

CHAPTER 8

Governments and
bureaucracies

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Reader's guide

This chapter looks at decision-making modes of governments and their capacities to govern. Special attention is given to the relationship between the political and administrative parts of government. The chapter begins by addressing definitions and distinguishing what constitutes government under different regimes. The chapter presents different modes of government that reflect the internal balance of power: presidential, cabinet, prime ministerial, and **ministerial government**. Then it addresses the autonomy of government, in particular from political parties and the permanent bureaucracy. Next, the chapter discusses the political capacity of governments, the relevance of **unified vs divided government**, **majority vs minority government**, and single-party vs coalition government. Finally, the chapter highlights the bureaucratic capacities of government, addressing issues such as classic bureaucracy, the politicization of bureaucracies, and the **New Public Management**.

Introduction

The term 'government' has several meanings. In the broadest sense it refers to a hierarchical structure in any organized setting, including private clubs, business firms, and political institutions. Within politics a broad definition of government includes all public institutions that make or implement political decisions and that can be spread over several tiers, which are called federal, state, and local government. That general understanding of government includes the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Most common, however, is to refer to a country's *central political executive* as 'the government', and this is how this term will be used in this chapter.¹

The job of the government is to govern the country. Governing means ruling. It is not, as the term 'executive' might suggest, just implementing laws passed by the legislature. Rather, governing means the government having a strong imprint on the laws passed during its reign and more generally exercising overall control over a country and determining its direction. As we shall see, governments are not always able to live up to very strong expectations about their ability to dominate political decision-making. Yet, even weak governments tend to be the political system's most important single political actor. This is a major reason why individuals and political parties mostly want to be in government. And because government is so important, positions in the central political executive tend to come with other goods that make them even more attractive: social prestige, decent income, public recognition, and privileged access to other powerful and/or famous people. The chance to govern the country and to enjoy these privileges is meant to motivate the best people to compete for government office. In democracies, such competition for government office is ultimately tied to elections. Either the government is directly elected or it is responsible to a parliament that results from general elections.

A few men and (increasingly also) women, distinguished and carefully selected as they may be, cannot run a country. Therefore governments have bureaucracies to support them in their tasks of ruling and administering the country. Thus, in functional terms, governing is not the exclusive task of the government. This has given rise to the notion of the *core executive*, which comprises 'all those organizations and procedures which coordinate central government policies, and act as the final arbiters of conflict between different parts of the government machine' (Rhodes 1995: 12). This implies that it is difficult to pin down the precise composition of the core executive. While the government in the narrow sense constitutes its centre, the core executive also comprises top civil servants, the key members of ministers' private cabinets, and a list of actors which varies over time and space. Realistically, the demarcation line between what constitutes the core and what belongs to the remaining

parts of the executive also depends on the analyst's perspective and judgement. At the same time, the core executive focus emphasizes coordination and negotiation rather than hierarchical relations among the units that constitute the core executive (Rhodes and Dunleavy 1995; Smith 1999). This perspective has become more important over time, due to the increasing complexity of governing in the modern world and in the context of **supra-national** government, in particular in the European Union (EU) (Levi-Faur 2012).

KEY POINTS

- The term 'government' has several meanings. The most common refers to the country's central political executive.
- Governing means ruling, exercising overall control over a country, and determining the course it will take.

Types of government

Government and the separation
of powers

Today's governments emerged through the piecemeal splitting-off of state functions from a traditionally undivided central government (usually a monarch) (King 1975; Finer 1997). In order to limit the government's power, judicial functions were transferred to courts and legislative functions to parliaments. This process began in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England. It had many national variations and, in Europe, was not completed before the twentieth century. The constitutional doctrine of the separation of powers—as developed first and foremost by the political philosophers Locke, Montesquieu, and Madison—provides a normative justification for the separation of institutions (Vile 1967; see also Chapters 7 and 9).

In practice, state functions were never as neatly separated as envisaged by political philosophers. The executive has retained important legislative functions, in particular drafting legislation and issuing government decrees and ordinances (Carey and Shugart 1998). With political parties establishing themselves as the main mechanism to structure elections and to coordinate incumbents, executives have gained an almost *de facto* monopoly in law-making in **parliamentary systems**. In presidential systems this is not true to the same extent, but executives also exercise a large influence on legislation.

The normative foundations of democratic government rest on two premises: the government must be connected to the electoral process and must work under constitutional constraints. Within these confines government can be organized in many ways. Three are quite

common: *parliamentarism*, *presidentialism*, and *semi-presidentialism*. Another is connected with the successful Swiss model and deserves a mention: the *directorial* form of **cabinet government**. Finally, government with a directly elected prime minister, which may appear as a 'natural' democratic improvement on parliamentarism, has failed in its only real-world test in Israel. Box 8.1 and Figure 8.1 show how these regime types can be distinguished.

In presidential systems the executives are not politically accountable to the legislatures, but the legislatures do play a significant role in holding presidents accountable for judicial offences such as treason or bribery. However, often the decision to investigate such offences and to proceed with the impeachment of the president is primarily political (Pérez-Liñán 2010). Typically, it

involves actors from both chambers of the legislature and qualified majorities to do so.

The government under different democratic regime types

What constitutes the government depends on the regime type. Presidentialism constitutionally provides for a one-person executive, but including his cabinet under the label of 'government' may be a useful working definition. Although the relations between the president and the cabinet are fundamentally different under fully fledged semi-presidentialism, both can be considered as constituting the government. Yet, semi-presidential regimes offer a wide range of different working modes (Elgie 1999). Sometimes the president acts as the real



BOX 8.1 ZOOM-IN Government creation and accountability under different regime types

Presidentialism

- Direct or quasi-direct popular election of the president for a fixed period.
- The head of state is identical with the head of government.
- The president is not politically accountable to the legislature.
- Appointment of government members by the president (mostly with the consent of the legislature).

