Lecture Four

Political Leadership in Europe

The lecture sets out to achieve two things: to develop a comparative framework for studying political leadership; to provide comparative examples of leadership offices in the UK, France, Germany and several other examples.

Questions in 2006: Compare and contrast at least TWO of the following political offices: the German chancellor, the British Prime Minister, the French President, the French Prime minister, the Italian Prime Minister.

What variable ought to be used in the comparative study of political leadership

1). Studying Political Leadership

1.1) Definitions Academic research into political leadership has reflected the difficulties involved in elaborating common definitions. The focus of attention has varied. A key distinguishing feature within the academic literature has been between those advocating universal propositions about political leadership; and those concerned with a more limited, usually national, framework. It is a relatively straightforward exercise to expose the weaknesses of over-ambitious, or unidimensional definitions of leadership. Blondel's attempt to construct a universal model of political leadership proves a case in point. He proposes a general model of political leadership which takes little account of different systemic contexts within which leadership is exercised; for instance between liberal democratic, authoritarian, traditional or military leaderships. Such cross-systemic comparison is fraught with danger: the exercise of political leadership operates under manifestly different conditions according to the type of political system involved, as well as the nature of the country concerned. We are involved here with most similar comparisons, insofar as we consider in the main parliamentary regimes…

The study of political leadership has a certain definitional malaise: Jean Blondel defines political leadership as the ‘ability to make others do what they would not otherwise do’, and as ‘the power exercised by one or a few individuals to direct members of the nation towards action’. This definition lays stress upon the coercive aspect of leadership, but underplays its inspirational and mobilising facets. For Robert Elgie, ‘political leadership is best understood as the control over the public policy-making process by a particular institution’. This limits the study of political leadership to one of interaction between formal institutions, and overlooks or underplays the mobilising aspect of individual political action. At the other extreme, psycho-biographies and socio-psychological studies have defined
leadership in terms of personal attributes of leaders, without adequately linking these to their operation within the wider polity. Weber’s charismatic leadership was one such example.

Attempts at cross-national comparison necessarily involve some attempt to define a framework of reference through which political leaders can be compared. There are many such frameworks. Definitions of leadership are many and varied. They typically encompass the personal preferences and political skills of national political leaders (Clements and Paterson, 1998, Gaffney, 1989), the positional resources attached to specific leadership offices (Cole, 1994, Elgie, 1995), the capacity to produce followership through emulation (Edinger, 1990), the role of symbolic leadership (Blondel, 1987). Within political science, most attention has been centred upon: the institutional offices or positions occupied by leaders; the personality traits associated with leadership (what distinguishes leaders from routine office-holders, for instance); the political environment within which political leaders operate; the communication strategies (political and discursive) adopted by political leaders; the variable dimensions of political leadership, and several other criteria.

2). Four dimensions of political leadership

The study of political leadership in any European democracy involves an appreciation of political structure, human agency, and the interactive relationship between the two. Most involve some combination of the personal qualities of leaders, their positional strengths and weaknesses, and the wider environmental and cultural constraints and opportunities that help shape their political leadership. Leadership studies necessarily involve some combination of the following four questions:

2.1). What is the interplay between structure and agency? To what extent are political leaders bound by structural and political constraints; how far are they free agents, able to determine leadership goals and policy outcomes? Are certain types of leader (for example the caretaker, the authoritarian, the visionary, or the coalition broker) suited to certain types of environmental setting? Do particular

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psychological character traits (such as an authoritarian personality) predispose certain individuals for political leadership?

2.11) A Structural argument Appreciating leadership potential depends first and foremost upon understanding the structural bases of a given polity. Let us take the case of Germany, for example, a difficult case. Post-war German political leadership has been built upon a political structure which embodies the diffusion of power across several interlocking institutions. The domestic political setting within which a German chancellor functions is far more restricted than that of his French or British counterparts. The diffuse distribution of power in the Federal Republic produces a domestic setting which has traditionally inhibited strong leadership. The forces militating against strong leadership include: the compromises inherent in coalition management, the impact of factional politics within the governing coalition, the federal system, which vests a virtual veto power in the hands of state governments and the second chamber; the prevalence of sectoral corporatism as a model of state-group relations, and the impact of a particular institutional framework designed to dissipate decision-making authority across separate, but interdependent institutions.¹ As Padgett affirms: ‘No German chancellor could have exercised the driving programmatic leadership characteristic of Margaret Thatcher. None has permanently shaped national political life in the manner of de Gaulle’.² This restrained domestic leadership setting in Germany is in contrast with that in France – especially – and in the UK.

