

PSA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

30 MARCH 2015

Going On and On? Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher: Leadership Capital Compared

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We define Leadership Capital as the aggregate authority composed of three dimensions: skills, relations and reputation of a leader (Bennister, 't Hart and Worthy 2015). The Leader Capital Index builds on other approaches to create a diagnostic 'checklist' tool for assessing a political leader's 'stock' of authority.¹ This paper applies the Index to two of the most dominant 20th century British prime ministers, Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher at 3 key points in their tenure. The LCI shows that Thatcher's and Blair's trajectory is more nuanced and interesting than conventional understandings of them as almost wholly 'dominant' leaders. The comparison offers a clear contrast in the overall trajectory of authority. Thatcher swung from weak (but apparently survivable) amounts of capital to dominance and back to a different, more fatal, kind of weakness. Blair moved from huge (unspent) credit to steep loss and then a less mentioned partial regain. The analysis underscores the contingent and limited nature of prime ministerial predominance.

¹ For more detailed discussion of the LCI and the methodology see Bennister, 't Hart & Worthy (2015) and our blog <https://measuringleadership.wordpress.com/>

Political and Leadership Capital in British Politics

The concept of political capital has often been used heuristically to assess British prime ministers. Heffernan (2005) identified it as the key attribute that allowed a prime minister to maintain ascendancy: ‘provided their political capital is in credit not debit...they are more authoritative than any president’ (2005, 36). Blick and Jones draw attention to the natural trajectory of leadership capital, defining it as ‘political resources...a mixture of opinion, alliances, personal, constitutive and institutional powers’ that are ‘high at the outset’ with a ‘broad tendency for it to decline thereafter’ (2010: 177).

We refer to a narrower idea, leadership capital, as an aggregate authority composed of three dimensions: skills, relations and reputation (Bennister, ‘t Hart and Worthy 2015). The LCI is a diagnostic ‘checklist’ tool that can be used for assessing a political leader’s ‘stock’ of authority and to track its ebb and flow over time.

The LCI fits with a series of work seeking a more systematic understanding and evaluation of performance of leaders (Strangio, ‘t Hart and Walter 2013; Theakston and Gill 2006). This includes expert surveys (see O’Malley 2007, Theakston and Gill 2006) and a range of theoretical applications for evaluating prime ministerial performance in Westminster style systems see Strangio, ‘t Hart and Walter (2013). This also includes Bulpitt’s ‘natural rate of governability’ and statecraft analysis that has gained a welcome revival (see Buller and James 2012).

The Leadership Capital Index

The LCI set out in table 1 has the potential to generate a more nuanced picture of a leader’s ‘license to operate’, both in time and over time. The index is the sum of the three key criteria of skills (soft and hard (s1+2), relations (r1) and reputation (r2). It seeks to combine the 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 leadership (Greenstein 2010, Kaarbo, 1997; Preston, 2001; Cronin 2008; Post, 2005; Hermann, 2013; see also Nye, 2008).

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

Criteria	Indicators	Measurements
S1	01 Political/policy vision	1. Completely absent 2. Unclear/inconsistent 3. Moderately clear/consistent 4. Clear/consistent 5. Very clear/consistent
S1	02 Communicative performance	1. Very poor 2. Poor 3. Average 4. Good 5. Very good

S2	03 Personal poll rating relative to opposition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very low (<-15%) 2. Low (-5 to -15%) 3. Moderate (-5% to 5%) 4. 1-5 5. 5-10
S2	04 Longevity: time in office	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <1 year 2. 1 – 2 years 3. 2 – 3 years 4. 3 - 4 years 5. >4 years
S2	05 (Re)election margin for the party leadership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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%)
R1	06 Party polling relative to most recent election result	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <-10% 2. -10% to -2.5% 3. -2.5% to 2.5% 4. 2.5% to 10% 5. >10%
R1	07 Levels of public trust in leader	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 0-20% 2. 20-40% 3. 40-60% 4. 60-80% 5. 80-100%
R1	08 Likelihood of credible leadership challenge within next 6 months	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very low 2. Low 3. Moderate 4. High 5. Very high
R2	09 Perceived ability to shape party's policy platform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very low 2. Low 3. Moderate 4. High 5. Very high
R2	10 Perceived parliamentary effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very low 2. Low 3. Moderate 4. High 5. Very high

The Index is designed to help us spot key variations in the nature and aggregate volume of leadership capital. The LCI merges perceptual categories with observable performance data (e.g. electoral and legislative record). See table 1 for a full outline and the appendix for a full discussion of methodology. The LCI needs to fit within the particular context that limits or enables leaders (Strangio, ‘t Hart and Walter 2013: 3).

Thatcher and Blair Compared

This analysis captures leadership capital levels for two prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, at precise points in their terms, for Thatcher in April of 1981 (T1), 1985 (T2) and

1989 (T3) and Blair in 1999 (T1), 2003 (T2) and 2007 (T3). These were chosen as points of analysis equidistant at four year intervals between the peaks of campaigns and elections, at a time when policy agendas become more apparent. These are mid-points in tenure, capturing the distance travelled in the electoral cycle to build a trajectory of leadership (see table 4).

Before presenting our analysis utilising the LCI, we briefly compare and contrast the style, ideological approach and policy trajectory of the two leaders. Thatcher and Blair shared a number of similarities. Both were dominant post war prime ministers; the greatest election winners in their party's history, who stood apart from their parties but came to personify them (Kavanagh 2007:14). Both come out high in prime ministerial ranking evaluations by the public and MPs (Theakston 2013; Royal Holloway Group 2014).