Parliamentarism

- The head of government (prime minister, chancellor, etc.) is different from the head of state (monarch or president).
- Most parliamentary systems allow for parliamentary dissolution by the head of state (typically on the prime minister's or government's proposal).
- Election of the prime minister by parliament in some countries (e.g. Germany, Spain), appointment by the head of state (e.g. Italy, Ireland) or speaker of parliament (Sweden) with subsequent vote of confidence in other countries, and appointment by the head of state without an obligatory vote of confidence in another set of countries (e.g. UK, the Netherlands).
- The prime minister and the cabinet are politically accountable to the parliament, i.e. they can be removed from office by a vote of no confidence at any time for no other reason than that the parliament no longer trusts the government. Some countries (Germany, Spain, Belgium, Hungary) require a *constructive* no-confidence vote, i.e. parliament must replace the sitting government with an alternative government with the same vote.

Directorial government

- Currently, only Switzerland works with directorial government. The *Bundesrat* or *Conseil Fédéral* (Federal Council)

consists of seven individuals who are elected individually by parliament (the joint meeting of both chambers) for the entire term of parliament.

- The federal president is head of government and head of state. This is inspired by US presidentialism, but the country's linguistic and religious diversity have required collegial government—the cabinet members rotate the presidency between them on an annual basis.
- The government is not politically accountable to parliament.

Directly elected prime minister

- Only Israel practised this system from the elections between 1996 and 2003. The prime minister was popularly elected with absolute majority (in two rounds, if necessary) at the date of each parliamentary election and when the office of prime minister was vacant.
- The cabinet was nominated by the prime minister but required a parliamentary vote of confidence to take office.
- The prime minister was politically accountable to parliament. However, a successful vote of no confidence also triggered the dissolution of parliament and hence led to new elections.

Semi-presidentialism

- The president is directly (or quasi-directly) elected.
- The president appoints the cabinet.
- The cabinet is politically accountable to parliament.
- The president can dismiss the cabinet and/or dissolve parliament.

Head of government's taking office rests on support of	Fixed term	
	Yes	No
Electorate	Presidential (US)	Parliamentary with directly elected PM (Israel)
	Semi-presidentialism (F)	
Parliament	Directorial government (Switzerland)	Parliamentary (UK)

Figure 8.1 Regime types

Note: Only one example is included for each type.

head of government, relegating the prime minister to a mere assistant and occasionally the scapegoat for things that do not go well, sometimes the holders of these two offices work together or against each other in complex power-sharing arrangements, and sometimes the president is little more than a powerful head of state in reserve for crisis situations. The archetypal case of semi-presidentialism, France, has seen the two former variants, while other countries (e.g. Austria) resemble the latter and combine a semi-presidential constitution with a parliamentary working of the system.

Parliamentarism in many ways is a simple form of government: the cabinet is the government (Strøm *et al.* 2003). And although the mechanisms of creation and accountability are fundamentally different, the cabinet also constitutes the government in systems with a directly elected prime minister (Israel) and in systems with directorial government (Switzerland).

KEY POINTS

- Today's governments constitute what remains of absolute monarchs, after splitting-off of judicial and legislative functions.
- Notwithstanding the separation-of-powers doctrine, state functions are not fully separated. The government has retained important legislative powers, although differences exist between different regime types.
- Different regime types also distinguish themselves by the definition of government. Constitutionally, one-person executives and collective bodies can be distinguished. Some governments include the head of state while others have a separate head.

The internal working of government

Constitutional texts are typically silent about the internal working and decision-making of government and much

is left to the political actors. Over time, conventions may establish themselves. Conventions are normative rules that are generally respected. Although they are not backed up by law, breaking conventions typically is not cost-free for the breaker. Nevertheless, the more a mode of governing rests on formal rules, the more difficult it is to introduce change.

Political science has established a number of descriptive models of government. These models are partly derived from the constitutional order, but try to highlight how government actually works and arrives at decisions. Models capture which actors are typically able to leave their imprint on the outcome of the government decision-making process to a greater extent than other participants. They were developed with the background of the archetypal cases of presidential and parliamentary government—the US and the UK—and subsequently applied to other cases.

Presidential government

The principle of presidential government is to vest all executive power in a single, directly elected politician for a fixed term (i.e. the president is not politically accountable to the legislature). As Article II of the US Constitution puts it, 'The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.' Lijphart (1992) lists 'a one-person executive' among the defining principles of presidentialism. More realistically, the 'elected executive names and directs the composition of the government' (Shugart and Carey 1992: 19). Thus, within the executive domain, the president is sovereign. Different US presidents have developed their own styles. Some have used their cabinet members mainly for executing their orders while others have used them as advisers, but a collective decision-making system has never been established (Warshaw 1996).

Cabinet government

Cabinet government represents the operating mode of the parliamentary system as it emerged in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. Then the cabinet discussed and decided the important issues collectively. The prime minister was a first among equals (*primus inter pares*), not the boss of the other ministers. The background to that was the limited role of the state and the fact that initially the cabinet was the monarch's creation. A slim state kept the cabinet agenda manageable. The cabinet being the monarch's creation had three implications.

1. In many ways the monarch was his own 'prime minister', dealing with his ministers on an individual basis.
2. The ministers objected to a strong prime minister undermining their direct link to the monarch.

3. So did parliament, which was keen to avoid individual ministers' accountability being obscured by cabinet hierarchy (Mackintosh 1977: 56). Cabinet government continued to prevail when electoral reform gradually loosened the cabinet's tie with the monarch while strengthening that with the House of Commons (Mackintosh 1977: 155–8, 257–343).

However, with the gradual increase of government tasks, more and more issues needed to be handled and decided. While their number clearly exceeded what a cabinet could handle as a collective body, at the same time many issues became too technical to allow a meaningful discussion between non-specialists. This had two consequences. First, the proportion of government decisions going through cabinet declined. Second, many cabinet decisions became formal, only ratifying what was 'precooked' before the cabinet meeting within and between the ministries (Burch and Holliday 1996; James 1999; Smith 1999). Thus, classical cabinet government is a thing of the past. Yet this has not made the cabinet an empty vessel, making decisions only in name but not in substance. A number of authors have identified important issues that are still decided by the cabinet in substance and have stressed the role of the cabinet 'as court of appeal for *both* ministers radically out of sympathy with a general line, *and* for a premier confronted by a ministerial colleague who insists on ploughing her or his furrow' (Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990: 11). If a cabinet fulfils these functions, i.e. deliberates and decides important issues and also functions as court of appeal, then we can speak of *post-classical cabinet government*.