2.12) An Agency argument…Personal character traits are an important facet of an ability to exercise political leadership. The leadership qualities of decisiveness, strength, resolution, risk-taking, vision and imagination are differentially distributed, irrespective of wider structural circumstances. Different personal skills are appropriate to varying leadership styles and circumstances. Certain leaders appear to possess personal characteristics enabling them to leave their permanent imprint upon their offices. the examples of Charles de Gaulle in France and Konrad Adenuaer in Germany were exemplary in this respect. As with the French presidency and de Gaulle, the character of the German Chancellorship owes a great deal to the legacy of the first Chancellor, Adenauer. Adenauer wielded the chancellorship into a powerful weapon of executive leadership.

2.2). What is the balance between resources and constraints? Leaders possess personal and political resources, but must also face sets of constraints. Resources can be political, party political, institutional (e.g. single party versus majority government as investigated last week), international…Gordon Smith refers to the ‘resource areas’ of German Chancellors, such as the constitutional position of the chancellor, the nature of the electorate, his relationship with his party, his style of coalition and
government management, and chancellor prerogatives in particular spheres of policy. Along with the resources of office, a chancellors’ personal resources also come into play. But key leaders in all European countries also face constraints: the state of the economy, personal popularity, the nature of the international system, the rules governing European Union and the international organisations. …as well as the political constraints of party and coalition and formal institutional rules that we looked at last week.

2.3). What leadership roles are performed? Successful political leadership in complex liberal democracies depends upon the ability to perform different roles appropriate to variable contexts. Certain types of leaders appear suited for certain situations, but not for others. The qualities required of a party manager are not always the same as those for a governmental coordinator; the skills required for domestic economic management are distinct from those of the foreign policy suzerain. To a degree, individuals can determine the roles they perform, or even invent new ones. (For example, social policy for Segolene Royal against representing France with a strong voice on the international stage for Sarkozy). The extent to which individual political leaders are able to carry out particular roles, however, is predicated upon the nature of the office they occupy; Chirac and Blair performed foreign policy roles that were, arguably, not available to Chancellor Schroder, on account of the constrained leadership setting within which German chancellors operate. The structure of the domestic political system is one very important dimension of political leadership. But office does not explain everything: even French Presidents will have variable understandings of their foreign policy roles and duties.

2.4). How is leadership associated with power? As Jean Blondel recalls, ‘power is the key element of political leadership’. But how power is defined, or measured is rather more difficult to ascertain. Blondel defines political leadership as the ‘ability to make others do what they would not otherwise do’, and as ‘the power exercised by one or a few individuals to direct members of the nation towards action’. This definition lays stress upon the coercive aspect of leadership, but underplays its inspirational and mobilising facets. Clarence Stone’s distinction between power over and power to is rather more subtle. The former is about the narrow exercise of power, in the sense of one actor directing others. The latter is about generating governance capacity; leaders mobilise support behind a common vision, or the pursuit of common interests. Here: leadership is far more behavioural: Max Weber and charismatic leadership: J.McGregor Burns on leadership and followership.
These four essential questions - concerning structure and agency, leadership resources and constraints, leadership roles, and power - provide a theoretical setting appropriate for any study of comparative political leadership. Whatever the formal institutional structures are, the function of government is virtually universal. In all societies, there is a fundamental need for command and coercion. Liberal democracies of the west European variety claim legitimacy on account of their regularised, constitutional form of government. I would like to draw out different features of the structure of government in several European nations: concentrating notably upon Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Poland.

3). Presidential, semi-presidential and parliamentary regimes

Liberal democracies can be divided, somewhat arbitrarily, into presidential systems, parliamentary systems, and those hybrid systems such as France and Finland which combine features of both. The key principle of a pure presidential system (such as the US) is that one individual symbolises the political executive, and is ultimately responsible for the activities of the government: in the US, the President in theory fulfils this function. The US President combines the functions of Head of State and Head of Government. The President is elected - by electoral college - and is responsible only to the people. Thus, in pure presidential systems, governments are responsible to the President alone, and can not be overturned by elected Parliaments. They will, however, change with a change of presidential incumbent. In the US system, there is a separation of powers, with legislative, executive and judicial branches of government separate from each other and providing checks and balances on each other’s operation. In most countries with powerful Presidents, however, there is no such pattern of divided government – and the presidential form equates with a powerful form of unchecked – and often corrupt – executive power (the model in Africa, for example). There is an ongoing debate between writers such as Juan Linz (1994), who argue that presidential regimes present dangers for stable democratic regimes; the personalisation of power inherent in the presidency is dangerous. On the other hand Shugart and Carey (1994) stress that presidential regimes allow greater accountability and transparency than in (coalitional) parliamentary Systems. We find here the distinctions between Majoritarian and Consensual government we came across last week.