First, as leaders, Blair and Thatcher were long serving: Thatcher was in power for eleven years and 208 days Blair for ten years and 56 days. Longevity is significant for the building of leadership capital:

...long-term leaders generally have firm support bases within the party that have crystallized over time [and] also develop a 'taken for granted-ness' among the party faithful; namely, it is their leadership style and political profile that dominate the party's political memory (Horiuchi et al 2013, 3)

There are also more symbolic effects for leadership capital, when voters conflate environment with agency:

In such political/psychological environments, what we call an 'attribution effect' may occur. A party's success during a long-serving leader's tenure is credited to the leader's credentials, not to exogenous factors (Horiuchi et al 2013: 3)

Second, both leaders styled themselves as 'transformative' leaders, seeking to change the existing system in some way by, in the mould of Skowronek's (2010) 'reconstructers' creating a new orthodoxy. Domestically and abroad their leadership was marked by a 'failure to notice or accept limits' (Laing and McCaffrie 2013, 84). Here the context of the arrival of each in power is crucial to understanding them ('t Hart 2014). Thatcher and Blair were in some senses 'anti-declinst' leaders who hoped to reverse, re-orientate or rejuvenate British politics after a period of what they defined as stagnation and crisis (Cannadine 2003).

Third, Blair and Thatcher were similar in style and operation. Benefiting from clear electoral victories and broad party support, albeit at different points, both leaders sought to dominate both colleagues and opponents and posit themselves at centre of the government decision-making machinery and media profile. As exemplars of leaders using (or abusing) the flexible nature of the British premiership, both faced accusations of over-control and autocratic tendencies (Dowding 2013; Heffernan 2013). This similarity was not accidental-Blair's style of rule was a (sometimes conscious) emulation of Thatcher (Hennessy 2001; Jenkins 2007). Both leaders operated in a political environment where, over time, personalisation and centralisation had strengthened prime ministerial control (Blondel and Thiebault 2009; Karvonen 2010; Strangio et al 2013).

Intriguingly, a key element of their respective styles was their cultivated 'outsider' image. Thatcher styled herself as a social and political outsider, describing herself as the 'rebel head of an establishment government' (King 2002, 445). She 'chose' the role and used its power to challenge consensus, bend or override institutional rules and dominate (if not bully) colleagues (King 2002, 449). Blair, educated at public school and with no roots on the political left, chose the Labour party rather than being born into it and claimed it powered his 'radical' challenging of convention. In terms of the fractious nature of Labour party politics in the 1980s, Blair was, 'perfect for the Labour party' as young, classless, with no trade union ties or obvious ideological baggage (King in Theakston 2002). Both pitched their leadership in the mould of the 'heroic leader' battling against entrenched interests or convention (Jenkins 2007: 164)

Despite these similarities, Blair and Thatcher also differed in fundamental ways. First, Thatcher used 'confrontational politics' to actively seek out enemies and her time in office can be seen as a series of battles with enemies foreign and domestic (Powell 2010: 140; Smith 2015: 9). As a result, she was divisive and unpopular, consistently attracting majority disapproval ratings and, despite later myth making, experiencing a 'consistent lack of adulation' from the public (Crewe 1991: 16). In electoral terms, Thatcher was reliant on a relatively small base of supporters, an electoral coalition re-assembled for each election victory (Denver 2007; Bale 2012). By contrast, Blair entered office intent on forging a new consensus of the centre ground, as a popular and populist leader. In his first term in particular he attempted to reach out beyond ideological, class or social divides, with his two landslide victories indicative of his reach. After 2003 and Iraq, Blair became a more divisive figure. A shift towards Thatcher's more conviction style approach became more evident when Blair adopted his moralising tone (Charteris-Black 2012).

Second, the patterns of electoral and party support for each leader differed. Between general election victories, Thatcher's support swung between deep drops in popularity punctuated by 'spectacular' by-election losses (Campbell 2012; Bale 2012). 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).

Third, Thatcher and Blair both dominated their cabinet colleagues and are regularly identified with personalisation, centralisation and stretching the institutional resources available to them (Strangio et al 2013: 12). Yet, while similar in style, they differed in psychological outlook and interpersonal approach. Geoffrey Howe bemoaned Thatcher's insistence on the 'sovereignty of her opinion,' dividing colleagues to rule. Her tenure was peppered by resignations in response to her autocratic style. Debate continues as to how Thatcher's gender shaped her dominant leadership style. Critics argue that Thatcher did little for women but was prepared to use her gender to 'personalise' politics and create distance and difference (Campbell 2015; Moore 2013).

Blair was more emollient, his personal approach less abrasive. He was a reluctant sacker and a frequent reshuffler. He governed by informality (much to the annoyance of the senior civil service) and kept his tent large, even allowing for the brooding presence of Gordon Brown (Bennister 2009: 176). Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand that Blair governed a party

where his leadership was, due to changed party rules, far more secure than in Thatcher's (Heppell 2013).

A final key difference lies in the broader context of leadership authority. The 'style, skills and traits' of a leader are vital but exist within particular 'historical and institutional contexts' that enables or limits (Strangio, t'Hart and Walter 2013,3). Thatcher and Thatcherism was very much a product of a certain context (Vinen 2009; Bale 2015). Whether Thatcher 'broke' the post-war consensus, she governed in the wake of a series of economic and political crises, failures by predecessors and deep social divisions (some engineered by her) overlain with domestic and international tension (Vinen 2009). Blair's context was far more positive - he governed a post-Cold War Britain, closer to Europe and with a far more positive economic situation and stability, at least until the War on Terror. What these different contexts allowed needs to be borne in mind.

Thatcherism and Blairism compared

Thatcherism remains contested, controversial and subject to very different interpretations, overlain by two decades of perpetuated myths and misunderstandings (see Bale 2015, Dorey 2015 and Gamble 2015). Thatcherism carried a 'Maoist emphasis on continuous battle and movement' (Jenkins 2007: 166; Gamble 2015). It was a radical brand of economic reform with a search for 'order and discipline' as its key components (Vinen 2009). Thatcher (1993:15) herself characterised it as an 'overall strategy of reversing Britain's economic decline' based on 'freedom and free markets, limited government and a strong national defence.' Cannadine (2003) classes Thatcher as the last in a line of leaders, from Austen Chamberlain to Winston Churchill, who sought to reverse Britain's decline as a world power.

