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Political Capital and the Dynamics of Leadership: Exploring the Leadership Capital Index

Tony Blair: Capital Squandered?

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This paper examines Tony Blair's use and loss of leadership capital between January and May 2005. Despite concern that Blair had earlier 'squandered' his authority, according to the Leadership Capital Index (LCI) Blair still possessed a series of advantages that gave him 'capital' to 'spend'. This included his personal skills, eight years' experience in office and, crucially, a continued polling lead and huge parliamentary majority.

So why in this period did Blair achieve so little and appear so beleaguered? The LCI demonstrates how these attributes proved superficial. The 'credit' parts of the LCI were waning and isolated while the 'debit' parts fed off each other as a continuously eroding cycle. While his skills remained, Blair's relations and reputation were eroded: the presence of a serious rival in Gordon Brown, party rebellion and increasing loss of trust over Iraq worked together to reduce and erode any leadership capital his advantages could bring. Moreover, these factors reinforced each other in a negative cycle.

We place leadership capital and Blair's premiership within the context of ever shifting academic debate on prime ministerial power in the British political system. The paper summarises approaches to studying the British prime minister, relates these to notions of political and leadership capital, then applies the LCI to a 3 month period of the Blair premiership, before offering some evaluation. The analysis offers support for rival theories of the prime ministership, though Blair's loss of leadership capital in this period emphasises the relational aspect of the methodological LCI approach. Blair, though superficially strong, moved from one leadership style to another, caught between dwindling influence and competing institutional trajectories.

Understanding the British Prime Minister

Prime ministerial power, for reasons argued elsewhere (Heffernan 2003, 2005, 2013; Bennister 2008, 2009, 2012), waxes and wanes, but prime minister's draw their authority from the fact that party leaders matter now more than ever and that modern prime ministers often matter more than previous ones. This is because prime ministers (and party leaders) operate in a political environment where political factors such as personalisation and centralisation have, to an extent, strengthened prime ministerial control (Blondel and

Thiebault 2009; Karvonen 2010; Strangio et al 2013). However powerful they may individually be, a prime minister remains Britain's principal politician and chief diplomat (for a recent discussion on the position of the prime minister see Dowding 2013; Heffernan 2013; Poguntke and Webb 2013; Foley 2013).

The notion that the prime minister should be powerful and authoritative—that any party leader, to be successful, has to be powerful and authoritative—is now a central feature of British politics. This is because two trends in comparative party politics have further rooted a leader-centric imperative within British politics: First, the ongoing personalisation of politics places party leaders ever more centre stage, something prompted by the pathologies of news media reportage. Secondly, the ongoing decline in the electorate's ties to parties, which makes parties 'sell' themselves by emphasising their leadership and the policy presented by that leadership. This means that any prime minister has a large political footprint. Elections are increasingly fought out between parties led by their leaders, so parties have significantly increased the political purchase of the individual party leader over their programme and campaign pitch (Panebianco, 1988; Katz and Mair, 2002; Heffernan, 2009).

The contested nature and debate regarding prime ministerial power has therefore shifted through various phases. The classic, traditional dichotomy between cabinet and prime ministerial power was overtaken by a comparative approach exploring global trends in personalisation which pitted presidentialisation analysis against dispersed core executive scholars. One of the difficulties with the debate is interpretive: the two views have focused on different aspects of what gives a Prime Minister authority. The presidential thesis fits easily with assessment around personal style, traits and presentation while the core executive holds to a more institutional and contextual view. It is necessary to both: the 'style, skills and traits' of a leader but also the 'historical and institutional context' (Strangio, t'Hart and Walter 2013, 3). What is needed are 'cogent ways' to analyse the 'interplay' between 'political circumstances, institutional possibilities, individual characteristics and social relations' (Strangio et al 2013, 6).

In the slipstream of this debate, Bennister and Heffernan have presented a 'predominance' approach drawing on the prime minister's location at the core of the core executive, but exploring the personal and institutional resources available. Judicious use of these resources and contingent factors determine how predominant a prime minister may be (Bennister 2008, 2009, 2012; Heffernan 2003, 2005, 2013). Therefore a more nuanced and multi-layered

debate has emerged as the merits of each approach has conflated and converged, allowing debates to move from binary distinctions to changes of emphasis. Staunch critics of presidentialisation such as Rod Rhodes now acknowledge that notions of predominance now provide a 'bridge' to proponents of core executive approaches. Rhodes has also tempered the core executive approach to acknowledge the power of relations at the heart of British government, and a notion of 'court politics' (Rhodes and Tiernan 2014). Prime ministers have resources at their disposal, but are also engaged in dependency relations. As Rhodes notes 'Due consideration therefore must be given to relations between leaders and their colleagues in Cabinet, the partyroom, and other 'followers' who depend on them, but on whom they also depend' (Rhodes and Tiernan 2014). The presidentialisation thesis (Poguntke and Webb 2005) also gives weight to the comparative notion that prime ministers and other 'chief executives' operate in 3 mutually reinforcing arenas (the executive, party and electorate faces). Strength in the party and electoral face can therefore impact on the executive face.

Predominance allows us to understand and analyse how strong leaders have appeared more 'presidential' and have stretched the institutional arrangements and powers of the always flexible prime ministerial office. But predominance also helps us to understand how and why prime ministers are constrained, by circumstance, relations and personal limitations – they are contingent actors. Such contingency is reflected in the statecraft approach derived from the work of Jim Bullpitt (1986) and reinvigorated by Buller and James (2011). The statecraft approach builds in a notion of the structural context facing political leaders before evaluating them and presents a nuanced set of benchmarks by which leadership can be evaluated. In addition, of all the conceptual presidential material, Stephen Skowronek's work presents us with an enticing view of cyclical political leadership with each new incumbent reacting against the previous. Any apparent strengthening or 'presidentialisation' is part of a transient 'ebb and flow'. A prime minister's power remains tied to interests and groups, from the party to ministerial colleagues that can and have removed prime ministers (Strangio, 't Hart and Walter 2013: 5). While the prime minister is certainly ascendant over the party and can push a policy agenda, their authority is 'often uncertain' and co-dependent (ibid.).

This debate has become more than an academic 'arm wrestle' between two camps, one stressing agency or individual factors the other stressing structural and dispersed or networked approaches. The current arena sees a convergence around acceptance that skills and reputation matter, but also relations too in understanding and exploring prime ministerial

power in the British polity. Leadership capital conceptualised around these three aspects of skills, relations and reputation therefore adds to this interactive approach highlighted by Robert Elgie (1995) and Ludger Helms (2005, 2012) among others. It is a blended approach that acknowledges the interdisciplinary nature of power structures, individual action and group behaviour. Modelling prime ministerial leadership in competing guises has given scholars frameworks for analysis to allow researchers to apply case studies and comparative approaches to a new set of criteria and variables. What is absent is a more systematic approach. The extrapolation of an index from the 3 core aspects of leadership capital allows us to join these approaches together and present a sharper measurement tool. The Leadership Capital Index covers personal and institutional resources and crucially demonstrates 'how resources allow impact' (Heffernan 2005: 616).