Prime ministerial government

Since the early 1960s, a transformation of the operating mode of British cabinets has been noted. Richard Crossman coined the term **prime ministerial government** (Crossman 1963, 1972). In this model, collective deliberation and effective decision-making in and by the cabinet have been replaced by monocratic decision-making by the prime minister. Authors writing about other European states that experienced long stretches of single-party government, in particular Greece and Spain, have echoed the British diagnosis: cabinet government has given way to prime ministerial government.

There are three different modes of prime ministerial government: (1) a generalized ability to decide policy *across all issue areas* in which the prime minister takes an interest; (2) by *deciding key issues* which subsequently determine most remaining areas of government policy; and (3) by defining a *governing ethos*, 'atmosphere', or ideology which generates predictable solutions to most policy problems, and hence constrains other ministers' freedom of manoeuvre so as to make them simple agents of the premier's will (Dunleavy and Rhodes 1990: 8).

Prime ministerial government suggests monocratic decision-making and hence resembles presidential government. The difference is that presidents have a constitutional right to do so while prime ministers need to go beyond their constitutional role. Also, presidents are unassailable, as their term is fixed, while in principle prime ministers can be forced out of office. Such involuntary departure from office is not just a hypothetical possibility, as the most powerful British post-war prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, experienced in 1990 when she was ousted by her party.

Ministerial government

Finally, the transformation of cabinet government is seen to have occurred in the opposite direction. Rather than concentrating power in the prime minister, it has dispersed among the individual cabinet members. This is **ministerial government** or, in Andeweg's (1997) terminology, 'fragmented government'. Decisions ending up in the cabinet typically are ratified only. Ministers are overworked and primarily concerned about getting their own act together. They are inclined to interfere in the business of other ministers only if the decisions concerned would produce negative fallout for their own department. Otherwise ministers respect a tacit rule of mutual non-intervention. As non-intervention is mutual, this rule helps them to get cabinet support for their own policies, and it is the success or failure in directing their respective ministry that is crucial for the conduct of their careers. Recognizing this development, Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1996) have described ministers as 'policy dictators' within their own domain as the founding assumption for their coalition theory.

Models of government and cabinet coalitions in parliamentary systems

Thus far, party has been absent from the government modes presented here. The implicit assumption is that no party line of division runs through government, though party-bonds may be important to overcoming other **centrifugal** forces (such as conflicting departmental interests). Indeed, cabinets consisting of more than a single party are unlikely to approach either full-blown prime ministerial or ministerial government.

To begin with, in the former the prime minister's dominance is partly due to his/her role as electoral leader—and indeed victor—when coming to office. The ministers' submission to the prime minister partly rests on his role as a party asset that is not to be damaged by internal challenges. Coalition governments can come close to prime ministerial government when one party is dominant and the coalition builds on an electoral alliance which ties together the cabinet parties. Yet, in most cases the analogy to prime ministerial government in

coalition governments is the establishment of an oligarchic leadership, consisting of the leaders of the coalition parties, with each party leader being on the one hand a 'prime minister' of his/her party team in government, and on the other hand deciding critical issues together with the other party leader(s). Note, however, that there are limits to collective leadership and 'sharing' the prime minister's powers. Party leaders cannot attend international summits—which are often the place where important decisions are made (e.g. on the management of the recent Euro crisis)—in tandem. Nor can constitutional powers be formally shared. Thus, in the case of conflict, the prime minister can always invoke whatever powers the constitution has endowed the office.

In strict terms, ministerial government in coalition regimes would mean that 'the cabinet is not simply a *collection* of coalition partners, but instead it is a *distribution* of specific powers over **policy formulation** and **implementation** among those partners' (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 282). In other words, each government party would implement its own policy in its departments and exercise no influence on the departments held by its partner or partners. This assumption underlies the coalition theory of Laver and Shepsle (1990, 1996; for a critique see Dunleavy and Bastow 2001), which predicts the formation of the government that allows each of the government parties full control over its most preferred policy dimension.

Nowhere does coalition government work strictly according to the ministerial government model (see the contributions in Laver and Shepsle (1994)). At least some policies are agreed between the parties before the coalition is set up. These deals are often fixed in coalition agreements. Moreover, coalition governance mechanisms such as coalition committees, watchdog junior ministers, and other scrutiny mechanisms are established to guarantee that the deals are being observed by the coalition partners (Müller and Strøm 2000; Thies 2001; Timmermans 2003, 2006; Martin and Vanberg 2004, 2011; Strøm *et al.* 2008; Strøm *et al.* 2010). Yet, within these important confines even coalition governments can display a tendency to work according to the ministerial government mode.

Variability of government modes

Government modes are not fixed once and for all. The preceding discussion of the transformation of cabinet government into prime ministerial government and/or ministerial government already suggests some long-term change. Yet, government modes also vary according to political conditions and issues (Andeweg 1997). Thus, single-party governments are more likely to become prime ministerial than coalition cabinets. At the same time, each cabinet is likely to handle issues differently, depending on their relevance and potential for causing damage to the government.

KEY POINTS

- Constitutions are silent about the internal working and decision-making of government, leaving much to the political actors who adapt the government modes to changing circumstances.
- Presidential systems provide for presidential government (with its internal variations). Parliamentary systems offer a broader range of decision modes: cabinet government, prime ministerial government, and ministerial government.
- Coalition governments in parliamentary systems typically have developed more complex decision modes.

The autonomy of government

In the previous section, when political parties were mentioned the assumption was that there is no difference whatsoever between government members and their parties. Yet political parties are complex entities. They consist of (1) the mass organization (the 'party on the ground'), (2) the parliamentary party, and (3) the party team in government (the latter two are also referred to as 'party in public office'). To make it more complicated, the 'party in the electorate' also exists. Although this layer lacks organization, and therefore the quality of a political actor, it is a highly relevant reference point for politicians.

Thus, understanding governments requires exploring the autonomy these layers have from other actors or providers of essential resources without which they would not be able to govern. This section discusses political parties and, more briefly, the bureaucracy (following section). Parties are essential for getting a government into office and maintaining it there, and without the permanent bureaucracy the government could not govern.

