

**A Reassessment of the Leadership of John Major using the Greenstein Model**

Thomas Ian McMeeking

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

University of Leeds

School of Politics and International Studies

June 2018

## **Declaration**

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own, except where work which has formed part of jointly authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others. Chapters of thesis which will include work which has been published in jointly-authored publications with details of the publications (e.g. title, authors, publication etc.): Public communicator chapter (Chapter three), which will include work from: Heppell, T. and McMeeking, T. (2015) The oratory of John Major, in Hayton, R. and Crines, A. (editors) *Conservative orators from Baldwin to Cameron*. Manchester University Press: Manchester. Details of the work which is directly attributable to you and details of the contribution of the other authors to the work: My role was in the research preparation stage for the book chapter I did with my supervisor, Dr Tim Heppell, published in 2015, on The oratory of John Major. This chiefly involved a detailed breakdown for Dr Heppell of Anthony Seldon's book: *Major: A Political Life* (Seldon 1997), specifically targeting sections and paragraphs from Seldon which referenced John Major's speeches at different forums and on different platforms during his premiership. Dr Heppell then utilised this material to produce a series of written up drafts which I was able to comment upon before the John Major chapter was sent to the publishers.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

The right of Thomas Ian McMeeking to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

© 2018 The University of Leeds and Thomas Ian McMeeking.

## **Contents**

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

List of Tables and Figures

Acknowledgements

Abstract

### **Chapter 1: Introduction P9**

- 1.1 *Introduction and Thesis Outline*
- 1.2 *Thesis Rationale*
- 1.2.1 *The Reputation of John Major*
- 1.2.2 *John Major's Place in Academic Literature*
- 1.3 *Research Methodology*
- 1.4 *Organisation of the Thesis*
- 1.5 *Conclusion*

### **Chapter 2: The Greenstein Model in Context P35**

- 2.1 *Introduction*
- 2.2 *Conceptualising leadership*
- 2.3 *British and American Studies of Political Leadership*
- 2.3.1 *The Prime Minister: A Definition*
- 2.3.2 *Prime Ministerial government versus Cabinet government*
- 2.3.3 *The Core Executive*
- 2.3.4 *The British Presidency*
- 2.3.5 *The American President: A Definition*
- 2.3.6 *Historical Context*
- 2.3.7 *The Moral Dimension*
- 2.3.8 *Skill in Context*
- 2.3.9 *Personality Studies*
- 2.4 *The Influence of Neustadt and Barber*
- 2.5 *The Greenstein Model in Context*
- 2.6 *Conclusion: The 'Added Value' of the Greenstein Model*

### **Chapter 3: Public Communicator P67**

- 3.1 *Introduction*
- 3.2 *Number 10 Communications Strategy, 1990-1997*
- 3.3 *John Major's Rhetorical skills*
- 3.3.1 *House of Commons*
- 3.3.2 *Party Conference*
- 3.3.3 *Media and Public Meetings*
- 3.4 *Conclusion*

### **Chapter 4: Organisational Capacity P98**

- 4.1 *Introduction*
- 4.2 *Number 10 Downing Street*
- 4.2.1 *The Press Office*
- 4.2.2 *The Private Office*
- 4.2.3 *The Political Office*
- 4.2.4 *The Policy Unit*

- 4.3 *The Cabinet Office*
- 4. *Whitehall reform*
- 4.5 *Conclusion*

**Chapter 5: Political Skill** **P140**

- 5.1 *Introduction*
- 5.2 *Greenstein's The Presidential Difference: Major's Ability to Negotiate*
- 5.3 *Neustadt's Presidential Power: Major's Ability to Persuade*
- 5.4 *Heresthetics: Major's Ability to Manipulate*
- 5.5 *Norton's Prime Ministerial Power: Major's Ability to 'Hide'*
- 5.6 *Hargrove's skill in context: Major's Ability to Discern*
- 5.7 *Conclusion*

**Chapter 6: Vision** **P181**

- 6.1 *Introduction*
- 6.2 *Direction*
- 6.3 *Policy*
- 6.4 *Consistency*
- 6.5 *Inspiration*
- 6.6 *Conclusion*

**Chapter 7: Cognitive Style and Emotional Intelligence** **P222**

- 7.1 *Introduction*
- 7.2 *Cognitive Style*
- 7.3 *Emotional Intelligence*
- 7.4 *Conclusion*

**Chapter 8: Conclusion** **P257**

- 8.1 *Introduction*
- 8.2 *Justifiable Critiques of John Major*
- 8.3 *The Question of Context and John Major's Leadership*
- 8.4 *The Value of the Greenstein model as a Tool to Measure Political Leadership*
- 8.5 *Conclusion*

**Appendix: Political elites who contributed to 2017 fieldwork** **P277**

**Bibliography** **P279**

**List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

CBI	Confederation of British Industry
DM	Deutsche Mark
EDCP	Cabinet Co-ordination and Presentation Committee
EDH	Cabinet Home and Social Affairs Committee
EDM	Early Day Motion
EDX	Cabinet Public Expenditure Committee
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
ERM	Exchange Rate Mechanism
EU	European Union
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
GEN	Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee
IGC	Intergovernmental Conference
IRA	Irish Republican Army
NEDC	National Enterprise Development Council
MP	Member of Parliament
ODP	Cabinet Overseas and Defence Committee
OPSS	Office of Public Service and Science
PCP	Parliamentary Conservative Party
PM	Prime Minister
PMQs	Prime Minister's Questions
PPB	Party Political Broadcast
PSBR	Public Sector Borrowing Requirement
SDP	Social Democratic Party
UK	United Kingdom
VAT	Value Added Tax