Political capital

The concept of political capital, from which leadership capital is derived, is not new to leadership studies in British politics. The idea has often been used heuristically to assess the prime minister. Heffernan (2005) identified political capital as the key attribute that allowed a prime minister to maintain ascendancy over other powerful actors: 'provided their political capital is in credit not debit, because they are better resourced in terms of their functions and executive legislature, they are more authoritative than any president' (2005, 36). Furthermore, Blick and Jones (2010) defined political capital as 'political resources', defined as 'a mixture of opinion, alliances, personal, constitutive and institutional powers' (2010, 176). They explained how it was 'high at the outset' with a 'broad tendency for it to decline thereafter, until a particular prime minister can no longer be sustained in office' (2010: 177). It is composed of two broadly different types: political and institutional resources and a leader with only one will find it 'hard to act' (172). It can, however, be temporarily revived by crises or election victories. Blick and Jones draw attention to the natural trajectory of leadership capital (Bennister, 't Hart, Worthy 2014), posing the obvious question first put by Enoch Powell that all political careers end in failure. After an initial honeymoon period the natural depreciation of capital is inevitable. It is important to differentiate between a broad notion of political capital which applies to individuals and groups as actors in the political sphere and the narrower concept of leadership capital (Bennister, 't Hart and Worthy 2014). Political capital is routinely used in popular political discourse as a heuristic device to

describe the degree of popularity, mandate or momentum enjoyed by professional politicians and leaders. However, leadership capital relates more narrowly to the 'aggregate authorisation' of leaders – the aggregate of a leader's resources (skills, relations and reputation).

If leadership capital rises and falls, depreciates and occasionally revives it is natural for researchers to ask if we can measure and track this ebb and flow. We can find some evidence from polling analysis that the trend for British prime ministers is inevitably downward, Denver and Garnett's (2012: 71) meta-analysis of opinion polling data found that 'it is certainly the case that all prime ministers leave office less popular then when they began. Most have ups and downs… but in the end the trend is inexorably downwards.' Davis and Seymour (2010) and Davis (2012) applied a Bourdieuian analysis to David Cameron's media relations, demonstrating that a confluence between the sociologically rooted Bourdieuian notions of capital can be transferred to the applied political sphere. More evident are expert surveys (see O'Malley 2007, Theakston and Gill 2006) and the four chapters in Strangio, 't Hart and Walter (2013) evaluating prime ministerial performance in Westminster style systems. It seems if we draw on the upsurge in such recent scholarly material, at least since 2010, there is a distinct market for more systematic understanding and evaluation of performance of leaders (Strangio, 't Hart and Walter 2013; Theakston and Gill 2006).

The Leadership Capital Index

As set out elsewhere (Bennister, 't Hart, Worthy 2014), the leadership capital index is derived from a conceptualisation of 3 core attributes of leadership capital: skills, relations and reputation. We conceptualise the Leadership Capital Index (LCI) as a diagnostic tool for tracking the strength of leader's political mandates over time. The LCI measures leadership as an aggregate of The LCI has the potential to generate a more nuanced picture of a leader's 'license to operate', both in time and over time, than the common job approval and poll ratings are able to provide. The index is the sum of the three key criteria of skills (soft and hard (s_{1+2}), relations (r_1) and reputation (r_2). It seeks to combine elements identified of 'competence, integrity and capacity' with reputational and integrity that form the basis of political capital (Renshon 2000; Schier 2008; Kane 2001). The index is akin to other efforts among many who have tried to capture key dimensions of politicians' leadership styles and skills and to develop them into predictive and/or evaluative performance assessment

instruments (Greenstein 2010, Kaarbo, 1997; Preston, 2001; Cronin 2008; Post, 2005; Hermann, 2013; see also Nye, 2008). With more specific reference to British prime ministers Jim Bullpit set out the 'natural rate of governability' presenting a set of variables in his statecraft analysis that has gained a welcome revival (see Buller and James 2012).

Table 1: The Leadership Capital Index of a Political Party Leader

Criteria	Indicators
S1	01 Political/policy vision
S1	02 Communicative performance
S2	03 Personal poll rating relative to rating at most recent election
S2	04 Longevity: time in office
S2	05 (Re)election margin for the party leadership
R1	06 Party polling relative to most recent election result
R1	07 Levels of public trust in leader
R1	08 Likelihood of credible leadership challenge within next 6 months
R2	09 Perceived ability to shape party's policy platform
R2	10 Perceived parliamentary effectiveness

We draw on 10 key variables derived from the core political leadership criteria discussed above. Bennister, 't Hart and Worthy (2014) provide a full explanation of how these variables were chosen and developed. The Index presents a mixed method approach combining available quantitative data with qualitative assessments. Much of the data required to perform a LCI analysis of a particular leader is available from public sources, such as election results, opinion polls and the parliamentary record. Some of the data is likely to be an aggregate or composite of numerous views. For example, assessment of the various 'skills' (S_1, S_2) indicators can be based on biography and examples drawn from the media or academic assessment. Where data is limited or unavailable, it may be that other proxies are used such as approval rating for trust. Once the analysis is undertaken, the data can then be 'scored' to allow a rating of a leader on the LCI.

The LCI thus offers a composite portrait of the shifting mix of skills, relation and reputation that can strengthen or weaken a leader. The LCI will reveal, for example, a leader who may have communication abilities but be a poor manager. It may also show apparently strong

leaders, winning elections but hobbled by poor party unity or challenger, which may in turn affect the passage of legislation.

The LCI combines straightforward use of publicly available data (indicators 3-7) with measures that have to be constructed intersubjective, i.e. through the use of an expert panel or working with multiple coders using an identical dataset and a systematic code book and ascertaining intercoder reliability scores (indicators 1-2, 8-10). This reflects the inherently multifaceted nature of the phenomenon that is political leadership. And it reflects the fact that the unit of analysis is leadership *capital*, in other words other people's judgments of a leader's quality and viability in the role. These are necessarily 'in the eye of the beholder' – e.g. indicators such as policy vision or communicative performance.

As with the 'natural rate of governability' some of the subjective measures are context-dependent (Bullpit 1986; Buller and James 2012). What are considered assets (skills, achievements or victories) in one setting, may not in another. This may vary from person to person or group to group: Renshon speaks of there being not one but 'several' public 'psychologies' assessing leaders (2000: 208). Renshon argues that building capital is not all catch-all race for the widest support: one leader as a unifier (a Churchill) may build capital through widening 'national' support: others (a Thatcher) may do so through division and strengthening a 'core' support of particular groups (2000: 207).