Political scientists have expended a lot of energy on defining what are presidential, semi-presidential and parliamentary regimes…. Or indeed, whether these categories exist. Some example illustrate this:
Sartori (1994) defines a presidential system in terms of: direct election of the Head of State; tenure of the President, not being able to be removed by a parliamentary motion of censure; heads or directs the government that he appoints… This is a fairly classic definition. Elgie argues that a presidential system involves a directly elected head of state and no separate head of government (the US model). Only Lijphart (1999) argues that in a presidential system an executive leader (of the PM type) can co-exist with a head of state. In most definitions, the strength of the presidency is that it combines the ceremonial functions of head of state with the political centrality of being at the head of the executive/

In parliamentary systems, which represent the vast majority amongst the EU-27 countries, government is held to be a collective enterprise: responsibility for government decisions is invested in a collective body known as a cabinet, or a Council of ministers. The Prime minister is the foremost personality within Cabinet, but decision-making is collective. The PM is not directly elected, and can be overturned by a negative vote in an elected Parliament. This is because, in parliamentary systems, governments are held to be responsible to elected Assemblies, themselves representative of the people. In practice, there might be many differences between Majority and Consensual democracies of the type we explored last week, but, at the heart, they share the key features of parliamentary systems. Description of parliamentary systems usually involves dressing a long list of propositions, or socio-structural features. But the key defining feature of a parliamentary system in government responsibility to parliament.

Systems that are hybrid are sometimes called semi-presidential, most notably following the definition of Duverger. The semi-presidential system combines features of the presidential and the parliamentary. A semi-presidential system combines a directly elected President and a government responsible to parliament. The only case where the semi-presidential category – developed initially by Duverger – arguably holds up is that of the French fifth Republic. With the transition to democracy in central and eastern Europe, commentators looked to countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic with directly elected Presidents + governments responsible to parliament – and concluded that the breeds had been exported. But in practice, as democracy has become embedded in these countries, these states have become parliamentary democracies, either of the majoritarian or of the consensual variety. The parliamentary model has triumphed and the semi-presidential construction appears unconvincing everywhere except- perhaps, in France.

What have been described as semi-presidential systems in practice contain a variety of sub-types. The idea that a prime minister is accountable to the President is extremely fuzzy. Semi-presidentialism explains the characteristics of neither presidential nor parliamentary systems: there are more meaningful categories such as presidential systems, parliamentary systems with presidential dominance,
parliamentary systems with a presidential corrective, and parliamentary systems with figurehead presidents.

4) The Role of the Head of State.

Let us consider the role of the Head of state in European nations. In most European nations, the Head of state is formally separate from the head of government. The role of the HoS is, in theory, largely a formal and ceremonial one. The duty of the Queen in Britain is to advise and warn; in fact, through her weekly meetings with the PM, the Queen is one of the most experienced politicians, but the influence of the monarchy is a covert and indirect one. In other European countries, the function of the head of state is fulfilled either by a monarch (Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Spain for instance), or by a President. In most EU states, the President is indirectly elected by Parliament, but in France, Finland, Portugal, Poland, the President is directly elected. Direct election in itself does not confer political legitimacy, as the example of Portugal shows.