Aside from these broad orientations, it was not a clear ideological project nor was Thatcher herself a 'constant', as she changed in style and approach during her eleven years in office (Bale 2015). Thatcher was both a 'Conservative and revolutionary' (Moore 2013: 754). Her approach was 'gradualist...testing the water' (Jenkins 2007) with policies 'products of their own success' rather than a pre-ordained plan (Bale 2012). Even the major policy changes were a 'series of trial and error experiments' (Jessop 2015: 2). It was 'populism of a very limited kind' combined with 'covert pragmatism and calculation' (Fry 2010: 554). Nor was it simply Thatcher's own project; key 'Thatcherite' ideas over economic policy or tax reform came from other ministers (Bale 2015). Thatcher's own decisive and domineering leadership style was central (Vinen 2009: Jenkins 2007: 164). Her 'distinctive style and leadership' was Thatcherism and from 1985 onwards the cult of 'Maggie' came to dominate media coverage (Jessop 2015: Campbell 2012). Moore (2013: 536) argues that Thatcherism was actually 'never a philosophy but a disposition of mind and character embodied in a highly unusual woman'.

In assessing Thatcher's time office and leadership capital, her premiership can be divided into distinct phases, as below.

Table 2: Reviewing Thatcherism

	Vinen (2009)	Jessop (2015)	Campbell (2012)
1979-83	Monetarism	Consolidation	Holding course
1983-88	Privatisation/economic boom	Consolidated Thatcherism	High (economic) Thatcherism (reaching zenith 1987)
1988-90	Anti-Europe	Blowback and decomposition	Social Thatcherism

Tony Blair was similarly associated with a ‘project’. Blairism as Heffernan (2001) argues was built on party change, part of a shift to occupy the ‘common ground’ saw New Labour ‘embrace the moral and material benefits of the market order’ (Beech and Lee 2008: 191). Blair championed this shift within the economic framework bequeathed by Thatcherism (Heffernan 2001). The result was a policy convergence between the two main parties that left little or no place for the opposition Conservative party to go. The priority of office seeking over policy seeking shaped the party’s acceptance of the political shift into enemy territory. Policy initiatives in education, crime and health gained the support of the Conservatives: indeed all originated under the previous Conservative governments (Bennister 2009). Yet there are also distinctions: Blair’s (albeit unenthusiastic) radical constitutional reform in his first term, his commitment to Europe and progressive social agenda over civil partnerships put clear space between the Conservatives.

Like Thatcherism, Blairism can be characterised (as below) as initial office seeking in the first term focused on demonstrating governing competence, through second term attempts to shape and reform the public sector via increased investment, further outsourcing and centralisation and on to less constrained third term activity.

Table 3: Reviewing Blairism

	Seldon (2007)	Buller and James (2012)	Diamond (2014)
1997-2001	Permanent campaign	Governing competence	Third way - joined up government
2001-2005	Delivery unfulfilled	Public service investment	Command and control
2005-2007	Unbounded	Autonomous leadership	Pluralised delivery

Leadership Capital Index: Thatcher and Blair Compared

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01 Political/policy vision – transformative leadership?

Thatcher's vision shifted with her changing project and ideas, though frequently underlined by a 'framing' or creation of opposition or enemies (Dyson 2009). The early phase in 1981 emphasised a clear agenda of 'discipline' law and order with economic stability and growth at its centre, layered with Monetarist ideas of controlling inflation (Vinen 2009). This was captured in her famous 'U-turn' speech of October 1980 (see below). Bulpitt famously characterised her first term as an 'experiment in government survival' through statecraft and an attempt to achieve 'governing competence' in the wake of the failures of the 1970s (Bulpitt 1986: 34). By 1985 this had shifted to a two pronged vision of, first, reform and change 'rolling back the state' through waves of privatisation and, second, a paradoxical (and distracting) use of central power against a series of enemies, including striking miners and left-wing opposition in English local government. In the final phase, what Campbell (2012) calls 'Social Thatcherism' and Jessop (2015) 'decay', there were a series of attempts to extend economic ideas of the free market into housing, education and tax reform, also marked by an increasingly strident anti-Europeanism (Vinen 2009: Daddow 2013). Thatcher's emphasis on the economy appeared to be the key to her continued electoral success, 'swinging back' to election wins in the wake of mid-term drops and losses (Denver 2007). While the first two phases represent a clear vision the final phase, for all its energy, represented a slowing down or stagnation of ideas (Jessop 2015).

Blair was widely recognised during his premiership as a 'transformist' in vision (Hennessy 2001; Seldon 2005). The first term of office was largely about demonstrating governing competence, such as with Bank of England Independence. The true radicalism was marked by a series of far reaching constitutional reforms from Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish devolution to the incorporation of the Human Rights Act - a programme that drew comparison with Britain's other great eras of reform in 1832 and 1911 (Bogdanor 2010; Flinders 2009). Blair's intense personal investment in the Northern Irish peace process remains one of his lasting legacies. His first term was also replete with 'symbolic' modernising radical policies such as the banning of fox hunting with dogs and removal of hereditary peers from the House of Lords. Having been frustrated by the inertia in the central machine (Diamond 2014: 84), in 2001 Blair promised a 'radical' second term that included far-reaching public service reform, democratic renewal and taking the UK into the Euro (Seldon 2005: 466-467). It became clear that Blair lacked a 'concise agenda' and had a tendency to become a 'crisis manager and headline seeker' (Kavanagh 2005: 16). Moreover, Blair was also blown off course by the War on Terror and, ultimately, Iraq, the event that 'overshadowed and distracted' his vision and estranged him from his own party and the public (see Hill 2005: 408; Buller and James 2012). After 2005 as his personal popularity waned, and the electorate and party were less willing to listen, Blair began to develop a more distinct 'choice and diversity' agenda across public services in 2004-5 (Seldon 2005). His late commitment to a referendum (without consulting colleagues) on the EU treaty can be seen as a final attempt to wrest the initiative and push bold policy (Riddell 2005). Beyond 2005 he felt freed up to present a policy agenda that was of course unlikely to tie the hands of a future Labour government, but set out a clear Blairite impetus for achievement in his final months as prime minister. The 'policy review' from late September 2006 onwards was foremost in this strategy, freed from electoral constraint, Blair set out his personal vision and battled to impress it on government (Seldon 2007: 501).