Government autonomy: the party dimension

It is the electoral connection which makes government democratic, and it is political parties which play a crucial role in structuring elections even when the electoral system allows the choice of individual candidates (Katz 1997). Modern democracies, therefore, have **party government** in a general sense (Müller and Narud 2013). Yet, this understanding of party government can be contrasted with a more specific one. According to Richard Rose:

... party government exists only in so far as the actions of office-holders are influenced by values and policies derived from the party. Where the life of party politics does not affect government policy, the

accession of a new party to office is little more significant than the accession of a new monarch; the party reigns but does not rule. (Rose 1976: 371)

What role parties have after the elections is subject to normative and empirical discussions. It is sufficient here to say that conflicting normative theories suggest both the full autonomy of elected officials from their party and, conversely, a strong role of the party in determining the course steered by the government. The former position can be associated with constitutional theory and liberal and conservative thinkers, and the latter one with much of constitutional practice and mostly socialist ideas (Birch 1967). The remainder of this section explores the issue empirically.

Thus, the key question is to what extent political parties can control the behaviour of their government teams. Three means of control are of particular importance (Rose 1976; Katz 1986; Müller 1994; Blondel and Cotta 2000).

Party programmes

Party control of the cabinet will be enhanced in situations where party programmes not only clearly state the intentions of the party, but also specify appropriate means to the desired ends. In such circumstances, ministers will have clear targets, whilst the party will have a yardstick for measurement of their performance.

Selection of cabinet members

Party control of the cabinet will be enhanced where cabinet ministers have internalized and acted upon party values. The internalization of party values is hard to measure, but holding high party office is certainly a plausible indicator. Note that ministers who have good intentions of serving their party still need to be skilled executives in order to succeed.

Permanent control of the party over the cabinet

While the above conditions increase the likelihood of 'party government' (Katz 1986), they do not guarantee the implementation of party policies. Therefore parties may want to exercise permanent control over their ministers. Naturally, the less these two conditions are fulfilled—for instance, because of the need to appoint technical experts rather than party leaders—and the more changed circumstances (such as international crises and unexpected economic developments) have dated the party programmes, the more important such control can be considered.

Empirical studies of party programmes and their relevance to government policy have a long tradition, though

most of them confine themselves to single countries and cabinets. In one of the few comparative and comprehensive studies, McDonald and Budge (2005) took a highly aggregated approach and compared party ambitions (programmes) in twenty-one countries with government ambitions (government declarations) and actual outputs in terms of budget priorities. This study did not find relevant party impact on government in a short-term perspective. The inertia of public policy is simply too strong. In the words of McDonald and Budge (2005: 180): 'The reason is not that changes are not made but that they are slow, because of preexisting budgets, contracts, commitments, and entitlements in the field of expenditures; time constraints, due process, legislative and social opposition, and administrative bottlenecks in the field of legislation.'

Only when a party manages to hold on to government for a long time—McDonald and Budge list the New Deal Democrats in the US, the Thatcher–Major Conservatives in the UK, and the Scandinavian Social Democrats—will a party imprint on public policy be clearly visible.

Blondel, Cotta, and associates chose a less aggregated approach (Blondel and Cotta 1996, 2000). Conceptually, they considered both directions of influence: party on government and government on party. Three ideal types of party–government relations can be distinguished:

- dominance—one of the two dominates the other;
- autonomy—government and government parties coexist without exercising influence on each other;
- fusion—party and government become politically indistinguishable.

Empirically, this research was concerned with appointments (to the cabinet and the party executive), government patronage, and fifty policy decisions in a set of West European countries. Unlike the Budge and McDonald (2005) study, which extracted general policy concerns of parties from their manifestos and the general direction of government policies from budget domains, this research was concerned with specific pledges and specific government policies. The aim was to establish to what extent government behaviour has a party origin and in what direction, if any, top-level recruitment takes place—from the party to the government (as the party government model suggests) or in the opposite direction.

The more exploratory study by Blondel and Cotta (1996, 2000) suggests that the ideal-typical picture of party government—with the party taking over government—needs correction. Specifically, following an initial period of *fusion* after a party enters government, new government appointments lead to increasing *autonomy* of the two, though 'fast-track' appointments of government members to high party office suggest even a tendency towards *dependence* of the party. With regard to policy, the government is not just the technocratic

executor of party policy. Rather, the government plays a significant role in shaping policies originating from the party and initiating its own ones. Patronage, it seems, is used to compensate the party for its desired policies which the government cannot deliver or does not want to deliver.

Presidentialization?

One recent attempt to capture the strengthening of the executive vis-à-vis political parties is the concept of presidentialization. Specifically, it means the strengthening of the chief executive. Although the term 'presidentialization' has been used earlier in studies of the British prime minister (Foley 1993, 2000; Pryce 1997), the most systematic comparative attempt has been made by Poguntke, Webb, and collaborators (Poguntke and Webb 2005). They associate presidentialization—in all regime types—with '(1) increasing leadership power resources and autonomy within the party and the political executive respectively, and (2) increasingly leadership-centred electoral processes' (Poguntke and Webb 2005: 5). In their analysis this process affects the internal working of the executive, the running of political parties, and the functioning of the electoral process.

Presidentialized government represents one ideal type of government. The 'partyfied' type of government occupies the opposite end of the continuum. The key question then is what is the role of individual leaders and of collective actors? Poguntke and Webb note that different regime types—parliamentarism, semi-presidentialism, and presidentialism—provide the actors with different power resources and hence constrain the place a specific government can take on the continuum. Thus, a parliamentary system under a strong prime minister can be more 'presidentialized' than a presidential system under a weak president, but never more so when the president is strong.

In their fourteen-country empirical analyses Poguntke, Webb, and associates identify an almost uniform trend towards presidentialism. Specifically, they recognize shifts in intra-executive power to the leader, increasing autonomy of the executive leader from the party, shifts of intra-party power to the leader, the leader's increasing autonomy from other party heavyweights, a growth of the leader's media coverage, increasing focus on the leader in electoral campaigns, and growing leader effects on voting behaviour. In combination, these developments indeed suggest a major shift away from the 'partyfied' type of democracy.

Government autonomy: bureaucratic government?