Bearing in mind the comments above, in most EU nations, the President of the Republic or the Monarchy as head of state perform a relatively limited role. In Germany and Italy, the President performs a similar ceremonial function to that of the Queen in the UK. In Germany, the post of President in the post-war period has been largely an honorific one: this is because memories have not faded of the Weimar Republic, when President Hindenburg facilitated Hitler's accession to power. For this reason, the Basic Law of the Federal Republic sought to limit the formal powers of the Presidency. The powers at the disposal of the German president are limited, and in practice, the German President has not even been able to exercise those invested in him by the Basic Law. For instance, in theory, the President has the right to select the name of a Chancellor which is then forwarded to the Bundestag; in practice, he passes on the name forwarded by the majority party or coalition (example of 2005). The President has virtually no power to dissolve the Bundestag – and can not in practice prevent the ‘constructive vote of no confidence’ manoeuvre. Indeed, party politicians have outmanoeuvred the President. In 1983, Chancellor Kohl and his new FDP allies organised an artificial ‘no confidence’ vote in the Bundestag, in order that the chamber could be dissolved and new elections held before their fixed term. This occurred again in 2005 with Gerhard Schröder. In this instance, the dissolution resulted from an initiative against the President- who expressed his misgivings, but was powerless to prevent it.

In Italy, a similar pattern prevailed. The honorific status of the President reflected a reaction against authoritarian leadership of the Fascist period. But the influence of the Italian President has not been completely negligible. This is on account of the President’s right to propose a prime minister to the Italian parliament; on occasion, Italian Presidents have proposed alternative candidates to those pressed upon
him by the main party in parliament. As the First Republic collapsed in 1993-94, the Italian presidency came into its own: in 1994, for example, President Scalfaro refused to accede to Berlusconi’s demand to dissolve parliament, and refused to allow his choice as Justice minister. In a later example (2003), President Ciampi used his constitutional right to veto a bill proposed by Berlusconi that would have allowed a Berlusconi media monopoly in Italy. Here: the Italian President has taken seriously the role of constitutional arbiter. Most recently, President Napolitano accepted Prodi’s resignation before calling upon him to form a new government approved this week.

By far the most powerful Head of State in Western Europe is in **France**. The French President of the Fifth Republic has occupied a powerful position since the presidency of Charles de Gaulle, the first President of the Fifth Republic created in 1958. The French executive has been labelled as a dyarchy, or a twin headed executive, arguably the only example of a semi-presidential system. But rather than a semi-presidential system (PM responsible to parliament and to the President), in practice, the Fifth Republic has, for most of its history, oscillated between periods of presidential ascendancy, parliamentary government with a presidential dominance, and routine ‘cohabitation’ that in practice is a form of parliamentary government with a presidential corrective.

However this is categorised, there is a state of competition between two powerful heads of government, in the form of the President and PM, appear to contest for the status of principal executive leader:

- the 1958 Constitution appears to contain contradictory constitutional provisions, in some articles supporting the President, in others lending succour to the premier; but the 1958 constitution designates the PM as the key executive leader, rather than the President

- from 1958 to 1986 the practice of the Fifth Republic was one of presidential pre-eminence on account of the legacy of de Gaulle, the Republic’s first president; and the direct election of the President, which has given the President a popular mandate to carry out his programme.

- On the three occasions when the French electorate has elected a rival majority to that of the President - in 1986, 1993 and 1997 - the President has backed down and the French system has reverted to being a classic parliamentary system along the lines of the British model.

- Under Chirac: weakening of the powers of the French President: powers of dissolution? Useless after 1997… Power to call a referendum? Devalued since the failure of the referendum on the constitutional treaty. Realigning of presidential and parliamentary terms: no noticeable increase in presidential power.
Within the other systems considered, the constitutional and political influence of the head of state is far weaker. The influence of the head of state depends in part upon the mode of his election. In none of these states (except Portugal, Finland, Czech Republic, Poland) is the President chosen by direct election. In Germany, the President is indirectly elected by an electoral college, composed of members of the second Chamber Bündesrat, and delegates from the Länder. In Italy, the President is also indirectly elected, by an electoral college consisting of members of the two Chambers, joined by delegates from each region. In both systems, the method of election is such as to limit the powers of the presidency: given the nature of his election, the President of the Republic is in no position to challenge the leader of the parliamentary majority for political pre-eminence. This is also the case in the UK: rather than indirect election, the British monarch is based on the hereditary principle, but the constitutional norm of strict neutrality is rigorously respected.

The Head of State performs four main functions in parliamentary systems:

- **The symbolic function of representing the unity of the nation.** This appears at first sight to be the least significant. The head of state is supposed to represent the unity and permanence of the nation and the State. The model is provided by the British monarchy: the political influence of the British monarch is dependent upon her accepting the public duty of neutrality and impartiality. In return, the monarch, an expert in constitutional detail and political appreciation, has the right to warn and advise - a right which is occasionally exercised in practice (This is especially the case in relation to Commonwealth affairs, where the Queen feels a personal sense of responsibility, since she is head of State for the whole Commonwealth. No other Head of State performs this symbolic function as well as the British monarch, but it does not differ fundamentally. Given that the political parties perform an essential role in the election of the German and Italian Presidents, it is more difficult for them as appear as the embodiment of national unity.