02 Communicative performance: delivery, delivery, delivery

Unlike Blair, Thatcher was not a natural communicator or speaker (Young 1993:2). She was very skilled in presentation and image control but found speeches was arduous (King 1985; Moore 2013; Vinen 2009). Nevertheless, Thatcher's time in office is bookended by two important speeches. The first was her speech to the party conference in October 1980 when she vowed not to turn back on her economic reforms as previous governments with a specially written pun: 'You turn if you want to...the Lady's not for turning' (Moore 2013: 532). This was intended to demonstrate her resilience in contrast to her Conservative predecessor Heath, whose policy shifts put the phrase 'u-turn' into 'the political vocabulary' (Crewe and King 1995: 5). The second speech was the 1988 Bruges speech against EU integration. Though intended to be a pragmatic critique of Federalism it was portrayed as 'populist' and 'nationalist' attack on the EU project, with Thatcher herself as a 'domineering ideologue'(Fontana and Parsons 2014: 95). Both speeches symbolised her vision, a 'stark framing of the world based on essentially dichotomous categorisations' (Dyson 2009, 46). However, they had reverse consequences for Thatcher's leadership. While the 1980 speech bolstered doubting party colleagues and weakened opponents by symbolically demonstrating resilience, the 1988 speech symbolised inflexibility on an issue already dividing powerful colleagues from their leader.

Blair's delivery and emotion made his speeches an event and his oratory was an essential part of his political skills. He articulated and embodied the New Labour discourse (Bennister 2015) and retained a 'remarkable capacity to communicate' (Kavanagh 2005: 18) in set pieces and in impromptu settings, using his skills to build narratives on public service reform in 2002 or foreign aid in 2005. His skills were most evident in his attempt to persuade the party and public over the War in Iraq in 2002-03 (Bennister 2012, 2015; Seldon 2005: 698). However, his abilities may have acted to over-inflate his self-belief. Even in 2005 Blair felt, against polling evidence, he could 'persuade' the electorate on an EU referendum (Riddell 2005). Indeed after 2003 he became more moralising in tone and autonomous in his decision-making. This was accelerated after 2005, when freed from any thoughts of re-election or the desire to placate voters and party he could speak his mind more freely, a tendency that may have accelerated his demise with, for example, his outspoken views on Israeli action in Lebanon in July 2006.

03 Personal poll rating relative to opposition leaders

Thatcher, despite later myths, was not a popular leader (Bale 2015). While many leaders build and develop capital from popularity, Thatcher did not. A consistent majority (around 60-61 per cent) were dissatisfied with Thatcher throughout her time in office: she was the second least popular Prime Minister since 1945 and her 'troughs' were 'lower than any other Prime Minister' (Crewe 1991, 16). Even her Falkland's victory in 1982 was more important for her authority among colleagues than the electorate (Vinen 2009; Moore 2013).

Thatcher, like many leaders, was also lucky in her opponents, whose lack of popularity prevented them gaining any political advantage from her own divisiveness. Thatcher faced successive Labour leaders in Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock who were largely preoccupied with managing their own internal party affairs. Although it is claimed the new breakaway Social Democratic Party (SDP), formed in March 1981 and present throughout the 1980s,

helped split the 'anti-Thatcher vote the evidence points in the opposite direction-the SDP vote prevented Thatcher gaining even larger majorities (Crewe and King 1995: 467). By 1985 the Labour party remained divided but by 1988-1989 it was becoming a more potent electoral threat. Nevertheless, its leader remained unpopular and the subject of vicious attacks from the Conservative supporting press. Continuous support from large parts of the tabloid and broadsheet press helped build a leadership cult around Thatcher (Campbell 2012).

In contrast to Thatcher's swings, in polling terms both Blair and his party experienced a 'long, slow but seemingly inexorable slide into unpopularity' (Bennister 2012:174; Powell 2010: 139). Blair had entered office on a wave of popular support. His political capital, as judged by net satisfaction rates peaked at +65 per cent, soon after assuming office thanks in part to his response to the death of Princess Diana. In 2000 he suffered a dip during the fuel crisis but he regained public support. The commitment of troops to Iraq in 2003 gave him a significant bounce to post a very healthy high net approval rate of around +40 per cent but then the deteriorating situation in Iraq dragged down both Blair and the party. As with Thatcher, the poor ratings of (Conservative) opposition leaders, William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith and then Michael Howard, meant Blair remained consistently ahead of his opponents-he outpolled them all. He had a huge relative 66 percent net lead in 1999 (B1) and was well ahead of Iain Duncan Smith in 2003 (B2). Only when his personal leadership was clearly on the wane did he drop below the opposition leader with Cameron outpolling him in 2005 (B3).

04 Longevity: going on and on

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 but may also bring fatigue and psychological problems such as hubris, stress and dissonance as well as over-reliance on like-minded supporters (King and Seldon 2002).

Thatcher in 1981 was relatively inexperienced and her speeches emphasising her commitment were arguably a sign of weakness not strength (King and Seldon 2002). Indeed, Thatcher's 'strength' in this period was a much due to her Chancellor Geoffrey Howe who urged her to continue with their joint monetarist project (Moore 2013; Bale 2015). By 1985 Thatcher, bolstered by her Falkland's and electoral victory was 'unassailable' and had six years' experience in office which she used to develop new tactics, for example circumventing formal Cabinet structures through bi-lateral meetings or controlling sub-committees (Campbell 2012). Her final period was marked by inflexibility and, it is argued, hubris as she became locked into a destructive conflict with her own chancellor and foreign secretary over Europe and relied on a small group of advisors (Owen 2003). John Major spoke of Thatcher's 'increasingly autocratic approach' and 'closed mind' (2000: 169).

Blair (2010) emphasised in his memoirs his inexperience in government on arrival in 1997. 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). Blair admitted that he was overly cautious and unwilling to push or stretch powers in his first term. Nevertheless, he used the office powers in a Thatcherite way from the outset, strengthening the centre, while circumventing formal governance (Jones and Blick 2010).

