CABINET AND PRESIDENCY

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Summary

Cabinet and presidency represent the two most important and prevalent types of political executive. The structures and functions of political executives have varied widely over time and place, and no single conceptual framework can contain all these variations and their consequences. Although this section is titled "Cabinet and Presidency," it is often difficult to categorize existing political executives as belonging to one or the other of the two types. Therefore, when we discuss ideal types of cabinet and presidential government, conceptual confusion should be carefully avoided between the form of government (the power structure of separation and sharing) and the performance of the government (the efficacy of strong and weak leadership).

1. Introduction

Cabinet and presidency represent the two most important and prevalent types of political executive. Most children are politically socialized through their perceptions of top political executives, and those positions have been the locus of post-war world politics, as demonstrated in strong leadership of such men and women as Adenauer, Churchill, Deng Xiaoping, Gandhi, de Gaulle, Gorbachev, Reagan, and Roosevelt. However, political scientists have often neglected the structures and functions of such governmental institutions and concentrated on societal phenomena such as pressure groups, party politics, public opinion, and elections. Political executives, however, play important roles in the politics of power separation and sharing between and within state and society. As the increasing complexity of socioeconomic relations elicits governmental intervention in ordinary lives and market operations, the vast majority of legislative initiatives stem from these executives and civil servants. The power balance between legislatures, judiciaries, and executives must be reexamined with more

emphasis on the executive branch than has been the case until now (see chapters *Constitutional Government; Democracy; Legislature; Judiciary*).

The structures and functions of political executives have varied widely over time and place, and no single conceptual framework can contain all these variations and their consequences. Although this section is titled "Cabinet and Presidency," it is often difficult to categorize existing political executives as belonging to one or the other of the two types. As will be explained below, the complexity of contemporary public issues often challenges the integrity of structural and functional boundaries between cabinet and presidency. In many of the transitional democracies arising from the wave of democratization since the 1970s, political systems have looked like hybrids of cabinet and presidency. The fundamental challenge of transforming authoritarian regimes into democracies lies not in the formal choice of between presidency and cabinet, but in difficult road to acceptance by society of a new type of political leadership, an informal process driven by the local cultural environment. For the new states to democratize, old societies based upon local powers, religious groups, landowners, and other institutions need to be transformed along with the political leadership, whatever the formal structure of government. Therefore, when we discuss ideal types of cabinet and presidential government, conceptual confusion should be carefully avoided between the form of government (the power structure of separation and sharing) and the performance of the government (the efficacy of strong and weak leadership) (see chapter *Authoritarian System*).

2. Conventional Typology of Political Executives

The normative characteristics of political executives are drawn from ideas associated with the Western democratic governments. Those systems share an assumption that effective governments respond to a variety of societally generated inputs, including the customs, beliefs, interests, preferences, and perceptions of a wide scope of individuals, classes, and social groups. The principles of structural organization are embodied in law, which ensures the broadest societal input and elevates people to the center of national politics. Therefore, the normative assumption concerning political executives under the Western democratic system is that a social system consists of individuals or groups with an assured right to be represented in government decision making; the government must properly represent the societal will with laws that maximize the plurality of ends; and power lies in the public, which generates political stimuli to which the executives must respond properly. Thus, executive restraints arise from the party systems and periodic elections that reflect societal interests, whether the system is cabinet or presidential. While the extent and efficiency of judicial review and legislative scrutiny of political executives differs between states, an election is assumed to be the most effective instrument for approving or disapproving the performance of executives. Thus agreement among political competitors over legitimate electoral procedures is the first necessity for establishing an effective executive in a constitutional democracy.

Political executives are part of a political system in which social and national interests are articulated, aggregated, and translated into outputs that take the form of political decisions and public policies. The first and most important role played by political executives is the output function. However, these executives also integrate social interests and represent and accommodate demands from pressure groups as well as

bureaucratic organizations. The integrative and representative function of political executives is both ceremonial and effective. The German President, British Queen, and Japanese Emperor, who officially stand as politically irresponsible heads, are largely limited to the ceremonial roles. In presidential systems, the effective functions are pursued by an individual, in cabinet systems, by a collective. The former category includes the U.S. President, the French President and Prime Minister, and the General Secretary of the People's Republic of China, the latter is manifest in the British and Japanese cabinets and the Swiss Federal Council. In many countries, ceremonial and effective functions are combined, with the same office and person performing both.