- **The head of state as a guarantor of the constitution.** Given the general weakness of their powers - excepting the French case - it is sometimes difficult to see how Heads of State can guarantee the continuity of the state, except in a symbolic sense. On occasion, however, the moral force of an appeal by the Head of state can have considerable bearing: thus, President Weisacker's appeal against the spread of racism in Germany made a definite impact.

- **The head of state as a Constitutional arbiter.** In Britain, the monarch is seldom called upon to arbitrate between rival political claims. Only in exceptional circumstances is the monarch
allowed a degree of leeway in selecting a Prime Minister. Nonetheless, occasionally the Monarch will make her views known in private on sensitive issues: Queen Elizabeth II urged Thatcher to take tougher sanctions against South Africa in 1986, reflecting her role as Head of the Commonwealth. Other Heads of State have exercised a more open arbitral role. This is most obviously the case where there is weak, unstable parliamentary government. Within the French Fourth Republic, and the Italian First Republic, Presidents were able to ‘exert influence’ to a great extent, by making known their preference for Prime minister. This was in spite the weakness of their formal constitutional roles.

- **Formal powers of appointment**. Within such systems, the Head of State formally appoints the head of government, the Prime Minister. As argued above, in most parliamentary systems this is a largely formal role reflecting the results of elections, but Presidents do have certain margins of manoeuvre which vary, of course, between states. But in reality the Head of State faces severe constraints when choosing a Prime minister. These systems are governed by the fundamental principle that the parliamentary system must express the popular will as expressed by the parliamentary majority, majority coalition, or the leading party. In practice, the head of state is usually forced to name as Prime minister either the clear victor of the most recent election (e.g. Britain, France 1993); or else the leader designated by a coalition of parties in parliament.

We can illustrate constraints by comparing European examples. At one extreme, the French President has appeared to exercise considerable freedom of manoeuvre in naming the Prime minister: Presidents have appointed prime ministers from outside of the Assembly, even, as in the case of Villepin, individuals who have never held elected office before. Nonetheless, cohabitation brought the French regime much closer to the parliamentary norm. At the opposite end from the French example is that of the Head of State who has absolutely no margin of manoeuvre in appointing the Head of the Executive. This model here is established by the British monarchy. The British monarch ratifies the verdict of the electorate - and only in exceptional circumstances can s/he play a more positive role. The British monarch has some leeway when there is no clear electoral verdict: in 1974, eg, when the Queen first called upon the Conservatives and Liberals, before calling Labour, the largest party.

The situation in Germany is similar to that which obtains in Britain. The leader of the majority party or coalition (generally designated in advance to the electorate) is called upon by the President to form a government. There was some delay after the 2005 elections in calling upon Angela Merkel. If there is no obvious victor, President will call on leader of the largest party to form a coalition.

5). **Parliamentary systems**
What general characteristics can we attribute to parliamentary systems? How can we differentiate between them? Apart from the hybrid examples of France (and Finland), European nations are parliamentary systems. Some political scientists criticise the exercise of attributing properties to parliamentary regimes; how these operate is not a function of broad institutional rules, but of the dynamics of coalitions, bargaining between parties, lobbying, pork-barrel politics. Describing general characteristics has an artificial character. But it is useful in terms of constitutional theory and helps us to distinguish between clusters – for example along the lines of majoritarian versus consensual democracies.

5.1). General principles: All systems emphasise the constitutional myth of cabinet collective responsibility. Some, but not all, also emphasise the importance of individual ministerial responsibility… Parliamentary systems are based on a fusion of powers. It is a general feature of parliamentary systems that government ministers are drawn from the elected Assembly. In the UK, Italy and Germany, there is an unwritten rule that the PM/Chancellor must select his ministers from amongst members of parliament. This is part and parcel of representative and responsible government. In order to exercise political control over ministers, Parliament must ensure that ministers are invested with democratic legitimacy as members of the elected Assembly, or the Second Chamber. Ultimately, ministers are individually responsible to parliaments and can be dismissed. France again is the odd-man out: under President de Gaulle, ministers were selected from apolitical civil servants, or businessmen, rather than from members of political parties. The nomination of de Villepin continued in the trend. Despite this, we might argue that one feature of governments in Europe is that government ministers must usually be invested with democratic elective mandate: this is one of the main functions of political parties - to provide political personnel to staff government.