Tony Blair, January-May 2005

Why Tony Blair?

As a case study, Tony Blair is an atypical leader. In duration, his premiership was a particularly long one, equalled only by Thatcher in the twentieth century (Theakston 2013). For much of his first two terms he governed in favourable circumstances with high popularity, strong skills and consecutively the second and third largest majorities in British parliamentary history.

Contrasting epithets have been used to characterise Tony Blair as prime minister: from tales of the 'command' premiership of 'President' Blair; to narratives of an unfulfilled, frustrated prime minister (Riddell 2006; Stephens 2004). These, however apt, only capture a moment or phase of his tenure while assessment of Tony Blair as prime minister in a more systematic

and measured way reveals interesting trajectories and competing pressures. Tony Blair stretched and manipulated the institutional capacity and personalised his leadership to create an autonomous premiership; aspects of his style of leadership will undoubtedly endure as will many of the institutional reforms (Bennister 2009). However, he remained a constrained prime minister boxed in domestically by his chancellor and frustrated by a system slow to respond to his prompting. When his personal appeal was high he was empowered as an autonomous leader, but - post-Iraq - it waned and he became weak as authority seeped away and constraints re-emerged.

The issue of leadership capital and trajectory are fundamental to understanding the arc of Tony Blair's premiership, which presents an atypical pattern. While prime ministers often seek to push change early on, the early years of Blair's premiership are viewed as a 'missed opportunity', a failure to spend capital and to use his advantages to greater effect. Blair spoke of how he sought to preserve his capital rather than 'spend' it in his first term:

> At first, in those early months and perhaps in much of that initial term of office, I had political capital that I tended to hoard. I was risking it but within strict limits and looking to recoup it as swiftly as possible (Blair 2010: 123).

This was then followed by later series initiatives designed to push forward an agenda and secure a legacy (Norris 2005). Blair later mapped the arc of his own premiership when he complained that as Prime Minister you 'begin at your most popular and least capable and end at your least popular and most capable' (Heffernan 2005, 643). This is complicated by further contradictory shifts in popularity and resources: Blick and Jones (2010) identified how Blair possessed 'immense political capital' at the outset of his premiership but 'lacked institutional resources' yet as his time passed his 'political resources lessened while the institutional resources continued to expand' (2010: 172). Opinion polling data (see below, adapted from Bennister 2012) captures the popularity aspect of political capital as Blick and Jones comprehend it but not other elements.

*Figure 1: Tony Blair Net Approval Ratings 1997-2007 (Mori)*
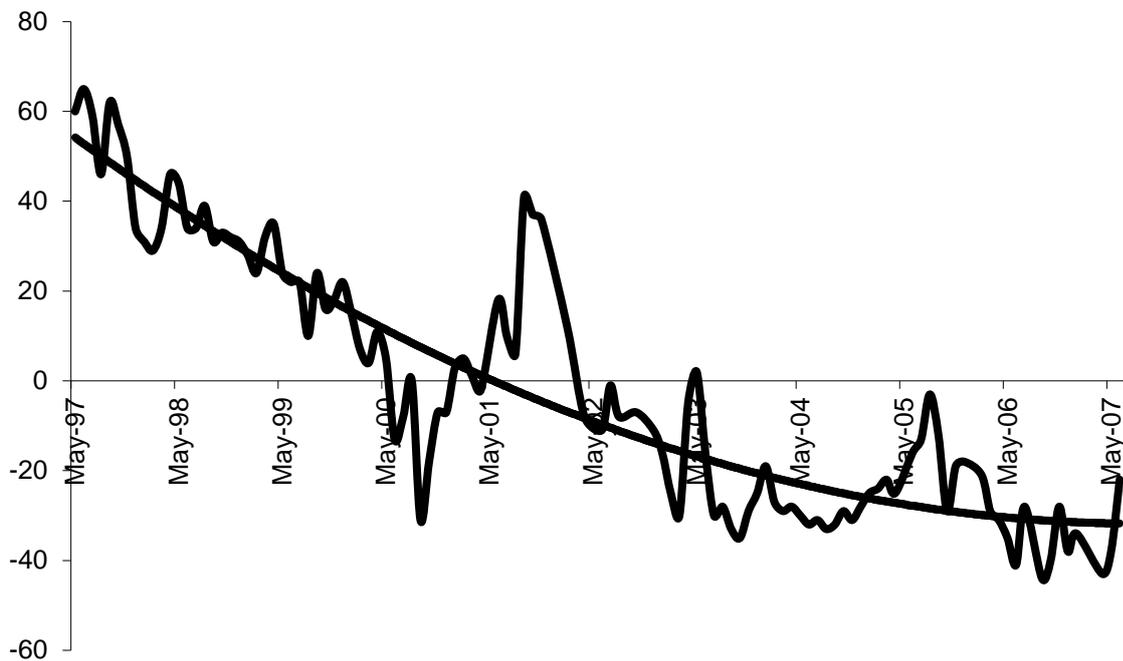
Blair's approval rate is a story of slow, albeit punctuated, decline, before settling into negative territory. The late upturn in Blair's rating in 2007 occurred once he had announced his date to step down.

The poll data shows the impact – both positive and negative – of external shocks or 'events'. For Needham: 'There is no direct causal link between leadership action and the poll ratings of incumbents since a premier's approval ratings are shaped by events beyond his control. However, the ways in which he responds to events and interprets them for the public do play an important role in public evaluations' (Needham 2005: 345). In the continual search for the enhanced personal political capital that accompanies high popularity ratings, Blair engaged in activities which were specifically designed to raise approval scores. As Needham (2005) notes however not all leadership activity is poll-driven (such as Blair on Iraq). Political capital can be gained by making decisions on issues which may run counter to public opinion – a short term hit may be beneficial in the long term (Bennister 2012).

Blair's time in office is particularly well documented and studied. In addition to the plethora of personal agency focused analysis there have been detailed studies of core executive

activity in the Blair years the institutional stretch, 'zig-zagging', special advisers and governing from the centre. Not only is there voluminous assessment of his time in office and legacy (both structural and personal), but also detailed studies of his parliamentary party (Cowley 2005), media perceptions and trust in Blair as a leader (Karp et al 2011: 2012), his own autobiography (Blair 2010) and academic and popular research into his legacy (Theakston 2012). The case of Blair proves a particularly fertile one to begin to utilise the LCI, as there is a mass and variety of scholarly (and confessional) material to draw on.

