

- Macmillan for his mishandling of the Profumo affair (1963).
- Callaghan for his failure to call an earlier general election in the autumn of 1978, before the 'winter of discontent' irreversibly damaged his premiership.
- Blair for his decision to back the US invasion of Iraq (2003).
- Cameron for his loss of the referendum of the UK's membership of the European Union (2016).
- May for her inability to achieve an agreement on the departure from the EU.

Of the 15 prime ministers since 1945, only two can be regarded as overall successes: Clement Attlee for introducing the welfare state and setting up NATO in 1949, and Margaret Thatcher for restoring Britain's prestige internationally and reviving the economy. Blair was a brilliant success electorally, but historians might ask whether his constitutional and welfare reforms were sufficient, given that he won three general elections and was in office for 10 years.

POLITICSREVIEWExtras



For advice on answering Edexcel exam questions on prime ministerial power, see:
www.hoddereducation.co.uk/politicsreviewextras

ACTIVITIES

Using this article, your textbooks and online material, make notes on the following:

- Five sources of prime ministerial power, with examples. (500 words)
- Five constraints on the power of a prime minister, with examples. (500 words)

Class discussion

Pick two factors that are the most important and two of lesser importance for the power and success of a prime minister.

Consider at least one factor, not mentioned in this article, that has an impact on prime ministerial power or success.

EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS

- 1 Evaluate the extent to which the powers of the prime minister outweigh the constraints. (30 marks, Edexcel-style)
- 2 'The UK prime minister has become too powerful.' Analyse and evaluate this statement (25 marks, AQA-style)

Sir Anthony Seldon is vice chancellor of the University of Buckingham.

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IDEAS AND THINKERS



Liberalism and freedom

Commitment to individual freedom is at the heart of liberalism.

Maria Egan analyses the extent to which liberals vary in their concept of freedom and their ideas of how it is best achieved

EXAM LINKS

The **political ideas** sections of both the **AQA** and **Edexcel** specifications require knowledge and understanding of how liberals agree and disagree about the concept of freedom and the individual.

In broad terms, classical liberals argue for negative freedom alone, whereas modern liberals advocate for the addition of positive freedom:

- **Negative freedom** is a concept of freedom that defines itself as an absence of constraint, which in practical terms means a freedom from government interference wherever possible.
- **Positive freedom** is a concept of freedom that sees the state play a positive role to assist individual development, for example a state-funded educational system.

Negative freedom

Thomas Hobbes

Hobbes (1588–1679) is generally seen as having provided the first definition of negative freedom, although he did not coin the phrase. Hobbes described freedom as the 'silence of the laws' in his book *Leviathan* (1651). He did not mean by this that there should be no laws, but rather that where there was no relevant legislation, a person was free to decide for themselves how to act. From this stems the classical liberal idea that the fewer the laws, the greater the freedom available to the individual.

Isaiah Berlin

Berlin (1909–97) provided a slightly different definition of negative freedom to that of Hobbes, describing it as 'an area within which a man can act unobstructed by others' because of the

'absence of obstacles to possible choices and activities'.

Berlin also wrote about positive freedom, defining it as the ability 'to be one's own master'. In other words, positive freedom is attained when an individual has the liberty to act according to their own wishes, develop their talents and achieve fulfilment. This is only possible if an individual is not at risk of poverty, deprivation or disease. Therefore, modern liberals seek to deliver positive freedom through the creation of a welfare state designed to furnish equality of opportunity across society.

John Locke

Locke (1632–1704) espoused an essentially negative concept of liberty, although he did not go so far as to advocate for the complete 'silence of the laws'. He argued instead that while people needed to be