The number of people who enter or leave government after elections (i.e. elected leaders and political appointees) differs from system to system. Yet, in most systems

their numbers are tiny compared with those of bureaucrats, even when lower-rank civil servants are not considered. In many parliamentary systems in the first post-war decades little more than two dozen posts changed hands when a wholesale government turnover occurred.

The idea of bureaucratic government (Rose 1969) rests on the assumption that a small group cannot run the whole show and critically depends on the permanent bureaucracy. Bureaucrats can set the agenda of their political masters by identifying problems that need to be addressed; they can limit political choices by presenting a narrow set of alternatives and by undermining the viability of ideas that run counter to the department's common wisdom. Such ideas are labelled, for instance, as not workable, too expensive, having huge undesirable side effects, conflicting with higher-level rules (such as the Constitution or EU rules), having already failed in earlier attempts, etc. More so than any other mode of government, bureaucratic government remains and needs to remain invisible. Thus politicians continue to dominate the public stage. They may even make consequential decisions (according to one of the above modes). Yet these decisions can be compared to choosing the flag to fly on a ship sailing on the ocean, while it is bureaucrats who determine its course. Moreover, most administrative decisions escape the politicians' attention altogether.

KEY POINTS

- Party government means that government actions are strongly influenced by the values and policies of the government party or parties.
- Political parties control their teams in government by the means of party programmes, the recruitment of party leaders into government office, and permanent oversight and control of the government.
- Empirical studies mostly demonstrate that parties have only a limited impact on government. Initial fusion of party and government often gives way to government autonomy and occasionally party dependence on the government.
- Individual leaders tend to gain weight relative to the parties ('presidentialization').

The political capacity of government

Modern governments of rich nations can achieve much. They can maintain law and order, provide essential services to their citizens, strengthen the economy, and send men and women into orbit or to explore outer space. Yet, whether governments can indeed do what is in the capacity of modern states depends largely on the political

conditions that prevail during their reign. This section can discuss only a few selected topics. It leaves aside much of the often very consequential nitty-gritty details of institutional rules (see e.g. Weaver and Rockman 1993; Strøm *et al.* 2003). Nor does it discuss systematically the reactions of citizens, interest groups, and the economy to government policy that at times have brought governments to their knees. It is sufficient here to refer to a few examples: the 2006 riots in the French *banlieues* (suburban housing complexes) which led the government to partly reverse its reform of the labour law; the mass strikes of the British trade unions that brought down the Heath government in 1974; and the less visible but much more common influence exercised by the investment decisions of firms in a globalized economy that have considerably constrained national governments' freedom of manoeuvre.

Unified vs divided government

The concepts of unified and divided government were invented in the US. **Divided government** means that the presidency is held by one party and at least one chamber of Congress is controlled by the other party; **unified government** is when all three are under the control of the same party (see also Chapter 7). The concepts of unified and divided government transfer easily to other presidential systems, although the multiparty nature of some of them requires some modification. Leaving aside non-partisan presidents, the (one-person) presidency by necessity must be under the control of one party and one party only. In contrast, no single party may control a majority in the legislature.

Yet a legislature passing a great number of detailed laws could make the president its mere servant. This could indeed be the case if no further provision were added to the definition of presidential government—some law-making authority of the president (Shugart and Carey 1992).

The US presidency represents the archetypal case of presidentialism. The formal law-making capacity of the president is negative: the president can veto any law passed by Congress. As long as no vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate overrides the veto with a two-thirds majority, the law is rejected and the status quo prevails. The US has seen divided government for most of the post-war period. Yet empirical studies suggest that this was not very consequential, as open battles between the Congress and the president resulting in vetoes and occasional overrides have been very limited (Mayhew 1991; Binder 2003). Note, however, that actors anticipating defeat may avoid such battles. While many studies of the US highlight the factors that prevent legislative immobilism, a comparative perspective can be particularly useful as it brings out many of the same factors more sharply and adds additional ones.

In Latin America the most powerful presidents enjoy a much richer set of legislative instruments than their US counterpart. Veto power can take the form of the line veto, enabling the president to veto specific clauses in legislation but accepting the rest, and most presidents also enjoy decree power, the right of legislative initiative, and some procedural power in Congress (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997; Morgenstern and Nacif 2002). At the same time these systems are multiparty. Hence, the chances of a president finding his party endowed with a legislative majority are often modest or non-existent. One influential study (Linz 1990a, 1994) has identified the main reason for the frequent breakdowns of democracy in Latin America in the institutional 'rigidity' of presidentialism—with fixed terms of both the president and the legislature. This, in turn, causes long periods of legislative gridlock followed by short periods of legislative overproduction. Both encourage frustrated political actors to resort to non-democratic means. Yet the specific assumptions about the behaviour of actors underlying Linz's theory have not withstood empirical scrutiny (Cheibub 2007; Llanos and Marsteintredet 2010). While it is true that democracy has had a rough life in Latin America, this is not just down to divided government. Presidents have found ways to cope with it, as Cox and Morgenstern (2002) demonstrate (see Table 8.1).

Depending on their own strength in terms of institutional empowerment and party support in the legislature (Martínez-Gallardo 2012), presidents employ four different strategies. I consider first the two extreme categories. The president uses unilateral powers if the legislature is hostile (*recalcitrant*). He uses presidential decrees to push forward his own policies (rather than making legislative proposals to the assembly) and vetoes laws passed by the legislature that run counter to his policy ambitions. In Cox and Morgenstern's typology this is the *imperial* president. This was the behavioural pattern of Chile's President Allende before General Pinochet's tragic military coup in 1973.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, if the president is sure that the assembly will follow his lead, he dictates his terms in the form of legislative initiative. Such a *dominant* president could be found in Mexico in the years of the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI) single-party dominance.

The two intermediate cases require the president to engage in give-and-take relations with the assembly. For the president this is more rewarding than unilateral action, as he does not need to push his powers to the very limits of constitutionality (or beyond) and because legislation is harder to overturn than presidential decrees. If the president meets a legislature that is *workable* he engages in legislative coalition-building. This requires policy deals (substantive compromises) and perhaps appointments from the coalitional parties to cabinet office. According to Cox and Morgenstern (2002), presidents in

Table 8.1 President–assembly relations under presidentialism

Presidential strategy	Assembly strategy			
	Reject	Bargain	Demand payments	Acquiesce
<i>Undertake unilateral action</i>	Imperial president, <i>recalcitrant assembly</i>			
<i>Bargain</i>	Coalitional president, <i>workable assembly</i>			
<i>Pay-off</i>	Nationally oriented president, <i>parochial assembly</i>			
<i>Dictate</i>	Dominant president, <i>subservient assembly</i>			

Source: Cox and Morgenstern (2002: 455).

post-dictatorial Chile have followed that strategy. Recent research suggests that the president's policy objectives may be better served by confining their strategy to making policy compromises (if necessary) with the assembly but remaining in full control over cabinet appointments (Martínez-Gallardo and Schleiter 2015).