Beyond producing empirics, which will no doubt be contested, we can also map the trajectory of tenure of leadership to demonstrate the ebb and flow of leadership capital over time. Such ideal type analysis can give us a sense of travel of leaders in office, assist in categorisation, evaluation and prediction. An idealised map of the trajectory of Blair's leadership capital may look something like this over the full period of his time in office.
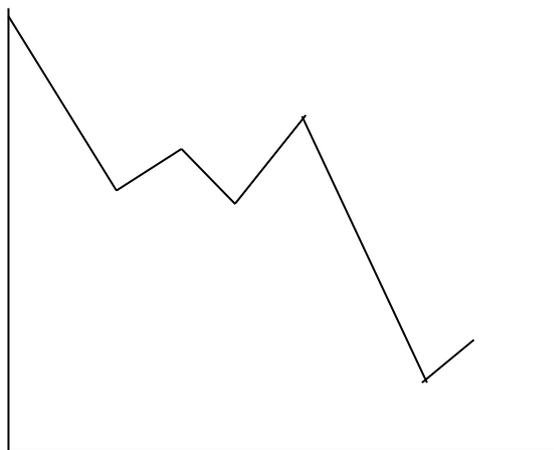
Why this period?

Context is crucial to understanding leadership (Strangio et al 2013, 3). The 'historical moment' and conditionality of leadership has been explored in presidential studies by Skowronek (1994) and subsequently applied to prime ministerial studies (Walter 2013, 33). We should keep this is mind as leaders are indeed shaped by the structural context and events that they find themselves confronted with in office. This can have negative or positive impact on the trajectory of leadership.

The LCI can give us a group of points within the ideal-type arc or trajectory, discussed above, to isolate and analyse. In this paper we close to isolate a particular period to apply the facets

of the LCI. The period chosen was towards the end of Blair's second term, as he sought to build a concrete legacy after his earlier caution or 'reluctance' to spend capital: he was 'less popular but more capable'. We focus on a four month period between January and the General Election of May 2005, eight years into his premiership and two years before his early forced departure from office, far on the decline side of the 'trajectory'. Heffernan spoke of how 'Tony Blair had been a strong and authoritative Prime Minister but in 2004-2005, battered by the fallout from Iraq and public sector reform, he was weaker than he had been in 2001' (616). Yet, through a process of 'accelerated fusion' and reform of Number Ten's operations, Blair had significantly strengthened the communications and resources available to the prime minister, creating what Burch and Holliday famously called 'an executive office in all but name' (Blick and Jones 2010, 173: Burch and Holliday 2004).

The period is bookended by two crucial events. The first, in late 2004, was when Blair announced he would step down as prime minister after serving a full third term (Seldon 2005, 295). This was intended to 'keep his enemies at bay' within the party by controlling the time of his departure (Seldon 2007, 295). According to Blair, it would buy him 'some time' to achieve and complete his work, against the calls for him to stand down in favour of Chancellor Gordon Brown (2010, 510). The decision can be seen as an almost unique attempt by a Prime Minister to control in advance the timing of departure, giving Blair an opportunity to 'spend' capital within a timetable that he controlled. The second event was the beginning of the General Election of May 2005 which, despite his apparent loss of popularity and authority, Blair went on to win with a reduced majority of 66. This would be the third term he sought to 'create a worthwhile legacy' (Kavanagh 2005, 5).

This period is shaped by two underlying external and internal issues: Iraq and Gordon Brown. The invasion and occupation of Iraq from 2003 onwards had severely eroded Blair's reputation and public trust and 'overshadowed' much else (Hill 2005). Continued violence and instability throughout this time kept the issue high on the media agenda and had damaging effects on Blair's relations and reputation with both his party and the electorate. In parallel, Brown's growing challenge and *de facto* control of domestic policy limited Blair's ability to act and undermined the loyalty of the party (Cowley 2005: Blair 2010).

His failure to 'spend his accumulated capital' and these obstacles meant that by 2005 Blair was widely regarded as unfulfilled. Seldon speaks of Blair's 'vast unfulfilled potential' marked only by 'rhetoric and good intentions' and Kavanagh saw him as a 'dissatisfied

leader' (Seldon 2007: 691; Kavanagh 2005: 5). Blair regretted the 'lost opportunity' of his first term and regarded the coming General Election of 2005 as his 'real' second term (Seldon 2005: 327). Traditionally, Parliamentary sessions before General Elections are taken up with small and non-contentious bills while foreign events would entail convenient and high profile meetings (Cowley 2005). Partly because of Blair's self-imposed timetable, the session is instead marked by a series of high profile foreign and domestic attempts to move forward far-reaching agendas. After the General Election Blair, with 'one eye on the clock', launched into a 'frenzy of activity' to move domestic and foreign agendas further (Norris 2005, 65). His actions in January-May 2005 can be seen as a precursor to this: a focused spending of capital after this period. A snapshot of the key events in this period is shown in the timeline below.

Tony Blair Timeline 2005

January

- 1st January Asian Tsunami
- 10th January Robert Peston book reignites Blair-Brown row
- 24th January PLP rebellion over gambling bill
- 27th January Blair's speech at the Davos summit calls for action on foreign aid to assist the war on terror
- 30th January first general election in Iraq

February

- 7 February rebellion over the Serious Organised Crime Bill
- 10 February PLP rebellion over ID cards
- Continued violence in Iraq
- Blair organised conference on academics and policy-makers on Climate Change

March

- 1 March London Conference on Middle East
- 9-10 March series of rebellions in the House of Commons over terrorism legislation

(Cowley 2005; Seldon 2007)

Applying each of the criteria systematically, below, we can isolate the variables that create a cumulative analysis of Blair's leadership capital during this period. Each variable is scored and summarised below, then discussed in further detail.

Criteria	Indicators	Measurements	Sources and summary
S1	**01 Political/policy vision**	1. Completely absent 2. Unclear/inconsistent **3. Moderately clear/consistent** 4. Clear/consistent **5. Very clear/consistent**	In this period Blair maintained a powerful and ambitious vision, for foreign affairs but a relatively moderate domestic agenda (ID cards aside). Yet limited by electoral considerations and a lack of clear values.
S1	**02 Communicative performance**	1. Very poor 2. Poor 3. Average **4. Good** 5. Very good	Blair retained his very strong communications kills. However his abilities were limited by a law of diminishing returns-fewer in his party or the public believed or trusted what he said.
S2	**03 Personal poll rating relative to opposition leader**	1. Very low (<-15%) 2. Low (-5 to -15%) 3. Moderate (-5% to 5%) 4. 1-5 **5. 5-10**	Remarkably, Blair retained a strong lead over the Conservative opposition leader Michael Howard, which fluctuated between 10 and 15 points ahead in polling. Blair's lead was less testament to continued popularity that Howard's poor image and action.
S2	**04 Longevity: time in office**	1. <1 year 2. 1 – 2 years 3. 2 – 3 years 4. 3 - 4 years **5. >4 years**	Blair had been in office for 104 months, making him one of the most experienced Prime Ministers of modern times. While this gave him considerable knowledge and understanding, the tenure may also have begun to strain him. It also led to tension within government, particularly with the Civil Service.
S2	**05 (Re)election margin for the party leadership**	1. Very small (<1% of relevant electors, i.e. caucus, party members) 2. Small (1-5%) **3. Moderate (5-10%)** 4. Large (10-15%) **5. Very large (>15%)**	Blair's large margin of victory was 11 years in the past and its effect by this time was mainly negative-to highlight tensions with Brown
R1	**06 Party polling relative to most recent election result**	1. <-10% **2. -10% to-2.5%** 3. -2.5% to 2.5% 4. 2.5% to 10% 5. >10%	Blair had been an unmatched electoral asset for the Labour party. As with Blair's personal polling, the party popularity continued to decline. Also as with Blair himself, the