However longevity post 2003 began to work against Blair. He may have won in 2005, but as party leader he was wounded and his personal credibility suffered, looked into a dysfunctional relationship with successor Brown. In parallel, Blair demonstrated 'closed' and 'hubristic' tendencies, relishing controversy and unpopularity (Owen 2003). His attacks on the press (particularly the Independent) in 2007 and his post-premiership reflections that his biggest mistakes were passing the Freedom of Information and Hunting with Dogs Acts were seen as evidence of a remoteness from political reality (Blair 2010).

05 (Re) election margin for the party leadership

Thatcher's election in 1975 was an unexpected victory against former Prime Minister Edward Heath. Many in the party and elsewhere saw Thatcher as a temporary leader (Moore 2013). Her victory was not by a huge margin and may have caused some concern in 1981 (Moore 2013). However by 1985 the victory was a decade in the past and her position secure. It was only by 1989, particularly in the wake of the Bruges speech that others in the party began to 'envision her departure' (Fontana and Parsons 2014: 96). Crucially, while her own election was far in the past, the mechanisms for triggering a contest remained in place. Kavanagh (1990) claims that the divisions sowed by her 1975 victory never healed and contributed to her fall.

Blair's election as party leader in 1994 was inevitable once Gordon Brown had agreed to stand aside. Blair had swiftly seized the opportunity following John Smith's sudden death. He won the subsequent Electoral College vote with 57 per cent of the total gaining a significant majority in each section way ahead of his only two nominal challengers John Prescott and Margaret Beckett. In fact Blair had benefitted from party reforms in 1993 which made the cost for potential leadership challenge much higher. These reforms strengthened the Labour leader's incumbency position and single member elections gave Blair authority and legitimacy within the party, transcending the traditional union support (Bennister 2008: 343; Quinn 2004). Blair's success in winning in all three Electoral College sections gave him party leadership legitimacy, while the deal with Brown kept any internal challenge at arm's length. He played his incumbency cards early to good effect.

06 Party polling relative to most recent election result

Party polling for the Conservatives followed the pendulum swing of popularity and loss of support. Conservative support dropped by 15 points from 1979 to 1981 in the wake of recession and riots. In 1985 it had dropped 6 points amid the miners' strike and in 1989 it had dropped only 2 (albeit with Labour now on the same polling figure) (Ipsos Mori 1988). After 1986, Thatcher as leader became increasingly reliant on party levels of support as her lead over her party evaporated (Crewe 1991).

Party polling for the Labour party leapt straight after the May 1997 general election to peak at 60 per cent, 36 points ahead of Tories during the highpoint of the Blair honeymoon period. By

our midpoint in the electoral cycle in 1999 (B2) the party was 12 points ahead of general election polling. Such approval ratings, both in relation to the election and the opposition could not be sustained. In 2001 Labour polled 42 per cent of the popular vote and hovered around the 50 percent mark in polling before falling away from November 2002 onwards. By April 2003, Labour was polling at 43 per cent, but still had a healthy 14 per cent lead over the opposition. The 2005 election saw the popular vote share drop to 36 per cent and Labour's polling at 7 per cent below the opposition at 31 per cent by April 2007. The picture is of a steady decline from a position of party strength both relative to the election polling and the opposition.

07 Levels of public trust in leader

Measuring public levels of trust in Thatcher is problematic given her divisiveness throughout the period - it is possible a substantial minority did trust Thatcher by a majority clear did not (Crewe 1991). A survey towards the end of her premiership, comparing her with her Labour opponent Kinnock, found her leading in courage and determination but found only 20 per cent finding her to be more honest than the Labour leader (Crewe 1991: 16).

Iraq was central to the decline of Blair's personal credibility, which bled away from 2003 onwards (Hill 2005). By 2005, 65 per cent of the public did not trust Blair to tell the truth, with 72 per cent citing the fact he 'spins too much' and 54 per cent that he lied to take Britain into war in Iraq (YouGov 2005). Polling on his net 'trustworthiness' showed a negative rating of 22 per cent by June 2003 gradually worsening to -30 per cent by June 2007 (Ipsos Mori 2012). Blair's integrity was continuously questioned by the Conservative press from 2003 onwards (see Stevens and Karp 2012). Yet his opponents fared little better-while 54 per cent distrusted Blair in 2003 40 per cent distrusted Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith (Populus 2003).

08 Likelihood of credible leadership challenge within next 6 months

Thatcher suffered only discontent in 1981 rather than any credible threat and in 1985 was dominant across her party. Only after 1986, when the ambitious Michael Heseltine resigned, was there a significant challenger within the party-who Thatcher described as 'lurking in the wings' (1993, 830). By 1989 the possibility of a leadership challenge, in retrospect, appears more likely than it appeared then. John Major, as former whip, claims to have missed the obvious signs (Major 2000). By April 1989 party discontent was present and by the end of the year it transformed into a 'stalking horse candidate' Sir Anthony Meyer standing against her (Thatcher 1993, 830). Though the bid failed, it revealed a far greater amount of unhappiness in the party than was assumed.

One of the essential components of any assessment of Blair's capital is the strength of an alternate challenger. Chancellor Gordon Brown 'agreed' in 1994 to stand aside from the leadership contest in exchange for the premiership after Blair (Kavanagh 2005). Brown had control of large swathes of the domestic agenda and profoundly shaped Blair's authority from the outset. He pushed for Bank of England independence in 1997, set the entirety of the welfare and public spending agenda and successfully thwarted one of Blair's central aims - to join the Euro (Riddell 2005). Between 2001 and 2005 the two men effectively ran the government as a 'joint premiership' or duarchy (Seldon 2007: 337: Kavanagh 2005).

As the authority of Blair drifted away, Brown applied informal pressure upon him to set a timetable for his departure. The September 2006 coup initiated by supporters of Brown forced Blair into naming his departure date, after a series of coordinated ministerial resignations (and threats of more) unless Blair agreed to depart (Rawnsley 2010: 402–3). Because Blair had pre-announced his intention to depart (making the question when, not if) informal pressures had more impact in the 2005–07 period (Bennister and Heppell 2014).