Finally, if the president meets a legislature that largely consists of constituency-bound representatives who need to bring home immediate benefits for the purpose of their re-election, the president offers pork and large-scale patronage rather than policy concessions. Elected representatives then sell their policy-making powers for goods and services that, in turn, they can allocate in their districts to secure their re-election. Probably much of Brazil's recent history provides a good example of the relevance of a *parochial* strategy (Ames 2002).

As Cox and Morgenstern (2002) make clear, the same forces are at work in the US as in the two intermediary cases. Clearly, the office of the US president is not endowed with the institutional powers of imperial presidents in Latin America and elsewhere. But different presidents were in different situations with respect to party support in Congress and other resources and chose their strategies accordingly. The record suggests that they were quite successful, although less so in more recent situations of divided government (Mayhew 1991; Binder 2003).

Attempts have been made to apply the concepts of unified and divided government to other regime types than presidentialism (Laver and Shepsle 1991; Elgie 2001). Accordingly, semi-presidential systems are treated as a close analogy to presidential ones. The only difference is that the division line does not run between the executive and the legislature but between the legislature plus the cabinet on one side and the president on the other. With regard to parliamentary systems, the authors identify minority governments as cases of 'divided government'. Here, the division line runs between the cabinet (supported by a parliamentary minority) and the parliamentary majority. Without doubt these situations

replicate some characteristics of divided government as it has emerged in presidential systems. Yet the very fact that the survival of government is not at stake in the latter while it is in the two former makes the analogy less than perfect and perhaps a case of 'conceptual stretching' (Sartori 1970; see also Chapter 3).

Majority vs minority government

Governments that enjoy majority support—at least 50 per cent of the seats plus one—in parliament can not only survive in office but also enact their political programme. For a long time **minority governments**—governments comprising parties that collectively miss that mark—were considered an anomaly. They were considered as unwanted crisis symptoms, coming to power when no **majority government** could be formed. Such situations are also referred to as *immobiliste*, as they will be unable to produce political decisions (Laver and Schofield 1990: 72). Yet, as Strøm (1990) demonstrated, and more recent studies confirmed, minority governments are neither rare nor particularly unstable. This result is not driven by governments that have a *formal* minority status but can rely on a legislative (rather than government) majority coalition.

What is the rationale of minority governments? Laver and Schofield (1990: 77–81) suggest that minority governments occupying the ideological centre or, more technically, that hold the median legislator, are 'policy viable'. This means that they can divide the opposition by policy proposals at the centre of the policy space. Although the left opposition will consider them too much to the right and the right opposition will find them too much to the left, these parties cannot join forces to bring down the government and enact alternative policies.

Of course, effective government by minority cabinets suggests that policy is the only or overwhelming motive that drives political parties. If office were dominant, parties left and right of the government would join forces to bring down any minority cabinet, as any new

government would at least increase their chances for government office. In practice, most parties are indeed interested in government office in its own right (Müller and Strøm 2000). Yet, their behaviour is constrained by the anticipated reaction of their voters. The bringing down of a social democratic minority cabinet by parties further to the left in alliance with right-wing parties may not be well received by left voters, particularly when it results in a new government more to the right than the one replaced. Anticipated voter reactions also matter in another sense: governing often results in electoral costs which some parties have good reasons to avoid (Strøm 1990). Indeed, as Narud and Valen (2008) show, there has been a monotonic and strong trend for government parties to lose votes since the 1980s. More dramatically, most European governments have not been returned to office in the years since the outbreak of the current financial crisis.

Table 8.2 provides a broad overview of the frequency of government types in democracies worldwide. The upper part of the table shows that minority situations—situations where no single party commands a parliamentary majority—are frequent, though more so in parliamentary than in presidential systems. The lower part suggests that about 45 per cent of these situations produce minority government in parliamentary systems and close to 78 per cent in presidential systems. More recently, the post-war or post-democratization record of 28 European countries shows a similar picture: the breakdown of 610 cabinets is 12 per cent majority and 30 per cent minority single-party and 54 per cent majority and 15 per cent minority coalition cabinets (Bergman *et al.* 2013).

Overall, majority cabinets enjoy a longer life than minority cabinets. Yet minority governments have a similar or even longer duration in some Western countries,

particularly in those where they are a regular outcome of government formation. Thus, in most cases minority cabinets are clearly more than temporary solutions between two 'regular' majority governments.

As we have seen, minority governments can be helped by their central location in the policy space. Institutional mechanisms such as presidential powers (already discussed in the context of divided government) can also increase their capacity. The French government is particularly lucky as the prime minister can draw on an arsenal of procedural rules which help to force through government policy. The strongest instrument is Article 49.3 of the constitution. It allows the government to turn any decision about legislation into a confidence issue, shifting the burden of proof to its opponents. Legislative proposals introduced under Article 49.3 are automatically adopted—without a vote on the proposal itself—as long as no no-confidence vote (requiring a majority of *all* MPs) unseats the government (Huber 1996). While this instrument is used frequently in France, most governments lack such strong instruments. Therefore, in order to survive and get policies passed, minority cabinets need to engage in negotiations with the opposition. This limits their capacities, as is also reflected in government durations (Table 8.3). Overall, majority cabinets enjoy a longer life. In aggregate they outlive minority cabinets by eight months. Yet, this is not true in every case.