5.2). Role of the PM

Prime ministers are, in constitutional theory at least, heads of collective teams of ministers. They are First amongst equals. In practice, the situation varies considerably in terms of national context. In Italy, anxious to avoid creating strong leaders after the experience of fascism, the postwar 1946 constitution made it clear that the premier was to be labelled the President of the Council of Ministers, to underline his status as head of a collective government. In Britain, the debate has raged between those arguing that we have Prime ministerial government and those claiming that we retain a form of collective cabinet government, notably as regards the Thatcher and Blair premierships. Thatcher was accused by her critics (especially in the media) of subverting traditional Cabinet government (i.e. collective government, based
upon collectively reached decisions), and replacing it with prime ministerial government (i.e.: presidential-style government, with cabinet ministers acting at best as advisers to the Leaders). Much simplification of debate took place: in fact, there were examples of Thatcher overriding the majority view of her cabinet colleagues, but there were also contrasting examples of Thatcher being overridden by tough opposition from within Cabinet. We should remember that it was her inability to carry her Cabinet colleagues along with her that accounted for Thatcher's eventual ousting in November 1990. To this extent, Thatcher's removal testified to the limits of individual prime ministerial power. The essential point to note: that however much power or otherwise they are able to consolidate in their own hands, West European Prime ministers are unlike directly-elected President of the American variety in at least one key respect: they are not directly elected, and find it difficult to claim a personal legitimacy akin to that of the US or French Presidents.

5.3) Powers of the PM? General remarks Within parliamentary systems, Prime Ministers with stable party majorities can accrue considerable power in their own hands – but there are also obvious obstacles to their tenure. The power of prime ministers is determined to some extent by the degree to which they can rely upon disciplined party, or coalitional structures to support their activity. Of our four test countries - UK, France, Germany and Italy – in all, the PM has generally been able to rely upon relatively disciplined support from parliament. Thus, the structure of the party system + the institutional rules of the game are both of great importance in explaining the strength of governments. As a general rule, strong parties+strong governments+ weak parliaments and vice versa.

The model of the core executive that places the most emphasis on prime ministerial power emphasises 8 core variables, which can be taken as general principles underpinning the exercise of the office of Prime minister in the UK:

- PM power of appointment and dismissal. The power to hire and fire vests the PM with considerable powers of patronage, but this can be a double edged sword, as those MPs who are sacked as ministers can become powerful opponents.
- Role of the PM as coordinator and overall navigator of governmental machine… In charge of inter-ministerial coordination and arbitration
- Agenda setting. The role of the PM is strengthened by the chairing the council of ministers/cabinet, thereby determining the agenda, the implementation of decisions taken by the cabinet
- role of cabinet committees – in nearly all parliamentary systems – and ability of a strong prime minister to determine the composition of these (this will vary according to the coalition agreement).
• Mediatised function of political leadership, focusing attention on the premier as the key political leader.
• International/foreign policy pre-eminence of PM
• Role of PM in party; this is a good means of distinguishing between contenders. A PM-party leader, such as Blair, can accumulate resources.
• Role of PM in charge of cabinet office/ SGG/administrative apparatus of government

5.4). Other readings of the core executive. In reaction to the prime ministerial thesis, some core executive analysis focuses upon ministerial autonomy and resistance to the centralising tendencies of the PM. We can uncover general regularities across widely differing types of political system:

• Competition between Finance ministries and spending ministries, such as health and education
• Competition between finance ministries and PM in terms of coordinating government policy/budgetary policy
• ‘Who gets what’: endemic competition between ministries. Reinforced by ‘who controls what’: especially in coalition governments parties claim specific portfolios, such as the Greens and environment or the Social Democrats and welfare.