09 Perceived ability to shape party's policy

Thatcher never sought to 'capture' the entire government or party. Instead she placed key allies in ministerial positions, creating a 'core' of sympathetic colleagues in important departments of state. Underneath the 'dominating' image, ministers such as Geoffrey Howe, Nigel Lawson or others helped to develop policy ideas (Bale 2015).

As with the electorate, her policy dominance was shaped by success. In 1981, the government's most significant move was the abolition of exchange rate controls, which symbolised a commitment to economic change (Bulpitt 1986). The emphasis on tackling inflation and the beginnings of the sale of council houses were widely supported by her colleagues, the latter in its aims and the former because of its obvious success (Moore 2013: King and Crewe 2013). By 1985 Thatcher's policy influence was at its peak, with two of what became central 'Thatcherite' reforms: her (initially experimental) rolling programme of privatisation and incremental trade union reform, both buoyed by economic improvement. Nevertheless, her victory against striking miners did not bring any polling benefit and her conflict with English local authorities proved pyrrhic, creating folk heroes out of leaders like Ken Livingstone (Vinen 2009).

Interestingly, in parallel to these conflicts, Thatcher was negotiating on two far-sighted agreements. Both can be viewed as investments of leadership capital on two key issues that would not come to fruition in her tenure—one that would help end her leadership and one that would benefit her successor but one (John et al 2011). The Single European Act 1986, that decisively moved forward the European Community project (which she would later renounce), was the single largest movement of power and sovereignty to the then EC (Gamble 2015). The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement proved to be one of the founding blocks of the Northern Irish peace process that Blair would complete in 1997-98 (Campbell 2012). Thatcher was also one of the first leaders to tackle the issue of climate change in 1988 (Campbell 2012).

Despite the superficial dominance, the final phase of Thatcher's premiership was brittle in its policy control. Though seemingly dominant, Thatcher had suffered a series of defeats over 'personal' policies from ID cards to the Child Support Agency (Campbell 2012). By April of 1989 the two issues that ended her premiership were in train - Europe and the Community Charge (Major 2000). On the one hand, her struggle with her Chancellor Nigel Lawson over joining the ERM had created stalemate within government. On the other hand, her commitment to reform local government finance had led, in the mid-1980s, to recommendations for a flat 'Community charge' despite warnings from her chancellor that it would be 'politically catastrophic' (King and Crewe 2013: Adonis et al 1994). Both policies symbolised an

increasingly autocratic style which, when tied to policy failure and subsequent declining poll ratings, proved fatal (Adonis et al 1994).

After the limited programme of the first term Blair's promises of radicalism were seen to fall short. Although manifesto commitments were met and NHS and higher education reforms and poverty reduction were clear markers of success, much of the responsibility lay with Brown (Buller and James 2012: 18). Aside from the unintended consequences of constitutional reform, the promised democratic renewal after 2001 was undermined by 'muddy planning' and 'poor execution' (Seldon 2005: 421). Significantly, Brown effectively vetoed Blair's central aim of UK entry into the Eurozone in 2003 (Riddell 2005). Yet Blair had imposed onto the party a policy platform radically different from the one he had inherited in 1994. Domestic public policy reforms delivered a new style of governance and signified a changed political party. After 2005 though, attempts to entrench New Labourism were largely rebuffed.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the defining moment of Blair's loss of capital, as Blair placed a series of 'bets' that went 'wrong' (Hill 2005: 296). The invasion and subsequent violence fed back negatively into Blair's personal credibility, party relations and policy influence. His subsequent attempts to advance action on climate change, Middle East peace and develop a stronger influence in the EU were all undermined by his diminished reputation and over-reliance on the US (Hill 2005). As such Blair's much of Blair's policy agenda had an obvious associated personalism, which meant as he became more autonomous in his style policy became for detached from the party.

10 Perceived parliamentary effectiveness

Thatcher never converted her party to 'Thatcherism' or took hold of the party machinery with 'fellow believers' (Norton 1990: Bale 2012). Research found that only a small proportion were ideologues, though a substantial number, were loyal to the leader (Norton 1990). Thatcher was, contrary to myth, not removed by her colleagues but ultimately by her own party, fearful of the electoral consequences of her survival. Her position in 1981 was uncertain, with rumours of potential leadership challenges in November and defections to the SDP (though only one MP actually went) (Moore 2013: 650-651). However, the continued turmoil in the opposition and the continued support of her Cabinet colleagues secured her position - unhappy MPs proved unable and unwilling to move against her (Moore 2013). By 1985, bolstered by a majority of 144 seats in the 1983 General Election, her control was at its height. Yet there were defeats in Parliament in 1984 over tuition fees and in 1986 a second reading defeat on the shops bill and the forced removal of Trade minister Leon Brittan by party pressure (Bale 2012: Kavanagh 1990). By 1989, Thatcher's position appeared strong, as a renowned national and international leader. However, her combination of domineering traits and pursuance of unpopular policy, at home and abroad, made her far more vulnerable than she appeared. Rising inflation in 1988-89 and an increasingly effective opposition, led to divisions with senior colleagues and concerns from the party. Conservative MPs saw themselves, as Bale puts it, heading to a dangerous deep electoral 'hole' from which there was no escape (Bale 2012: Bale 2011).

