

Government and Politics – Cabinet Ideology Essay

Q: “All Cabinets are a coalition of different views and opinions, even when they are made up of just one party”. Discuss the validity of this statement.

I do agree with the statement that all Cabinets are a coalition of different views and opinions. There are many examples that can support this across the UK and even the globe where many parties have their own, official or unofficial, ideological factions. This can be seen in the UK with Tony Blair’s Centrist approach, or Jeremy Corbyn’s more hard-line left-wing approach to the Labour Party and Margaret Thatcher’s more Right-Wing Conservative Party, or Theresa May’s more moderate leanings. It can also be seen in the US, where there are liberal, left and conservative factions in the mainly centrist US Democratic Party.

One argument of different views of a cabinet is that of the 2010-2015 Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition. It was clear that this cabinet was a coalition of ideas as it contained two parties; the Liberal Democrats which are Centre to Centre-Left and the Conservative Party who are Centre-Right. This clearly shows a difference of ideas and that proves the argument that Cabinet is indeed made up of different views such as the Liberal Democrats being pro-Europe, and aspects of the Conservative Party being rather Eurosceptic. The Conservative Party is equally more traditional and less progressive on social issues than the Liberal Democrats, who did in fact propose LGBTQ+ Legislation for the Coalition Agreement, and many Conservatives opposed the legislation (the legislation did still pass).

Another argument that Cabinet is filled with different opinion and views is on the issue of Brexit and this is a good example of it being only one party. Britain exiting the European Union dominated British politics since the 2016 referendum and the two governments since, which is May’s Administration and Johnson’s Administration. A good example is May’s Administration. She

included a fervent remainer such as Amber Rudd (Home Secretary) and hard-line brexiteers such as Michael Gove (Environment Secretary) and Boris Johnson (Foreign Secretary). This clearly provides an argument that there are differences, sometimes large differences, and that this is generally the intention of a Prime Minister as a difference of ideas allows for better policy, compromise and scrutiny and therefore more well-rounded legislation and policy initiatives.

A final argument that there are different views and opinions in a Cabinet even during a one party government is that of ideological differences. In a single party government, these ideologies may not necessarily be dramatic but certainly are prevalent. For example, in Johnson's government it included Matt Hancock (Health Secretary) who is seen as on the more Liberal-end of the Conservative Party and Priti Patel (Home Secretary) who is much more Right-Wing. It also included Sajid Javid, who was more centrist between liberal and right-wing aspects of the Conservative Party and served as Chancellor of the Exchequer until his resignation. This clearly tells us that Boris Johnson, and his predecessors, clearly seek a balanced Cabinet of ideological and policy differences in order to have a healthy and respectable Cabinet.

There is however evidence to suggest in other governments that there may not have necessarily been that much difference in policy/ideology – there is no coalition of different views and opinions. There have been cabinets in the past which have had domineering and like-minded ideologies and Cabinet Secretaries which share the same opinions such as Thatcher's government. Thatcher was known to have shuffled her cabinet for those who shared the same 'New Right' ideas that Thatcher was known to have created and embraced. This, for example, led to the satirical show 'Spitting Image' holding a sketch pertaining a restaurant with Thatcher and her Cabinet, and when ordering, Thatcher said "they'll have the same", referring to her Cabinet. This clearly shows that some Prime Ministers tend to allow for their policies to be priority and without much opposition or discussion otherwise, hence a Cabinet such as Prime Minister Thatcher's.

Another point to be made that Cabinets may not necessarily be a coalition of differences of ideas and views is that it may in fact depend on election success or solid party status. For example, Tony Blair's government had similar ideas and policies and generally had no opposition to any other Cabinet Members, or Blair's ideas and in fact, Blair made most of the decisions with ease. He was equally known to fight with Old Labour members or more hard-line left-wing Labour members such as Tony Benn. This is once again another example that some Prime Ministers may not necessarily be opposed to a lack of 'idea diversity', particularly with Blair, as he transformed his party to become much more centrist in nature and a Cabinet reflecting better diverse ideas of the Labour Party may have caused political turmoil.

The third and final point in that the UK Cabinet is not a coalition of different ideas and values (at times) is that resignations can cause a reshuffle in which the Prime Minister may choose to replace the former member with a more like-minded official. For example, former Chancellor of the Exchequer Sajid Javid resigned in protest after disagreements with economic policy between Johnson and Javid. This was over Johnson wanting Javid to remove his advisers so that Johnson could have more input on the new ones that would be appointed. Rishi Sunak was replaced by Sajid Javid as Chancellor and agreed that he would have a pooled unit of advisers between No. 10 and No. 11. This gave Boris Johnson greater power over economic policy. This clearly illustrates a power grab by the Prime Minister showing the policy differences can in fact be riddled out by a PM in favour of more control over certain policy meaning that, in this example, Johnson's government has lost a degree of 'differing opinions' therefore reducing the validity of the statement in question.

In conclusion, I do believe that the statement is valid that Cabinet is indeed a coalition of different views and opinions, even in a single party government. I believe I have reflected these points in the Cameron-Clegg coalition, Johnson's government as well as the Brexit differences in both May's and Johnson's government and that within in their Cabinets. It is clear however that there have been times where there has been much less differences in other Governments but that both generally work as well as each other – so long as there is party stability.