			party was faced by an opposition less popular and seemingly unable to gain support.
R1	**07 Levels of public trust in leader**	1. 0-20% **2. 20-40%** 3. 40-60% 4. 60-80% **5. 80-100%**	Blair faced a crisis of personal trust, stemming mainly from Iraq. By 2005 more than 6 out of every 10 members of the public did not 'trust' Blair, citing his 'lying over Iraq' or propensity to 'spin' generally.
R1	**08 Likelihood of credible leadership challenge within next 6 months**	**1. Very High** 2. High 3. Moderate 4. Low 5. Very Low	Blair faced the most severe leadership threat of modern times. The 'duarchy' with Brown had grown increasingly acrimonious, creating dysfunctional and factionalised government and divided party. This limited Blair's control of Cabinet, party and policy.
R2	**09 Perceived ability to shape party's policy**	1. Very low **2. Low** 3. Moderate 4. High 5. Very high	Blair's attempts to push domestic and foreign policy in this period largely failed. His attempts at a London peace conference for the Middle East failed, his movement of climate change and poverty were only partially successful and his reaction to the Asian Tsunami was heavily criticised. Domestically the government dropped Blair's personal policy of ID cards and faced a series of rebellions over major and minor legislation.
R2	**10 Perceived parliamentary effectiveness**	1. Very low **2. Low** 3. Moderate 4. High 5. Very high	Despite his majority of 167 seats Blair found it increasingly difficult to control his rebellious party. The Parliamentary Labour Party, embittered by Iraq and increasingly loyal to Brown, rebelled over a series of issues, culminating in a 28 hour joint disruption with the House of Lords over terrorism legislation.

01 Vision

As visionary, Blair was seen as a potential 'weather-maker' and transformist leader (Hennessy 2001: Seldon 2005). Borrowing from Skowronek, Blair's rhetoric early in his premiership was as a 'reconstructer' and transformer, seeking to reform the political system, a leader seeking to 'forge new ideas and new arrangements' (Laing and McCaffrie 2013, 81-82).

By 2005, Blair was no longer a 'radical transformer' but more an orthodox innovator focusing on 'signature' areas (Laing and McCaffrie 2013, 81-82). A gap can be seen between foreign and domestic policy, possibly reflecting Blair's increasing interest in former and neglect of the latter (Kavanagh 2005, 15). In 2005, Blair's foreign policy still contained a range of far-reaching goals including Middle East Peace, action on climate change and the alleviation of poverty in Africa (Seldon 2005, 302). Blair spoke of this period as dominated by 'hard' action in Iraq and Afghanistan and 'soft' progress towards Palestinian statehood (Blair 2010, 515). By contrast, his domestic agenda was about 'delivery' rather than change, focusing on education and health, though it also included a controversial policy to introduce identity cards into the UK and some constitutional reform (Seldon 2005, 304). This drift towards foreign policy is partly rooted in the office itself, where leaders continually find themselves 'enmeshed' in foreign affairs (Hill 2005, 385). It was also linked to Blair's 'carving up' of foreign and domestic policy between himself and the chancellor, though the exact diving lines were contested (see below).

Blair continued to speak about being 'new, modern and radical' but the 'passage of time decreases the credibility of his rhetoric' (Kavanagh 2005, 5). Blair's vision in this period was limited both by electoral considerations and his own approach. First, the electoral strategy that anchored him to the centre also 'simultaneously tied his hands in terms of visionary policy change' –he spoke of how earlier he had 'tried to reform with the grain of opinion not against it' (Norris 2005, 65: Blair 2010: 123). His 'cautious moderation' was 'the bedrock of his popular success' but also limited 'what he could do with his popularity' –Iraq illustrated the perils of taking risks (Norris 2005, 65-67). Second, Skidelsky compared Blair with Lloyd George as a politician who possessed powerful gifts but an 'unfocused radicalism' that was not grounded in any 'concrete philosophy' or set of beliefs (2005, 440). In style, this lack of values was reinforced by Blair's own tendency to become a 'crisis manager and headline seeker' (Kavanagh 2005, 16).

02 Communication

Blair is viewed as one of the most powerful communicators among recent UK Prime Ministers, perhaps the high point of a growing personalisation that places the leader 'centre stage' (Bennister 2014; Heffernan 2006, 583). Blair was a central part of the highly sophisticated media strategy of New Labour that sought to 'vigorously intervene in the news cycle', and continually portray 'government actions as the result of Tony Blair's own decisions' a strategy that helped in turn fuel the 'presidential' thesis (Heffernan 2006, 582).

Blair still retained a 'remarkable capacity to communicate' in 2005 (Kavanagh 2005: 18). At the end of January he spoke on the link between the War on Terror and foreign aid at Davos, a set piece example of his continued ability to argue and persuade (Seldon 2005, 698). The difficulty for Blair was less his skills and more their effect. His communication skills had less and less purchase or effect on his reputation and relationships. By 2005, the loss of trust in Blair meant fewer and fewer in the electorate or his own party, however well he expressed himself, believed what he said (see below). The attempts to control the news agenda also fostered in the long term a 'set of antagonistic relationships between new labour's news handlers and elements of the media' (Heffernan 2006, 588-589).

03 Polling – personal

The position of the leader as electoral asset is crucial to continuation in office and a key constituent of personal power (Heffernan 2005, 642). Thatcher's removal by her own party served a reminder to Blair of the consequences of loss of both intra-p and extra party support. Blair had given the Labour party 'unprecedented electoral success' with two landslide victories of 178 and then 167 seats in 1997 and 2001 (Norris 2005, 64-46). Although the exact level of leadership effect is contested he continued to exert a 'significant effect' on voters (Norris 2005, 62).

By 2005 both party and leader (below) found their poll ratings declining. Between 2001 and 2005 second order elections showed Blair's popularity was becoming 'stale' (Norris 2005, 46). Nevertheless, the descent was gradual. Tony Blair's Chief of Staff described Blair and the Labour party's polling decline as a 'long, slow but seemingly inexorable slide into unpopularity' rather than the 'ploughs and troughs' that marked the Thatcher governments (Powell 2010, 139).