The impact of Blair's dominance of the party on a structural and personal level was a largely compliant party. Yet over time, as the parliamentary majorities fell from 179 in 1997 to 166 in

2001 and then 67 in 2005, so did Blair's authority over the party. The number of rebellions in the Commons grew. Labour MPs rebelled in the House of Commons 259 times in 20.8 per cent of votes, culminating in the largest rebellion in modern history over military action in Iraq in March 2003, an event dangerous enough for Blair to draft a resignation statement (Cowley and Stuart 2005: 23). Labour backbenchers may have already gained a taste for defying the party whip, but it was Iraq that undermined Blair's role as party leader. These rebellions continued and, indeed, intensified towards 2004-05 (Cowley 2005). In an interesting case of unintended consequences, the unelected House of Lords, empowered by Blair's removal of its hereditary element in 1999, defeated the government twice as often as the first term on a range of important issues from the judiciary to NHS reform, immigration and anti-terrorism powers (Cowley and Stuart 2005: 39). Although the defeats rarely seriously hampered the government, they led to policy shifts and were 'politically costly' in symbolic terms and 'self-perpetuating' in encouraging further rebellion (Cowley and Stuart 2005: 41). The assumption that the smaller majority after 2005 would 'concentrate minds' proved wishful thinking as MPs continued to rebel. Cowley (2007: 27) that the three key policies of the Blair era on foreign policy (Iraq), domestic (schools) and defence (Trident) only passed the Commons thanks to Conservative support.

Thatcher and Blair: The Analysis

The LCI demonstrates the nuance within Thatcher and Blair's trajectories of authority. Thatcher's capital swung from weak (but apparently survivable) to dominance and back to a different, ultimately fatal, fragility. Blair moved from huge (largely unspent) leadership capital to steep loss and then a less mentioned partial regain. Given the differing contexts, Thatcher made more of a less favourable context than Blair (Strangio, 't Hart and Walter 2013: 3). For both, the end of their premierships came when their ambition outstripped their waning authority: forging ahead with (controversial) visions against the wishes of their party, both had less leadership capital than they believed.

Thatcher's trajectory of leadership capital follows an inverted U-curve, building, consolidation in an upswing and then decline. Her time in office is one of ascendancy to middle stage dominance, bookended by two periods of weakness. In 1981 (T1), Thatcher's leadership capital was weak with a cumulative score of 28, as an unpopular leader with an unpopular party. Yet here vision, as competence or economic stability, was strong attracting support from colleagues and flowing into policy achievements and effectiveness. In many ways, the middle period (T2) Thatcher is a model of positive leadership capital: her score of 37 in 1985 flowed from a clearer vision, electoral success and a rolling programme of successful policy, buoyed by media support and heightened by poor opposition. All that was missing, throughout her premiership, was popularity.

Thatcher's late stage dominance, heightened by the media, was fragile, masking various losses and 'leakages' of leadership capital that were quietly eroding her authority. By 1989 (T3) her capital was fading, down to her 1981 score of 28 but in a different pattern. There existed a dangerous 'dysfunction' (Bale 2012) between the unpopular policies, less control or influence over an increasingly restive and concerned party and the very different vision, stale, vision of 'late' Thatcherism that clashed with her party and colleagues. This combustible mix, covered

by apparent dominance, would build tension that would build into a leadership challenge and resignation the following year.

By contrast, Blair's leadership capital trajectory is one of gradual depletion. He begins (B1) on 43 with 'exceptional' amounts of capital and then suffers a deep loss to a medium 'muddling through' level. He recovers slightly to the border of 'medium' and 'high'. Blair's lowest point came in 2003 (B2), with Brown's Euro 'veto' and the series of rebellions on Iraq apparently removing Blair's control of his party and policy.

Unlike Thatcher, Blair had almost perfect conditions for a 'weather-making' premiership with a 'large majority, goodwill, economic stability' and a 'feeble opposition': few leaders have had a more 'favourable context' (Kavanagh 2005: 19; Buller and James 2012: 18). This was the perfect environment to achieve and build reputation to enhance capital. An opportunity was missed as caution prevailed throughout the first term of office, as Blair himself has admitted.

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).

Thatcher's second term is perhaps the exception proving the rule that few second term governments 'enhance their reputation' since support becomes 'stale' and opposition increases (Kavanagh 2005: 3; Norris 2005: 44). As Cowley notes (2007: 28) Blair would have perhaps been better with Thatcher's majorities building from weak to strong, rather than the other way round. Beyond 2005 his relationships suffered both within the party and externally, largely damaged by the personalised approach he took to the Iraq war and trans-Atlantic alliance with Bush. Iraq is the key event, comparable with Thatcher's poll tax. Iraq undermined Blair's skills, meaning his strong communicative skills had declining impact on a sceptical public and unhappy party. It also strengthened Brown's challenge and status as 'leader-in-waiting', as Blair admitted (Blair 2010: 511).

The loss was also down to Blair himself. Blair believed he retained more power than he did: Barber claimed that Blair felt that 'through the exercise of his own formidable powers of persuasion, he could achieve almost anything' (Barber 2007, 305). His poor strategy and lack of detailed planning further limited his ability to reform: he had 'failed to work out what to do' with his second term until late (Seldon 2005, 423-424; Kavanagh 2005). A more difficult question is how Blair regained parts of his capital towards 2005. Blair undoubtedly became more focused later in the second term and, as a consequence, pushed a series of, at least partially successful, bold domestic and foreign policy initiatives late in 2004-2005 from action on climate change to the creation of a Supreme Court (Cowley 2005).

Leadership Capital and British Prime Ministers

The decline of leadership capital also helps to reveal what keeps leaders in power in British politics. Skills, structural advantage and poor opposition are vital. Blair and Thatcher's majorities gave great structural advantage at different points, though in Blair's case in particular this was subject to diminishing returns due to increasing rebelliousness—a long term behavioural shift dating back to the 1970s (Cowley 2005). Both were also leaders who

frequently 'pitted' themselves against their own party (Owen 2003). Most importantly, both were sustained by a weak and less popular opposition. Their key consistent 'strength' was one of fortune: the weakness of the Conservative or Labour opposition, which both had 'flat-lined' and remained in 'disarray' (Norris 2007: 45) and in Thatcher's case was ridden by in-fighting (Crewe and King 1995).