Single-party vs coalition government

Single-party governments have the distinctive advantage that no party line of division runs through the government. This implies that the government goals will be relatively uncontroversial internally. Any remaining differences are likely to be suppressed, given the common

Table 8.2 Coalitional status of governments under parliamentarism and presidentialism (1945–2002)

	Parliamentary regimes		Presidential regimes	
	N	%	N	%
Majority situations	215	43.2	121	55.5
Minority situations	283	56.8	97	44.5
Total	498	100.0	218	100.0
<i>Government types in minority situations</i>				
Majority coalitions	175	54.2	31	22.3
Single-party minority governments	83	25.7	49	47.6
Minority coalitions	65	20.1	31	30.1

Notes: The upper part of the table identifies government formation situations by counting the number of legislative seat distributions. Changes in the seat distribution are triggered by elections and by splits and mergers of parties. The lower part records the government *type* that was formed in minority situations. Changes in the composition of government that did not affect its *type* (e.g. the switch from one majority coalition to another in a sitting parliament) are not registered. The number of government types exceeds that of minority situations because different government types were subsequently formed under the same seat distribution.

Source: Cheibub *et al.* (2004: 573–5).

Table 8.3 Absolute and relative cabinet duration in twenty-eight European democracies, 1945–2011

Country	Period	Absolute duration			Relative duration		
		Mean	Standard deviation	No. of cabinets	Mean	Standard deviation	No. of cabinets
Austria	1945–2011	911	401.35	25	0.71	0.26	24
Belgium	1946–2011	544	519.28	40	0.45	0.36	40
Bulgaria	1990–2011	728	556.58	10	0.54	0.38	9
Czech Rep.	1992–2011	605	462.64	11	0.61	0.37	10
Denmark	1945–2011	680	337.83	35	0.55	0.26	35
Estonia	1992–2011	536	296.45	12	0.58	0.36	12
Finland	1945–2011	457	415.36	50	0.53	0.34	50
France	1959–2011	660	466.76	29	0.58	0.29	28
Germany	1949–2011	762	505.48	29	0.65	0.37	28
Greece	1977–2011	822	517.38	15	0.62	0.36	14
Hungary	1990–2011	760	456.04	10	0.83	0.24	9
Iceland	1944–2011	747	487.06	32	0.61	0.35	31
Ireland	1944–2011	958	450.60	25	0.59	0.25	25
Italy	1945–2011	390	347.46	55	0.34	0.31	54
Latvia	1993–2011	323	179.44	19	0.43	0.31	18
Lithuania	1992–2011	559	431.16	12	0.58	0.40	11
Luxembourg	1945–2011	1239	652.71	19	0.86	0.24	18
Malta	1987–2011	1279	552.48	7	0.75	0.37	6
Netherlands	1945–2011	773	541.73	28	0.65	0.34	27
Norway	1945–2011	793	409.17	30	0.76	0.31	29
Poland	1991–2011	429	354.09	16	0.45	0.37	16
Portugal	1976–2011	629	530.17	19	0.50	0.34	19
Romania	1990–2011	446	275.95	17	0.53	0.36	16
Slovakia	1992–2011	686	593.49	10	0.59	0.37	10
Slovenia	1992–2011	614	408.32	12	0.74	0.27	12
Spain	1977–2011	1111	330.45	11	0.82	0.21	11
Sweden	1945–2011	829	434.47	29	0.82	0.29	28
UK	1945–2011	997	509.99	24	0.66	0.30	23
All 28		687	490.54	631	0.59	0.34	613

Note: Absolute duration is in days, relative duration in percentage of the time until the end of the constitutional inter-election period (CIEP).

Sources: Saalfeld 2013 (calculated from S. Andersson and S. Ersson (2012) 'The European Representative Democracy Data Archive'. Principal Investigator T. Bergman (www.erdda.se)).

goal of survival in office. Parties holding government office as a result of their strong position—commanding a parliamentary majority or occupying a strategic position in the party system—are also likely to have strong leadership that can overcome internal difficulties. Hence, with everything else equal, governments consisting of a single

party can be considered homogeneous. This implies that they can make decisions quickly, avoid disagreeable compromises, and maintain a common front.

Coalition governments, in turn, need to satisfy at least some of the ambitions of each of the government parties. Even in the unlikely case of (almost) complete a priori

agreement between the coalition partners about government goals, the fact remains that office-sharing means that the personal ambitions of some would-be ministers in the parties must be frustrated. This, in turn, may result in only half-hearted support of the government (Sartori 1997). In most cases some of the party's policy ambitions will be compromised. This typically lengthens the internal decision-making process and often exposes internal divisions to the public, with the consequence that the government appears divided and therefore weak. The alternative of one party quietly submitting would allocate the costs of coalition one-sidedly; that party would be considered by its activists and voters to be selling out to its coalition partner. These problems tend to remain modest in ideologically homogeneous coalitions but accelerate in heterogeneous ones. And they tend to be particularly tricky when they are fuelled not only by party policy ambition but also by office ambition. Whenever the most prestigious office—that of prime minister—is at stake *between* the coalition partners, coalitions tend to be seriously hampered by internal rivalry and conflict.

According to Table 8.2, in minority situations coalition governments are the dominant outcome in parliamentary regimes and still result in more than half of such situations in presidential regimes. A wealth of research shows that the overall picture is remarkably balanced between single-party and coalition cabinets. In the aggregate, single-party governments do not last significantly longer than coalition governments. Yet, this similarity should not prevent us from seeing that very different forces are at work here. Coalition governments that do not reach the maximum possible duration generally terminate over internal conflict and unbridgeable differences between the partners. In contrast, single-party governments tend to shorten their term because they feel strong and early elections are likely to return them to government (Strøm and Swindle 2002). In East-Central Europe the picture is remarkably similar, particularly given the lack of consolidation of both parties and party systems in most of the countries (Nikolenyi 2004; Conrad and Golder 2010).

KEY POINTS

- The political capacities of governments differ widely, depending on the government's support base in the political institutions and the society.
- In presidential regimes, 'unified government' suggests greater capacities. 'Divided government' requires the president to use institutional prerogatives, bribe members of the legislature, or compromise with legislative parties.
- In parliamentary regimes, single-party majority governments normally have the greatest political capacity.

Bureaucratic capacities

No government can achieve its goals, limited as they may be, without many helping hands. The modern state has developed the permanent bureaucracy as the prime instrument for that purpose (see Chapter 4). In order to fulfil the bureaucracy's mission, its members—the bureaucrats—need to be able and willing to do their job. In addition, the internal organization of tasks and processes can exercise a major influence on bureaucratic capacities.

