Editorial

Editorial: New Approaches to Political Leadership

Mark Bennister

School of Psychology, Politics and Sociology, Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent, CT1 1QU, UK;
E-Mail: mark.bennister@canterbury.ac.uk

Abstract
This editorial introduces the special issue and considers what the articles tell us about new approaches to political leadership. The editorial explains how each article engages with the core puzzles of political leadership and brings together many diverse theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of political leadership, a vibrant area of study currently in the midst of an academic renaissance.

Keywords
chief executives; elites; leaders; party leadership; political leadership

Issue
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1. Introduction

Political leadership sits at the heart of how we explain the functioning of various political systems and public policy decision making. A myriad of approaches, frameworks and concepts exist within the very broad field of leadership studies; an essentially contested subject area. Without a single unifying theory of leadership, Elgie (2015) notes that the study of leadership is ontologically and epistemologically diverse. Such diversity is in fact attractive to scholars, able to pick through a field that has yet to prioritise any one approach over another. It is now well established that leadership is the product of the interaction between leader and the environment within which the leader is operating. This forms the fundamental paradigm of interactionism. But this takes us only so far and, in contrast to leadership study in the business field, political leadership study is much less coherent. At the heart of the interactionist paradigm, there are many 'puzzles' of political leadership in democracies. For instance, should leadership be promoted or constrained? And how does leadership effect, and be effected by, the contexts and situations in which it is exercised? The growth in interest reaches across disciplines and scholars, from political scientists to psychologists and anthropologists. Units of research now extend beyond the traditional analysis of elected representatives and formal office holders. Political leadership is exercised by individuals and groups with considerable influence, operating in a variety of leadership zones to impact on policy and decision making.

The recent rich flowering of research presents opportunities for scholars to move the field forward. Publications have emerged to consolidate and energise research in the area. Prominent amongst these has been work that makes sense of the study of leadership (Elgie 2015), the methods and analytical approaches (Rhodes & 't Hart, 2014), the normative democratic leader (Kane & Patapan, 2012), and trends in the evaluation of prime ministerial performance (Strangio, 't Hart, & Walter, 2013). Much of this literature has sought to re-evaluate research approaches in the field, but there has also been a flowering of applied research. Political science, and other related disciplines, has sought to measure and theorise political leadership in order to predict (or at least explain) the success and failure of party leaders, heads of government, mayors, gover-

nors, or leadership teams at the apex of government (Rhodes & 't Hart, 2014, p. 150). Now, greater attention is being paid to the leadership impact on so called 'wicked' policy issues and factoring in leadership to explain policy failures in uncertain times.

This special issue complements the renaissance of interest in political leadership and bring together some important new research in the field from a broad variety of scholarly angles. Approaches range from the conceptual through to the organisational and on to the highly empirical gathering of evidence of leadership traits. Contributors ask questions to challenge some of the assumptions prevalent in the literature. Several of these questions go to the heart of the agent-structure paradigm that is so embedded in interactionism. For example, to what extent do leaders shape the environment in which they operate? Can leaders overcome organisational and situational constraints to influence outcomes? Can leaders 'stretch' these institutional boundaries? How responsive are leaders to public concerns? To what extent do the relational aspects of leadership matter? Why do leaders rise and fall so swiftly? Can anti-conventional leaders be effective? Where do non-democratic leaders come from? As citizens invest greater expectations on those that lead to deliver, they are easily and often let down. This special issue presents theoretical and applied contributions that further enhance this diversity of study and provide innovative new dimensions to address some of these puzzles.

The special issue therefore brings together methodological approaches that do not often sit together, from the theoretical to the highly empirical. With such a diverse set of puzzles and approaches the call for papers generated a positive response. The final twelve articles present theoretical and conceptual analyses, empirical case studies, new data sets (both qualitative and quantitative) and innovative new forms of evaluation of leadership. I have grouped the articles around four core puzzles of political leadership, relating to party leadership, governance, crisis (mis)management and agency

2. Restraining Leadership: How do Parties Shape Leaders and Leaders Shape Parties?

Party leadership has long been a neglected topic in the study of political parties (Costa Lobo, 2014). This reluctance to recognise a role for political leaders has been tempered somewhat by recent studies focusing on personalisation and presidentialisation (Karvonen, 2010, Poguntke & Webb, 2007). Party leadership studies have largely concentrated on either the impact on party organisation or the role of leadership effects on electoral performance. Emmanuelle Avril (2016) here takes a firmly organisational approach, indeed borrowing from organisational theory and utilising participant observation, to analyse the impact of the UK Labour party's leadership under Tony Blair. The 'unintended consequences' can be seen in the subsequent leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. As Patrick Diamond (2016) explains, Labour elected a leader in 2015 who eschews the Blairite organisational doctrine of electability and prime ministerial credibility in favour of position politics and conscience-based policy.