The LCI reveals several interesting aspects about leadership capital and British prime ministers. First, a leader can be hugely successful without being popular among the public, a fact facilitated by the electoral system. Second, a leader can have low capital in certain patterns, as in 1981 for Thatcher or post 2003 for Blair, but can survive. Certain patterns of 'dysfunction' (Bale 2012) can weaken a prime minister but not prove fatal: lack of popularity or communication may be survivable—at least for some time when opposition is weak. Other combinations seem fatal. Blair and Thatcher show how a dangerous combination of stale and hostile vision, falling party support and weakening policy grasp represent very dangerous negative multiplier. More needs to be done to investigate these factors as well as, in Blair's case, the partial revival of capital in 2005 (see discussion in Bennister, 't Hart and Worthy 2015).

The analysis underscores the contingent and limited nature of prime ministerial predominance, revealing the contingent factors determine how predominant a prime minister may be (Bennister 2008, 2009, 2012; Heffernan 2003, 2005, 2013). Despite the 'mediatisation' of modern political leadership, and the frequent image of control and dominance, even the leadership of these two archetypal 'controlling' leaders was constrained (Helms 2012). A prime minister's power remains tied to interests and groups, from the party to ministerial colleagues (Strangio, 't Hart and Walter 2013: 5).

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Appendix 1: Leadership Capital Index Measure of Thatcher 1981 (T1), 1985 (T2) and 1989 (T3) and Blair 1999 (B1) 2003 (B2) 2007 (B3)

Criteria	Indicators	THATCHER			BLAIR		
		T1 1981	T2 1985	T3 1989	B1 1999	B2 2003	B3 2007
S1	01 Political/policy vision	4	4	2	3	4	5
S1	02 Communicative performance	4	4	3	5	4	5
S2	03 Personal poll rating relative to opposition leader ²	2 (+2) Thatcher-28 Foot -26	2 (-2) Thatcher-19 Kinnock -17	5 (+4) Thatcher-13 Kinnock -19	5 (+66) Blair +35 Hague -31	1 (+23) Blair +2 IDS -25	1 (-37) Blair -35 Cameron +2
S2	04 Longevity: time in office	2 (2 yrs)	5 (5 yrs 11 mths)	5 (10 yrs 11 mths)	2 2 years	5 6 years	5 10 years
S2	05 (Re)election margin for the party leadership	2	2	2	5	5	5
R1	06 Party polling relative to most recent election result	1 (-15: 79-81)	2 (-6: 83-85)	3 (-2: 87-89)	5 (+12: 97-99)	2 (-2: 01-05)	1 (-5: 05-07)
R1	07 Levels of public trust in leader ³	2	2	2	4	2	2
R1	08 Likelihood of credible leadership challenge within next 6 months	3	5	2	5	3	2
R2	09 Perceived ability to shape party's policy	4	5	2	5	5	2
R2	10 Perceived parliamentary effectiveness	4	5	2	4	3	2
TOTAL		28	36	28	43	34	30

² Net satisfaction rates compared Ipsos Mori

³ Thatcher analysis based on Crewe 1991, Blair on Ipsos Mori (2012) polling on leader 'trustworthiness.'

Data Sources

The data is obtained from opinion polling sources, primarily Ipsos Mori (S2, R1) as well as electoral analysis by others (see for example Crewe 1991 and Denver 2007). We draw on first-hand accounts such as Thatcher (1993) herself and work by other influential actors such as John Major (2000) Thatcher’s authorised biography by Moore (2013) and historical revisions such as Vinen (2009). For Blair there is his own autobiography (Blair 2010) and academic and popular research into his legacy (Buller and James 2012; Rawnsley 2010; Bennister 2009, 2012; Theakston 2012). There is a wide variety of work by political scientists including a special issue on Thatcher for BJPR in 2015 including Bale (2015), Jessop (2015) and Campbell (2015) as well as work on the Conservative party (Bale 2012). There is voluminous assessment of Blair’s time in office and legacy (Heffernan 2001; Seldon 2007) but also detailed studies of his parliamentary party (Cowley 2005), governance (Diamond 2014), media perceptions and trust (Karp et al 2011).

Leadership Capital Index

The index is conceptualised as the sum of the ‘scores’ leaders achieve on the three elements presented above: skills, relations and reputation. The LCI merges perceptual categories with observable performance data (e.g. electoral and legislative record) honed to a manageable number of 10 core indicators. The variables relate to the three aspects of leadership capital defined above. Some act as ‘proxies’ to assess electoral skill. This underpins the Index with a level of coherence and parsimony. Most indicators relate to a perceptual element and thus involve either public opinion/constituent data, or require some form of intersubjective agreement among analysts (e.g. by using expert panels or parallel coding). The LCI takes a mixed methods approach, blending the two types of measures and merging the five ‘hard’ empirical measures based on empirical data with five more ‘soft’ or interpretive assessments based on expert opinion. Read and Marsh (2002) in particular point out the requirement for a clear ‘lead’ between the two types when using mixed methods; the LCI offers an index driven by the hard measures impacting on the soft. The cycle is then reciprocal as positive outcomes are in turn led by the soft analysis. Moreover, measures can be combined as, for example, parliamentary rebellions require reading beyond the numbers. Scores can be aggregated and potentially compared. The table below gives possible exemplars.

Aggregating and interpreting LCI scores

Ratings	Description	Examples
0-10	Depleted capital: edge of removal or ‘lame duck’	Australian Labor Party leader and Prime Minister Julia Gillard (2010-13) in the 9 months prior to her removal.
11-20	Low capital: ‘politically weakened’ but still capable of some action	British PM John Major, (1990-97) in face of intraparty rebellion over EU policy post the 1992 election.
21-30	Medium capital: ‘muddling through’ in the face of significant obstacles and divisions, yet with provisional license to operate from (a small majority within) the authorizing environment	Swedish social-democratic party leader and prime minister Goran Persson Sweden (1996-2006).
31-40	High capital: ‘momentum’ derived from robust political performance and party cohesion	Spanish social-democratic leader and prime minister Felipe Gonzalez (1982-1996), particularly in his first two terms.
41-50	Exceptional capital: ‘political weather maker’ boosted by electoral landslide, and/or personal dominance and/or ‘good crises to have’	US Republican Party leader and president George W. Bush (2001-2008) following the September 11 attacks, until a few months into the 2003 invasion of Iraq.