The relationship between political executive and government bureaucrats varies according to the political system. The general tendency has been for the public bureaucracy to assume more and more important responsibilities for the formation and implementation of public policy, occasionally at the expense of political executives and legislators. Especially in developing countries, professional bureaucrats educated in western countries and possessed of special knowledge and skills tend to form a special group of technocrats around a top political executive and to marginalize elected actors. The government, whether cabinet or presidential, usually consists of a small number of politically appointed secretaries, ministers, and parliamentary secretaries and a large number of higher civil servants directly recruited from the universities by competitive examination. This is true even in developed countries. For example, the British Prime Minister and the German Chancellor make only about one hundred ministerial and junior ministerial appointments, while, the higher civil servants are generalists who spend their lives as elites, moving from ministry to ministry and department to department and accumulating experience and knowledge. Recently, chiefs of state, both presidents and prime ministers, tend to control a separate office staffed with specialists, such as military officers, diplomats, doctors, economists, and lawyers, who are hired on a short-term basis. For example, the presidential staffs at the French Élysée Palace and in the American White House work to maximize the power and efficiency of the president. Political executives pursue a number of strategies to curb abuses of power by the professional bureaucrats. These include the creation or strengthening of managerial units with budgetary and personnel control over administrative agencies, the expansion in numbers of political appointees in the upper levels of governmental agencies, and greater involvement in the promotion and placement of high-ranking career bureaucrats. Legislatures and legislative committees have, in turn, tended to expand their own staffs in an attempt to match the exercise of professional bureaucrats in making and implementing policy (see chapter *Bureaucracies*).

The conceptual dichotomy between cabinet and presidency originated in the study of the two successful historical cases of representative democracy, Britain and the United States, and the observed differences between the two systems should be understood to be conceptual rather than effective, as explained below.

2.1. Cabinet

Parliamentary regimes combine executive and legislative authority in a single institution, or parliament (house, chamber, or diet). The collective body of executives, or the cabinet, is responsible to the legislature, and it functions as an agent of

parliamentary authority. Thus the cabinet members are often members of parliament. The different branches have a single electoral origin; the premier and cabinet are chosen by the assembly, which is elected by the people. The leader of the majority party becomes prime minister and chooses cabinet members, usually from elected members of parliament. The executive consists of the prime minister and his cabinet. The cabinet usually assumes collective responsibility and all members are expected to speak in favor of cabinet decisions and be bound by them. The majority of countries forming new constitutions since World War II have adopted the cabinet system. Constitutional monarchs or presidents under the cabinet system usually play a purely symbolic role, as in Britain, most Scandinavian countries, the Low countries, Germany, India, and Japan.

Cabinets are formally invested with executive power by a vote of the legislature, and their political term can be suspended at any time by a vote of non-confidence in the legislature. Thus, in the parliamentary system, instability of the government is possible, while political stalemate between the government and the legislature, found in presidential systems, is entirely unacceptable. When no electoral party wins a majority in the parliamentary system, the result is either a minority government, which is persistently vulnerable to a non-confidence vote, or, more commonly, a majority coalition of several parties. Coalition governments can be fairly stable in some countries, such as the Netherlands, and much less so in others, such as Finland and Italy. Elections by proportional representation often result in coalition governments, because they improve the chances that smaller parties can place their members in the cabinet. In proportional representation elections, the country is either divided into a few districts or is not divided at all, as in the Netherlands and Israel. Each district elects several representatives from a list of candidates submitted by political parties. The number of representatives that a party wins depends on its share of the total votes. In Israel, no single party has commanded a Knesset (Israel's unicameral parliament) majority; after the election of 1988, for example, fifteen different parties were represented. After each election, the president of Israel, in his most important role, usually consults with the leaders of all parties to determine possible coalition partners. The cabinet remains sustainable only as long as the government holds majority support in parliament (see chapter *Political Parties*).

A lack of parliamentary confidence in the government requires it either to resign or to attempt to secure a new parliamentary majority by means of a general election. Originally, the prime ministerial power of parliamentary dissolution was meant to strengthen the prime minister's position in relation to the majority, allowing him to retaliate against a loss of parliamentary confidence. However, when party structure is highly developed, it is used primarily to adjust the timing of general elections to the ruling party's advantage.

The key to executive stability in the cabinet system is cohesion in the party (or parties) that command a majority in the legislative body. Cohesion is relatively easy when two-party competition dominates. With only two major parties, as in England, it is highly likely that one party will have a parliamentary majority. The original British model changed once the cabinet was assured of strong support from a majority of the legislature. The election of the prime minister was effectively transferred from the parliament to the general public, and the prime minister now bears individually

responsibility to the people. The power of the prime minister has also been increasing in multi-party systems. For example, German Chancellors, effectively prime ministers, are now chosen on the basis of party leadership. Thus, a prime minister is as immune as a president to overthrow by the legislature as long as his party is stable and disciplined. This is especially true in those countries with systems of dominance by one-party, of which the former Soviet Union and China are the prototypes. Their executives are thought to be uniquely immune to the people's voice as the latter is supposed to be aggregated in the legislature. Unless the party leader loses support in the central committee of the dominant party, he or she can control not only the legislature as leader of the majority party, but also the cabinet as a head of the government. One-party domination occurred both in communist regimes and in those countries in Africa and Asia that achieved national independence after World War II. Those countries tended to legitimate only the party that led the independence movement and to bar political activities by other parties.

Finally, as in Japan, political competition could take place mainly within the one majority party. In Japan, while one party (the Liberal Democratic Party) ruled for 38 years, the country chose more than 20 prime ministers. Thus dominance by one party does not guarantee immunity to the political executive; internal politics and the resultant intra-party competition must be examined carefully to understand the separation of power between the premier and the legislature.

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Biographical Sketch

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