However, the context made the decline less dangerous than it would otherwise be. First, support was falling from a very high level (see figure x). Second, and more importantly, Blair was faced by a Conservative party on its third opposition leader, former Home Secretary Michael Howard. Despite Howard's political experience, he pushed the Tory party to the right and away from the centre and opened them up to the charge, as Blair put it, that they had not changed (Seldon 2007, 229). Blair felt Howard lacked a 'true political instinct' (517). Consequently Blair retained a healthy lead over Howard, with an average gap of 17 points when asked 'who would make the best PM' (UK Polling Report 2011).

04 Longevity

Up until January 2005 Blair had been Prime Minister for 104 months, one of the longest serving Post-war Prime Ministers. The question of longevity may hold both positive and negative consequences. Assessment of Presidents and Prime Ministers find 'greatness and longevity in office usually go hand in hand' (Theakston 2013, 230). The Prime Ministers considered to have had the greatest impact 'served for six or more years in number 10' with those considered failures serving for three years or less (ibid: 231).

Longevity brings skills and experience as well as knowledge of the machinery and role. By 2005 Blair felt he had the experience and skills, with his commitment to continue for another full term testament to his belief (Kavanagh 2005, 3). Yet to survive requires 'psychological strength, physical toughness and…resistance' (234). On a personal level some allege that 'hubris' had set in Blair's premiership following the invasion of Iraq (Owen and Davidson 2009). It was also claimed Blair was 'troubled by health scares and self-doubt' (Kavanagh 2005, 3). In terms of the machinery of government, there were also signs of discord between Ministers and officials within the civil service and Blair's bilateral and 'informal' decision-making style was seen to undermine the formal system (Rawnsley 2010).

Leadership Election Victory 05

Blair's victory as leader was 11 years in the past, too long ago to have any effect (Kelly et al 2010). Rather than a source of legitimacy, discussion of the leadership merely served to highlight the deep discord around the so-called 'pact' between Blair and Brown. Indeed, it is claimed Blair even considered running a new leadership election against his rival Brown-though this is likely testament to his frustration rather than a realistic proposal (Seldon 2005).

06 Polling – party

The Labour party had enjoyed 'unprecedented electoral success' under Tony Blair (Norris 2005, 64). The Labour party dropped an average of around 10 points between the General Elections of 2001 and 2005. Yet, as with Blair, the poor state of the opposition mitigated the impact. Norris felt the Conservative party 'has seemed emasculated by Tony Blair' (43). The Conservatives had been 'disastrously' weakened by Blair's first victory in 1997 and made only 'painfully modest progress' by 2005 (Norris 2005, 45-46). The Conservative party remained behind by average of 5 percentage points in polls in this period (UK Polling Report 2005).

07 Trust

Trust is a key part of transformation leadership, and, according to Bourdieu (1986, 2005) a powerful bond of political capital. Public perceptions of good leadership are frequently linked to a capacity to tell the truth, admit mistakes and demonstrate transparency (Theakston 2013, 233). High levels of trust may be linked to public support and, consequently, greater capacity for innovative or radical policy (Hetherington 2005).

Blair came into office committed to a transparent and open approach, a commitment he later regretted (Blair 2010). By 2005, Blair faced a deepening loss, indeed a crisis, of personal trust. In a poll in January 65% of the public did not trust Blair to 'tell the truth', with 72% of those distrusting Blair citing the fact he 'spins too much' and 54 % that he 'lied to take Britain into war in Iraq' (YouGov 2005).

Iraq was central to this loss of trust. It was, as Blair admitted 'an unpopular war' undertaken with a 'very unpopular American President' (2010, 511). Despite the free elections of January in Iraq there was continued violence and disorder. As of September 2004 more than 50% of polled respondents were against continued military action (Yougov 2013). The issue of Iraq and Blair's integrity was continuously emphasised by the Conservative press (see Karp and Stevens 2012). Blair (2010) spoke of feeling 'under attack' and claimed that the BBC in particular continually focused on the subject (511-512). This was slightly offset by the presence of Labour supporting newspapers and the differing (and complex) approaches and effects of the Conservative attack (Karp et al 2011).

On a personal level Blair admitting to feeling 'demoralised by the sheer weight of criticism' (Blair 2010, 519). Politically, the loss of trust negated Blair's communication skills and

raised questions about his electability. It also 'gave left and right unity' and strengthened the position of his increasingly strong rival within the party (Blair 2010, 511).

08 Challenge

One of the keys to any assessment of Blair's capital is the strength of an alternate challenger in this period. All prime ministers face senior colleagues with a 'veto capacity' (Heppell 2013, 137). Tension between the prime minister and finance minister is a recurrent feature of Westminster systems and in the UK the Chancellor and prime minister is no exception (Laing and McCaffrie 2013). There is sometimes a de facto division of roles: prime ministers 'tend to be agenda setters and symbolic leaders of reform' while the 'treasurers have had more substantial roles in implementation' (Laing and McCaffire 2013, 85).

Yet Blair's relationship with his Chancellor was more fraught and more complex than usual. Chancellor Gordon Brown had 'agreed' in 1994 to stand aside from the party leadership contest in exchange for control of large parts of domestic policy and the Premiership after Blair. By 2005, although the two men effectively ran the government as a 'joint premiership' or 'duarchy', a decade of division left them divided into two warring camps (Seldon 2007: 337: Kavanagh 2005). In January 2005 an expose of the Labour government quoted Brown as saying he 'no longer trusted anything Blair said' (Seldon 2007, 327). Relations were so poor Blair considered sacking Brown but found he lacked the power to do so (2007: 330).

The result by 2005 was a deeply divided and fragmented government (Kavanagh 2007). The 'Blair/Brown division' split policy and power into 'fiefdoms' with a 'fundamental impact' on Blair's ability to govern (Richards 2011, 35-36). It also divided the loyalties of Ministers: Blair sought to 'marginalise' Brownites and promote Blairites (Heppell 2013, 137). However, testament to Brown's power by 2005 there were only two 'Blairites' in Cabinet, with Blair having lost a series of heavyweight Blairite Ministers between 2001 and 2004 (Seldon 2007).

As well as hampering policy-making, the in-fighting split and divided the party. Blair called this period 'TB/GB' and spoke of his chancellor as being in a 'highly dangerous mood' sending signals to the party that Brown was 'real Labour' (Blair 2010: 510). He felt that the Labour Party saw Blair as an 'albatross' and felt they could 'renew under Brown' (2010: 510-511). A poll found Brown out polling Blair by 39 to 30 when respondents were asked who they would prefer as Prime Minister (YouGov/Daily Telegraph 2005). The infighting became

divisive that Blair and Brown were warned by their own party that they risked losing the election (Seldon 2007, 316). This fed in turn into the growing rebellion in Parliament.