3. Governance Relations: How Out of Touch Are Leaders from the Public?

Rich case study analysis has been a core component of leadership study. Four articles take particular cases and utilise innovative frameworks to analyse the leadership puzzle in each. Once elected, politicians at the centre of government are portrayed as out of touch and elitist, but Jenifer Lees-Marshment (2016) challenges such assumptions with a new perspective from behind the closed doors of government. Her ground breaking research in UK, US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand found that leaders in government are refreshingly and surprisingly deliberative when confronting challenging environments. The tenure of Japanese prime ministers is famously short. Between 2006 and 2012 Japan changed prime minister once a year. Tina Burrett (2016) asks what factors explain Japan's revolving-door premiership? To explore this puzzle, the article applies the Leadership Capital Index (LCI) developed by Bennister, 't Hart and Worthy (2015) to case studies of the nine Japanese prime ministers holding office between 2000 and 2015. With the crucial leader-follower relationship at the centre of their study, Femke van Esch, Rik Joosen and Sabine van Zuydam (2016) introduce the technique of cognitive mapping to explore the congruence in beliefs on European integration of four Dutch political leaders and their followers. Although the study finds a significant gap between some leaders and their followers' narratives on Europe, it finds no evidence that this narrative congruence is related to the credibility of these leaders in the eyes of their followers. With non-elected leaders under studied, Henriette Müller (2016) presents a case study of the EU Commission Presidency, examining institutional development and personal performance in office. Using Jose Barrosa as a case study (and utilising *candidate-media agenda convergence* theory), she finds that the Presidency still depends more on the incumbent's personal capacities to lead than the office's institutional structure.

4. Cognition, Contingency and (Manufacturing) Crises: What Shapes Leaders and Leadership Environments?

Moving beyond empirical cases, the collection gathers together three conceptual and reflective articles. Moshe Maor (2016) draws on insights from social networks, social cognition and the study of emotions, to offers a set of ideas and a series of predictions on how

the agency-audience and reputation relationship may impact on agency behaviour. Crises provide political elites with opportunities, but also threats to legitimacy and can make or break leadership in office. Understanding, reacting and making decisions become critical in such situations. Staying with the conceptual theme, András Körösényi, Gábor Illés and Rudolf Metz (2016), working at the apex between contingency and agency, present the analytical notion that leaders may both interpret and invent crises. In an overview of the burgeoning scholarly literature on political leadership and crisis since 2008, Cristine de Clercy and Peter Ferguson (2016) evaluate what sort of questions are being asked, and identify some new lines of inquiry.

5. How Much Do Style, Situation and Background Matter?

Political leadership tends to focus on formal executive office holders in western liberal democracies, as noted above. The next three articles reach beyond the usual units of analysis. Alix Kelso (2016) delves deep into parliamentary leadership points in studying committee chairs in the UK House of Commons. She recommends that leadership analyses can indeed go beyond studies of presidents, prime ministers, and party leaders. Individual points of leadership in political institutions may apply to lowly political figures who may not automatically spring to mind in the context of political leadership, but who are nonetheless performing important leadership roles in a system of dispersed democratic governance. Margaret Hermann and Christiane Pagé (2016) ask if leadership matters in the governance of civil society organisations? In particular, do the CEOs of humanitarian and development NGOs exhibit different leadership styles and perceive their work environments in different ways as the literature suggests. To explore this question, they interviewed 96 CEOs - 32 from humanitarian NGOs and 64 from development NGOs and apply *leadership trait analysis* to the data. Also presenting new data, Alex Baturo (2016) asks do democratic leaders have distinct personal backgrounds compared to those of their peers in dictatorships, do they tend to hold different prior careers and posts while climbing the 'greasy pole' of politics? Comparing leaders' careers in democracies and dictatorship and their personal background, experience in politics, prior to their tenure, Baturo found that overall, leaders in party regimes, in this respect, have more in common with democratic leaders than with other dictators.

6. Conclusion

So what do these diverse and illuminating approaches to the study of political leadership tell us? Although there has been a considerable growth in scholarly literature, political leadership remains largely ill-defined and conceptually diverse. This is perhaps to the researcher's advantage. There are now multiple approaches and methodologies to utilise; a variety of toolkits and frameworks to pick from. This special issue demonstrates how multi-disciplinary research can present potential solutions to complex leadership puzzles.

First conceptual and analytical assumptions that have characterised the field can and should be challenged. For instance political leadership is not simply hierarchical in nature, there are various zones of political leadership. Individuals operate within institutional and situational contexts, impacting on decision making from inside and outside the immediate governmental sphere.

Second scholars can learn new and innovative research techniques to confront puzzles of leadership. For example, participant observation and in-depth interview techniques from within organisations such as parties or government departments can tell us how much of an impact leadership style and action has on the organisation. This way we can better understand the organisation's responsiveness to public demands.

Third political leadership fascinates and intrigues. We are uncertain if it is a force for good or bad; if it should it be empowered or constrained. There is both a wariness of dominant leaders in democracies and an assumption that contemporary leaders are not responsive to electors. However, several articles in this issue present evidence that leaders are not so out of step with the public and can be responsive to followers.

The study of political leadership will continue to present particular methodological and conceptual challenges to scholars. Yet the rewards for pursuing such research are evident. If we return to interactionism we see how in this special issue, leadership shapes and is shaped by multiple forces, including here political parties, crises, civil society organisations, legislatures and government.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Mark Bennister (PhD) is Reader in Politics at Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent, UK. He has written extensively on political leadership, prime ministerial power, rhetoric and oratory. He is co-editor (with Paul 't Hart and Ben Worthy) of *The leadership capital index: A new perspective on political leadership* (Oxford University Press). In 2015–16 he was Principal Investigator on a Nuffield Foundation funded project analysing prime ministerial accountability to parliament in the UK.