Working from an idealization of the Prussian bureaucracy, Max Weber (1947) outlined the key characteristics of bureaucratic organization.

Personnel

Formal lifelong employment of bureaucrats who receive a fixed salary and earn pension rights in return for their service and who are promoted largely on the basis of their seniority (the length of their service).

Organization

Specialization, training, functional division of labour, well-defined areas of jurisdiction, and a clear hierarchy among the bureaucrats.

Procedure

Impersonal application of general rules (mostly laws and government decrees); business is conducted on the basis of written documents, bureaucratic decisions are recorded, and the relevant documents carefully stored.

Each of these features has a specific function in making the bureaucratic organization an effective instrument. Indeed, Weber suggested that it is not only *effective* (i.e. getting things done) but, indeed, 'capable of attaining the highest degree of *efficiency*' (i.e. getting things done with a minimum of cost) (1947: 337). Lifelong employment and career perspectives allow the administration to attract and retain qualified staff. Personnel stability, in turn, is one condition for a smooth working of the administrative machine that builds on division of labour and specialization. Well-trained bureaucrats who work on clearly defined issues and who are part and parcel of an unambiguous command chain are able to produce 'standardized' decisions. This means that, when confronted with the same case, different bureaucrats would arrive at identical decisions derived from the general rules. Paying the bureaucrats a fixed salary and having strong rules of incompatibility aim at preventing personal interest intervening in their decisions. Finally, the requirement that decisions are fully documented and hence can be checked at any time helps to keep bureaucrats on track.

A cornerstone of the bureaucratic system is **merit system** recruitment. Accordingly, access to the administration

is not restricted to particular segments of society; selection and promotion aim at appointing the best-qualified individuals. With regard to promotion, in the case of equal qualifications seniority is decisive. Clearly, in such a system political affiliation and attitudes of job applicants and members of the bureaucracy do not play any role. Such considerations would not only be inappropriate but also unnecessary, as the bureaucracy is considered a neutral instrument. Within the confines of laws and regulations the merit bureaucrats serve every government loyally.

Problems of bureaucracy

To be sure, Max Weber's appraisal of bureaucracy rested on its comparison with pre-modern types of organization (including patrimonial systems where offices were sold and, in turn, generated income for their holders). He was quick to add that real-life bureaucracies become inefficient when decisions need to take into consideration the individual characteristics of the cases to be decided. Indeed, the term 'bureaucracy', and even more so the adjective 'bureaucratic', in ordinary language implies excessive rules and complicated procedures, formalism, and rigidity in their application—hence delay and inefficiency in making decisions and consequently the waste of public money. It is true that each of the principles of bureaucratic organization can be overdone. The rule of law then degenerates to rigidity and inertia in procedures and over-regulation, specialization of bureaucrats leads to civil servants who perform acts without understanding their consequences, and personnel stability and arcane internal rules create a closed system out of touch with its environment. One possible consequence of the latter is groupthink. Groupthink means the unconscious minimizing of intra-organizational conflict in making decisions at the price of their quality, which can lead to disaster (Janis 1972; 't Hart 1990). A famous case of groupthink was the Kennedy administration's Bay of Pigs invasion, and perhaps the same can be said about the more recent Iraq war planning of the Bush administration.

Theories of bureaucracy have been concerned with such phenomena but more often with less spectacular developments. Parkinson's Law is a famous formula for the creeping but consequential growth of the bureaucracy. Parkinson (1958) suggested that in a bureaucratic organization 'work expands to fill the time allotted'. Consequently, the development of bureaucratic organizations, such as the British Colonial Office, does not reflect its objective function. Indeed, that office increased its staff size considerably as the British Empire declined.

As we have seen, the principles of bureaucratic organization aim at separating the private interest of bureaucrats from the decisions they have to make. Yet to assume that human beings will ever be able and willing to separate completely their private preferences from their behaviour as officials would be naive. Bureaucrats do have

private interests and political preferences. They want to boost their income and prestige by climbing up the career ladder and will probably take account of their own political preferences when preparing or making decisions.

Let us consider first the growth of bureaucracy. Parkinson (1958) noted that officials want to 'multiply subordinates, not rivals'. The Public Choice School made the private interests of bureaucrats their starting point. Within this approach, the work of Niskanen (1971) has been the most influential. His theory builds on the simple assumption that bureaucrats have the goal of increasing their budgets. This is because most of the bureaucrats' personal incentives—salary, reputation, power, policy-making capacity—are positively related to the size of their organization's budget. The push of the bureaucrats is met by the pull from societal groups and their representatives who make increasing demands on government. Two reasons make it difficult to keep the growth of government at bay.

1. It is often hard or impossible to measure objectively the 'final outputs' of bureaucracies. With regard to many outputs it is hard to say when an optimal level is reached and to avoid overproduction. The many times overkill capacity built up by the superpowers during the Cold War is a case in point.
2. Specific bureaucracies tend to be the only suppliers of particular (public) goods (e.g. defence or public health). This avoids wasteful duplication but also frees the bureaucracies from competitive pressure (which has negative effects on efficiency) and deprives the politicians of alternative sources of information. All this contributes strongly to the growth of government.

Niskanen's theory is difficult to test. When confronted with empirical data, the evidence has been mixed. While some have found very little evidence conforming to the theory (Blais and Dion 1991), other studies remain sceptical about the power of bureaucrats to set the agenda in a way that results in ever-increasing budgets, but marshal impressive empirical evidence that production of services by private sector firms is considerably cheaper than that by bureaucrats (Mueller 2003: 371–80). In any case, with Niskanen serving on the Board of Economic Advisers under President Reagan and having inspired this president's thinking, his theory has been quite important for the efforts at rolling back the state since the 1980s.

It now turns to the effort that bureaucrats bring to their job and to the question of whether they diverge from the directions given by political officials. In recent years several studies have employed the principal-agent framework of micro-economics to address these issues (see also Chapters 7 and 9). Brehm and Gates (1997: 50) have nicely summarized the set of options that bureaucratic agents have.

1. They may either work in the interest of their principal (no agency problem) or engage in leisure-shirking, dissent-shirking, or sabotage.