But there are also many system-specific variables that vary across country. What is the role of party? What is the nature of the relationship with the civil service (is there a system of cabinets, or not, or political appointments of top civil servants?). Most important, what is the constitutional status of ministerial authority and the tenure of individual ministers. Let us take two or three examples to illustrate this:

5.41). The ministerial pole is that represented by Germany, whose Basic Law guarantees individual ministerial autonomy. According to the principle of Ressortprinzip, enshrined in the Basic law, each Minister is responsible for running his own department, and the Chancellor can not order a Minister to run department in a different way (unlike in the UK). This makes the coordination of a German chancellor difficult, but allows ministers to focus on the task at hand.

5.42). In most other countries, individual ministers are less powerful. In Britain, the Finance minister-Brown – is untouchable, but most other ministers have moved. In France, individual ministers move – and move often, perhaps best symbolised by the number of Finance ministers since 2002. In Italy, likewise, in the first Republic ministers would come and go with governments. In practice, however, individual ministers would often maintain their posts in successive governments. In Poland, there has been rapid turnover of governments and ministers. Rapid ministerial turnover cautions against model of
individual ministerial authority… but this can be counterbalanced by political experience and party support in coalition negotiations.

5.5) Role of Assembly and second chamber

Again These variables cover some of Lijphart’s distinctions between majoritarian and consensual democracy…

The role of party spills over into an appreciation of the role of parliaments. As a general rule: strong parties mean strong governments and weak parliaments. We will consider the role of parliaments later. But strong committees and – especially – a strong second chamber controlled by an opposition party, or with precise constitutional prerogatives can weigh upon the possibility to exercise political leadership.

In Germany, the existence of a powerful second Chamber (bundesrat) with important veto powers, controlled for much of the Kohl chancellorship by the opposition SPD, and for most of the Schroder period by the opposition CDU, has no real equivalent in France or the UK. It imposes a de facto grand coalition in important areas of policy… even when there is not a real Grand Coalition as at the moment.. The lack of a majority in the bundesrat has acted as a powerful constraint. Thus, Kohl relied on SPD co-operation to reform the Basic Law in order to permit the deployment of troops outside of the NATO area, and tightening up the clauses of the Basic Law dealing with Asylum seekers. German chancellor Schröder had to rely on CDU support to push through reforms of the labour and social security systems from 2002. Thus, the second chamber acts as a powerful constraint on Chancellor Democracy. Second chambers also represent land or regional governments, another set of counterweight to central power.

The federal system, within which land governments control important policy sectors (such as education and culture) reserved in France or Britain for the central state, limits the scope of policy intervention of the German Chancellor.

5.6) The European rescue of the national executive?
There is a democratic deficit within the EU, that we will consider at some length in the lectures on the EU political system in a few weeks. But it is clear that there is a procedural and informational advantage for Executives in their dealings with the EU. The intergovernmental dimension of EU decision-making is almost entirely the responsibility of executive branches of government. Even when European Affairs committees are involved in considering EU directives, the length of time and lack of information makes their task very difficult, if not impossible. The Constitutional Treaty might change this …but it is not certain.

Deliberations of the Council and the sectoral committees are secret, unlike those of parliamentary assemblies. In this way EI has strengthened national governments. In the case of Germany, for example, the governance of the European Union also favours the German chancellor. Helmut Kohl personally resolved the contentious issues surrounding German unification and the EU. Kohl's principal interlocutor was Commission President Jacques Delors; the two men worked out how the unified Germany would operate within the EU. This had a major effect upon the operations of core executive relations within Germany; it placed the Chancellor in the centre of foreign policy decision-making, at the expense of the foreign ministry. New leadership roles have thus emerged, with the international order pushing the German chancellor into a far more assertive position. It is via the intermediary of foreign policy and European affairs that the Chancellor is able to carry out the guidelines principle vested in Article 65 of the Basic Law. This is even more the case for a British premier or a French President.

6. Political Leadership in comparative context: checklists and frameworks

Comparative politics sets out typologies - including that of political leadership. The typologies used will tend to be most similar: we look at parliamentary systems, in order to identify the distinguishing features between them. No two countries are the same. European political leaders can never be judged according to exactly the same criteria, but meaningful comparisons can be drawn by referring to common sets of variables. EIGHT General propositions about executive leadership on western Europe – in the form of a framework to measure the power of a particular political leader.

6.1). Homogeneous versus coalition government. The strong prime minister at the head of a disciplined party majority is likely to exercise tighter control over government than the broker-style leader of a coalition of five or so parties.