09 Policy

Blair sought to push move forward with a new agenda, particularly in foreign affairs but also with an unusually heavy legislative agenda. His attempt to set the agenda or push proposals was marked by numerous high profile failures.

In foreign policy, Blair's ambitious agenda encountered mostly failure. His 'soft' approach to Palestinian statehood floundered. The Middle East peace talks in London, intended to move forward the stalled peace process and 'roadmap', were undermined by a lack of co-operation from the US or Israel. The much reduced meeting received only a cursory mention in his autobiography (Seldon 2005: 318-319: Blair 2010, 515). As described above, hopes of a new era in Iraq following the first elections were undermined by continued violence. Not only in planned policy but in reacting to 'events' Blair appeared to perform badly: his apparent lack of response during January to the Asian Tsunami was heavily criticised, though his decision to increase aid was supported in later polling (see YouGov 2005). In a few areas Blair did use his agenda setting influence to move forward ideas and give them priority. He had some success in organising meetings and mobilising groups over climate change as well as over alleviating poverty in Africa (Seldon 2007: 326-327). Significantly, these were two areas where he and Brown agreed and could work together (Seldon 2007: 321)

Domestically, between November 2004-May 2005 18 pieces of legislation were passed. Priority was given to health, education, law and order (Blair 2010: 504). There were numerous legislative achievements including the creation of Serious Organised Crime Agency and a Supreme Court for the UK. The latter piece of constitutional reform represented the last in a long and radical line of constitutional reform in the UK, in which Blair appeared to take little interest (Bogdanor 2010).

It was the policy failures and battles where Blair's weakening capital was exposed. The same period also saw the dropping of the commitment to introduce national ID cards to the UK. This policy was closely associated with Blair himself and tied to national security and the war on terror. There was also a difficult passage for a key terrorism bill in both Commons and Lords (Cowley 2005).

The reasons for Blair's policy weakness were partly due to his declining status, driven by division with Brown and weakening party relations. Yet it was also Blair's own choices. Blair's decision to pursue such an ambitious policy agenda was a strategic mistake, possibly driven by his feeling of limited time. His poor choice (and loss) of Ministers for key departments and subsequent attempts to control them further undermined his policy influence (Seldon 2007, 697). In foreign policy he appeared to over reach himself and over-estimate his influence-his commitment to Middle East Peace relied on partners who were unwilling to exert themselves and Iraq 'overshadowed' and weakened his other foreign policy initiatives (Hill 2005, 408). Blair simply lacked the other constituents of leadership capital, whether his own skills, support or relations, to carry through so ambitious an agenda.

10 Parliament

Although research has tended to focus on executive relations, party control, management and 'security of tenure' is crucial to understanding leadership capital and is central to the 'variability' of Prime Ministerial power (Heppell 2013, 129). Party loyalty and discipline can enable action or disrupt, block and, ultimately remove, a leader.

Blair's relationship with the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) was driven by two contradictory forces. On the one hand, Blair's premiership came after a series of reforms that gave Blair the 'strongest and most centralised form of leadership the Labour party had ever experienced' (Heppell 2013, 131). A series of structural changes in the 1980s and 1990s gave security of tenure, enhanced 'Prime ministerial autonomy' and helped project 'an image of strong and effective leadership' (Heppell 2013, 132:146). On the other hand, behaviour of both parties in the legislature had been towards 'increasing ill-discipline' since the 1970s with governing parties rebelling and voting against the whip more frequently (Heppell 2013, 133). Rebellion carried its own momentum-a propensity to rebel frequently led to more disobedience in the future (Cowley 2005).

During his second term Blair encountered rebellions in 21% of votes (Heppell 2013, 133). The tendency towards disruption increased as ex-ministers and 'serial' rebel numbers grew (Heppell 2013, 133). The Blair government had been damaged by large rebellions over NHS reforms in 2003 and reform of higher education fees in 2004 (Cowley and Stuart 2005, 23). In March 2003 the 139 Labour MPs voted against the government in the largest rebellion in modern British political history (Cowley and Stuart 2005, 23). As well as the House of

Commons, the reformed House of Lords, more assertive and without any party holding a majority, inflicted a series of defeats on the government (Cowley and Stuart 2005, 38-40).

Between January 2005 and the dissolution, rebellions by the PLP were 'frequent and widespread' with 61 rebellions in the period (Cowley 2005, 226). Brown may also have supported and encouraged the ill-discipline in certain cases (Seldon 2007). As well as ID cards there were a succession of serious rebellions on minor bills such as mental incapacity, gambling and railways (Cowley 2005, 271). The rebellion in March 2005 over terrorism legislation culminated in 28 hour session pitching rebel MPs and members of the House of Lords against the government (Cowley 2005, 234:272). The rebellions were driven by a combustible mixture of the Labour party's growing support for Brown, anger over Iraq and, possibly, attempts by MPs to distance themselves from an unpopular leader (Cowley 2005, 225-234).

The rebelliousness of the party damaged Blair's final months and disrupted the legislative programme. It was symptomatic of Blair's weakening capital and the breakdown of leader party relations. One commentator observed that Blair had 'achieved the impossible…after winning a landslide majority of 160, he is forced to conduct his business as if he were leader of a minority government' (Cowley and Stuart 2005, 23). On one level, the programme continued. For governments with a large majority 'revolts can be absorbed and the legislative agenda will remain on track' (Heppell 2013, 134). Blair's programme broadly did so and the U-turn on ID cards was due partly electoral expediency rather than anticipated defeat. However, on the level of reputation and how rebellion 'shapes perceptions of the incumbent party and Prime Minister' the disruption was highly damaging (Heppell 2013, 135).

Analysis

Overall, Blair scores 31 out of 50, classifying him just on the cusp as a medium capital leader: 'muddling through' in the face of significant obstacles and divisions, yet with provisional license to operate. At various points in this period Blair sought to persuade and carry forward policy agendas, probably driven by the need to secure a distinct 'legacy'. Yet this did not translate into policy success-indeed the period seems marked by failures and opposition.

The LCI index shows both the strengths and weaknesses of Blair's position in a key period in his premiership. Blair's strength was subject to diminishing capital returns, as the various

'strong' sources of capital, mainly in Blair's skills and experience, were cancelled out and undermined by worsening negative relations and reputation. Blair's skills, ambition and ability to communicate remained intact. His vision remained ambitious, particularly in foreign policy terms. Blair also polled ahead of the Conservative leader by a safe margin-a distance that should conventionally remove the danger of Blair becoming an electoral liability. However, his communicative abilities were no longer anchored to public support or trust or party loyalty that would give it traction.

