary system as was before mentioned. " Prime Ministerial government has two key features.

First the office of the prime minister is the central link between the legislative and the executive branches of government, its holder being drawn from and accountable to the assembly, and also serving as chief executive and head of the beaurocracy. Secondly, prime ministerial governments reflect the centralization of executive power in the hands of the prime minister and the effective subordination of both the cabinet and departmental ministers. 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.

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 and the ' nudge and

fudge' of collective decision making" (Heywood, 2002: 368). The powers and limitations on the Prime Minister in Barbados do not lead to Prime Ministerial government but they do in Britain. Philip Norton points out that the formal powers of a Prime Minister are a necessary but not a sufficient description for the effective application of prime ministerial power. The power of a particular Prime Minister depends on the style of leadership he or she chooses to adopt, the political skills and his or her personality.

The idea that Britain had a Prime Ministerial government gained support in the 80s because of Margaret Thatcher's style of leadership. Mrs. Thatcher lost the support of both her Cabinet and the Conservative Party when she was seen as being too over-bearing and out of touch. A PM who loses support from his own party is doomed to failure even if he does have the power to reward loyalty (Dearlove & Saunders, 2002). Thatcher was known to often dominate her Cabinet meetings. She described herself in 1979 as ' a conviction politician' and someone who ' believes in the politics of persuasion'. She appeared to meet with some success in pushing through innovative policies in the face of some opposition from her government and party.

She was effective in getting her own way when the government enjoyed popular support. However, the reverse applied when popular support subsided as it did on a number of occasions between general elections. Thatcher also made less use of the formal cabinet Committee system than her predecessors which suggest again that she was dominant over her Government (Coxall & Robins, 2003). During the late 1980s, it became

increasingly common for political commentators to argue that the Prime Minister had gained power at the expense of the Cabinet. Crossman, one of these commentators, argues that there has been a shift from Cabinet government to Prime Ministerial government which came about for two main reasons.

Firstly, the party system has developed in such a way that the party machinery had been centralised under the control of the Prime Minister. Second, the civil service has grown too large to be controlled by the Cabinet and is therefore controlled by the Prime Minister. Recent developments also suggest that the UK has adopted a prime ministerial government. For instance, Prime Ministers are now more closely involved in economic and foreign affairs. The electorate is now more than ever encouraged to identify parties, governments and their policies with Party Leaders. Business tends to flow through the Prime Minister's Office as least as much as through the Cabinet Secretariat. Tony Blair is also seen as leading a Prime Ministerial Government.

There are some striking similarities between the prime ministerial styles of Thatcher and Blair. Blair, like Thatcher, has been described as a 'conviction politician'. Secondly, the two PM's share a common approach. Blair's premiership has been described as being characterised by 'strong leadership' and 'charismatic control'. Thirdly, Blair has been described as 'the most commanding of premiers' as has Thatcher. Finally, like Thatcher, Blair has shown the ability to shake off crises. It should also be noted that Blair's style of leadership is distinctive. For example, some argue that Blair

has been much more comfortable about apologising for mistakes made, which was not the style of Thatcher's leadership.

This is despite Tony Blair's refusal to apologise for controversial policies such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is also said that Blair has shown a willingness to experiment with a wide range of methods and approaches to policy making and advice. Thatcher did not experiment in this way (Coxall, 2003). With Blair the claim is that he bypasses accepted standards of decision-making and comes to decisions after consulting just a few people – including unelected people such as his former Director of Communications, Alastair Campbell. In this way, the claim is that decisions taken have not included an input from all members of the Cabinet. Such a process, it is said, causes mistrust in the Cabinet.

The claimed input of non-elected people from outside of the Cabinet also undermines the democratic process as such people are unaccountable to the electorate. Blair, of course, denies that he engages in such a system of decision-making. Though the Prime Minister has a great deal of political power, this power is also balanced by the fact that there are limitations to that power. While a Prime Minister has the backing of his party, his position is secure; if he loses that support, then his position becomes very vulnerable. Any Prime Minister would always ensure that he knows what the opinions of the back-benchers are. In Barbados the powers and the limitations of the Prime Minister do not lead to Prime Ministerial Government but it does in Britain.

This is so because the Prime Minister in Barbados communicates with the Cabinet unlike in Britain whereas Thatcher's and Blair's styles of leadership and personality led them to having this type of government. Bibliography Coxall, B & Robins, L. Contemporary British Politics, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003 Dearlove, J. & Saunders, P. Introduction to British Politics, Polity Press, 2000 Heywood, Andrew. Politics 2nd Edition, Palgrave Macmillan (published), 2002 Munroe, Trevor. An Introduction to Politics: Lectures for First- Year Students, Canoe Press, 2002 Norton, Phillip. The British Polity, Longman, New York, 2001 Sandiford, Lloyd Erskine. Politics & Society in Barbados and the Caribbean: An Introduction, Cassia Publishing Limited, Barbados, 2000