6.2). Direct election and elective legitimacy. The executive leader who has been directly elected (such as the French President) enjoys an additional elective legitimacy by comparison to parliamentary prime
ministers; on the other hand, direct presidential elections do not automatically invest officeholders with increased power, as the Portuguese example demonstrates.

6.3). Elections and government formation. The closer the link between electoral victory and government formation, the stronger the position of the office holder. Political factors ultimately determine the power a PM has in relation to his government. The strength of the British PM (and, for that matter, the German Chancellor) relates to the fact that he has led the ruling party to a victorious general election. There is a strong relationship between general elections and government formation. In Italy, or France, this relationship is less apparent - which limits the political prestige of the PM. Thus, Helmut Kohl, Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair all led their parties to successive electoral victories, thereby strengthening their leadership positions. Although Thatcher was eventually overturned by a party revolt, and Kohl’s leadership threatened to go the same way, there is no doubt that Kohl and Thatcher had more authority and power than a string of Italian premiers whose occupancy of the premiership was decided by party committee in between election periods. After all, who can remember Spaldolini in Italy?

6.4) longevity of office. This is a precondition to exercising effective political leadership.. But experience also demonstrates that it is extremely rare for any one leader to stay in office more than 10 years or so…

6.5). the nature of the relationship between government and governing party….the colonisation of important ministries by a coalition partner can frustrate the claim by the premier to exercise political leadership

6.6). The powers vested by the constitution (for example the power of selection and dismissal of ministers, or the guarantee of individual ministerial autonomy)

6.7). the relations of political leaders with other decision-making actors, both within and outside of the core executive. The dynamics of relations between Prime ministers and Finance ministers often crystallises tensions…. Powerful external relations can strengthen a PMs internal standing.

6.8) the existence or otherwise of institutional and political counter-weights to strong leadership (such as constitutional courts, a written constitution, or a constraining party system). The role of Assemblies and – especially – constitutional courts is critical importance here: the rise of the judiciary across EU countries.. strengthened by the legal order basis of the European Union and the ECJ, has provided a powerful check on unbridled executive authority.
**7). Conclusions** In a context of globalisation, European integration, and international financial capitalism, even national governments can only pretend to exercise limited sovereignty. The functions of national parliaments everywhere are either in decline, or being reinvented. The raison d'être of the most parliaments is not as institutions capable of controlling the details of the policy process; but as instruments of executive scrutiny, political communication, and ultimate democratic legitimacy. Insofar as these functions are performed at all, they are shared with other institutions or actors: such as the judiciary, the mass media, and social or political movements.

1. The executive has become the central element of all political systems, whether these are presidential or parliamentary. This is because of several reasons. Firstly, executives have benefited from an enormous expansion in terms of functions, means and staffs, a far greater expansion than that experienced by the other branches of government.

2. Secondly, the nature of contemporary decision-making favours the executive. Rapid decisions are easier to take amongst a small group of political leaders than as a result of extensive parliamentary deliberations. This applies especially to foreign policy. The excuse of the need for secrecy has proved to be an additional weapon at the hands of most executives. Even in Italy, where the *centralità del Parlamento* has become the regime’s motto, the power retained by parliament is largely of a negative character: the formal power of decision-making has passed to the government (which can pass law-decrees without immediate reference to parliament) and to the administration.

3. Thirdly, the reciprocal checks and balances that legislatures and executives used to be able to impose on each other have become unbalanced in favour of the latter. The controls that the executive has over the legislature have increased, in particular with the development of the party system, and with a host of mechanisms to speed up parliamentary procedure. The reverse is not true: the motion of no confidence - the strongest weapon possessed by a legislature vis-a-vis the executive - has virtually fallen into disuse.

4. Finally, the pre-eminence of party provides a bridge between the legislature and executive - but usually means that communication between a government and its supporters occurs via the mechanism of the party, rather than through the institution of parliament (eg in party caucuses, in secret meetings between party leaders and members of the government).

The constraints on executives come increasingly from the international arena, as well as by the plurality of each of the individual societies concerned, which means that change can best be incremental.

1 See Smith (note 11). Also R. Mayntz, ‘Executive Leadership in Germany: Dispersion of Power or “Kanzlerdemokratie”’, in Richard Rose and Ezra Suleiman (eds), Presidents and Prime Ministers (Washington DC: AEI, 1980)
2 S. Padgett, ‘Chancellors and the Chancellorship’, in Padgett Adenauer to Kohl, p. 3.
4 Blondel, Political Leadership.