In relational terms, the Labour party retained an edge over the Conservatives. Yet this did not translate into support. Blair faced a twin problem of declining personal trust, from both public and party, and an extremely strong rival. These two factors reinforced each other, as Blair himself admitted that the party was rebellious partly because of the strength of his rival and partly because of Iraq (Blair 2010, 511).

In reputational terms Blair found shaping the policy agenda domestically and abroad increasingly difficult. His grand peace conference was a failure while his attempt to move climate change was at best modest success. Domestically Blair's flagship policy on ID cards was dropped and both major and minor legislation faced serious opposition and disruption. Interestingly, one final piece of constitutional reform, the creation of a supreme court, was largely ignored by commentators, but is not necessarily something Blair could gain credit for and develop reputational enhancement.

Examining the Balance

Blair's continued capital, even if mild or short-lived, was partly due to context and partly institutional. First, Blair in this period fits the academic assessment that a leader needs 'luck' (Theakston 2013, 233). Blair was fortunate in the state of the opposition leader and party, who remained less popular and unable to fully 'oppose'. A more vigorous opposition, combined with a critical media, a powerful rival and rebellious party, would have been a probably fatal combination to Blair's weakening capital. Second, a number of institutions also made Blair's position more secure-the Labour party's selection rules and the legitimising influence of office undoubtedly buoyed Blair and the prestige of office allowed him to seek the grand attempts at agenda setting, particularly in foreign affairs. His large majority absorbed the practical (but not the symbolic) consequences of repeated rebellion.

The decline of the capital was in part due to relations. The dysfunction between Blair and Brown undermined Blair's ability to make policy or act, partly owing to Brown's 'ownership' of domestic policy, but also due to the loss of loyalty of the PLP. The media's growing personalisation of attacks and the public loss of trust made for a deepening, ever-decreasing loss of leadership capital and authority.

Yet it was also his own choices, both in terms of his vision and his management. Blair's foreign policy agenda, including Palestinian statehood, set an ambitious target. Moreover, it relied on US co-operation and he failed to see how Iraq had damaged his influence (Seldon 2007; Hill 2005). Similarly, the introduction of identity cards in the UK represented a decisive and controversial change and the agenda more generally contained a series of minor changes that could provoke the ire of his party. Why Blair chose to push a heavy and controversial legislative timetable is unclear-it may be part of the frenetic attempt seen after the 2005 General Election to create a legislative legacy of reform in the limited time available (Norris 2005).

The LCI and the British Prime Minister

A superficial analysis of the LCI reveals a presidential-style figure, seeking agenda setting actions abroad. This analysis comes at the end of a serious effort by Blair to 'stretch' the office and build institutional capacity. The period is marked by a series of 'interventions' on foreign aid, climate change and Middle East Peace, designed to move forward his 'signature' agendas and drive change.

Yet the LCI reveals how this choice was partly due to weakness. His 'presidential' style stemmed from an agreement between himself and Brown and may have been one area in which he had relatively autonomous power (Blick and Jones 2010: 175). The leadership-centric media coverage may have been beginning to prove a negative. By 2005, his 'presidential style' belied the fact that Blair had little control of domestic reform and, indeed, weakening control of his party or parliament.

A structural analysis of constraints within the executive and party appears to fit much better. Blair in 2005 can be seen as buttressed and constrained with dynamic and shifting relations. Yet a structural, resource based analysis fails to fully give weight to Blair's continued ability to seek to shape the agenda on his own personalised terms. Blair is at the centre of a web but remains the only actor capable of initiating change, his choices and actions shaped both

negatively and positively much of what happened in this period. The core-executive also focuses overly on the 'centre'-the PLP were also a powerful constraint on Blair's actions. Blair appears as a leader seeking to move beyond institutional constraints (Bennister 2012).

Skowronek (1994) offers a way of seeing Blair's leadership capital as shaped by a series of institutional trajectories. On the one hand Blair benefited from, and consciously built upon, past holders of the office. This strengthening of the machinery of government, as well as a conviction style of leadership (largely borrowed from Thatcher) and communication reforms gifted Blair an increasingly strong leadership capacity. However, other institutional trajectories emerge to constrain Blair and limit his capital. The rebelliousness of Blair's party was part of a long move towards greater rebellion and disorder (Cowley 2005). The increasingly assertive second chamber was set in motion by Blair's own reforms of the House of Lords in 1999 (Russell 2013). The media personalisation may date back at least two decades to Thatcher. Even the tension between chancellor-as-rival and prime minister is not unique, though it was probably uniquely disruptive and severe in Blair's case (Kavanagh 2005). Blair may also, albeit willingly, have been part of a trajectory of office that 'pulls' leaders towards the 'foreign stage' and away from domestic politics (Hill 2005, 385).

Skowronek's (1994) criteria offers three alternatives as to what a leader can do: they repudiate, create a new orthodoxy or affirm. To fully apply Skowronek, a similar exercise would need to be conducted for the whole the Blair premiership and a trajectory of Blair's capital flow could then be extrapolated. The isolation of Blair's leadership capital in early 2005, catches him in movement between types. Blair's leadership capital leaves him with less scope to be the 'reconstructer' he wishes to be or was previously. Blair in 2005 sits uncomfortably between an 'articulator', seeking to preserve and secure the changes made, and a pre-empter, seeking to 'repudiate' parts of the system through emphasis on 'signature issues'. Blair's decision to announce a further term was seen as a means to preserve a legacy while his continued efforts in 'grand' areas carry the mark of continued innovation.

Conclusion

Analysis of Blair in this period demonstrates the nuanced interplay between personal and institutional resources situated in the context of the time. The analysis demonstrates the potential of the LCI as a conceptual and methodological tool for greater systematic analysis. The tool requires refining to harden up the differentiation between political and leadership capital and to examine the link between single scores and leadership trajectory. Yet the

operationalization allows us to understand and explore a more nuanced approach to political leadership.

Blair's outward appearance was as a 'predominant' prime minister, however looking at the 3 core aspects we identify as essential to political leadership we can under Blair as a limited and constrained actor. This may be an example of the British political system working, reining in over mighty autonomous leaders who are after all without any direct electoral mandate. Capital can be generated by consensus and conciliation too as an antidote to personalised, singular leadership. Blair's actions show him to be an ambitious politician, seeking to spend his leadership capital in a bid to move forward his agenda in the limited time his 'self-denying' promise gave him. His efforts both domestically and abroad could be seen as 'failure to notice or accept limits' (Laing and McCaffrie 2013, 84). The parts of his leadership that stayed in credit (his skills his popularity) were either on the wane or isolated and stale-unconnected to key groups and unable to maintain or build a reputation. Conversely, the 'debt' parts of his 'account' (his party relations, rival, levels of trust) were connected and dynamic, feeding off of each other. His ambition outstripped his capability: Blair had less leadership capital than he believed.

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