**List of Tables**

Table 1: Political Skill Dimensions

Table 2: Major government parliamentary rebellions by session during 1992 Parliament

Table 3: Major government parliamentary rebellions in context, 1945-2012

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank here a number of people who have helped and supported me throughout my PhD. First, I would like to thank my friends and family who have offered me a great deal of emotional support over the past few years. In particular, I would like to thank my parents and sister and her family who have supported me along my academic journey and for which I will remain eternally grateful. I also wish to thank the Adult Cystic Fibrosis Unit at St James's Hospital, for their support and help. They have been equally important to me in my being able to complete my PhD. Second, I would like to thank all of the political elites who contributed to my fieldwork in 2017. Their insights and accounts have helped deepen and expand my knowledge of modern British politics and the politics of the 1990s greatly. I express the most gratitude for their willingness to take time out of their busy schedules and for sharing with me their experiences of John Major's premiership from an array of different perspectives. Finally, but by no means last, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr Tim Heppell and Professor Kevin Theakston, for their expert guidance, support and mentoring throughout my PhD. Their comments, insights and willingness to look over drafts of my work have played no small role in making it the document you see before you. Tim and Kevin have been approachable and rigorous as well as generous with their time, which is all I could ever wish for in a supervisory team.

## **Abstract**

Some twenty years since the dramatic fall from office of his government in May 1997, the premiership of John Major (Conservative, 1990 – 1997) has been overlooked within academic literature, seemingly dwarfed as it has been by the literature on the transformative premierships of Margaret Thatcher (Conservative, 1979 – 1990), and Tony Blair (Labour, 1997 – 2007). The literature that does exist on Major is concomitantly on the whole critical, a by-product of the turbulence of his time in office. This is despite Major's seeming reputational improvement, and the increasingly revisionist attitudes towards his government, since he left office. Such an improvement has resulted in Major playing an increased role in the national debate in recent years, including in the 2016 referendum on Britain's future relationship with the European Union. Therefore it is arguably an appropriate moment to re-assess the political leadership of Major. It is the proposition of this thesis that the best mechanism to assess Major's prime ministerial performance and possibly gain a new insight into his premiership is from Presidential studies and the seminal 2000 work of Fred Greenstein and his six criteria for leadership, thereby building upon the work of other political scientists who have utilised the Greenstein model as a means to assess leadership performance within Prime Ministerial studies. This will be shown with the use of elite interview and questionnaire responses from nineteen participants currently within the House of Commons and House of Lords who were active during the Major era. This thesis will seek to show through the feedback from elite fieldwork that whilst much of the criticism of Major was justified, it equally is possible to argue using Greenstein that the undervaluing and overlooking of Major in the academic literature is unjustified, with much that Major did achieve deserving of further academic research and study.



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section gives a brief outline of the main proposition for this thesis. The second section provides the rationale for this thesis, which includes an assessment of John Major's current reputation and a review of the current academic literature. The third section will discuss the methodological approach of this thesis. The final section will give a brief outline of the content of the remaining chapters of this thesis before concluding overall.

### **1.1 Introduction and Thesis Outline**

This thesis assesses the political leadership of John Major, Conservative Prime Minister between November 27 1990 and May 2 1997, using the six criteria for political leadership devised by Princeton University Professor Fred Greenstein in his seminal work on Presidential leadership: *The Presidential Difference* (Greenstein 2000, Greenstein 2004, Greenstein 2009a).

This is the so-called Greenstein model, an analytical framework which seeks to assess Presidential leadership under six headings – *public communicator*, *political skill*, *public policy vision*, *organisational capacity*, and, finally, *cognitive style* and *emotional intelligence*. The final two of the criteria are the psychological elements of political leadership, a specialism of Professor Greenstein dating back to his first work on politics and psychology in the 1960s: *Personality and Politics: Problems of Evidence, Inference, and Conceptualization* (Greenstein 1987).

It is through these six criteria for political leadership within Presidential Studies that this thesis will seek to re-assess the premiership of Major, some twenty years after his government fell, adding to earlier comparative studies which have assessed Prime Ministerial performance using the Greenstein model (Honeyman 2007, Theakston 2007, Theakston 2011, Theakston 2012).

### **1.2 Thesis Rationale**

The rationale for this thesis, specifically the use of the Greenstein model<sup>1</sup> to re-assess the political leadership of Major, can be justified for two principal reasons.

---

<sup>1</sup> See chapter two for justification of use of Greenstein model to assess John Major

First, the arguable reputational improvement of Major (Seldon and Davies 2017, 325), witnessed in his appearance recently in significant campaigns such as the Scottish independence referendum (2014) and In/Out referendum on Britain's relationship with the European Union (EU) (2016), as well as his rise in the Prime Ministerial 'league table' since 1997 (Theakston and Gill 2006, Theakston and Gill 2011). Second, the overlooking and seemingly somewhat undervaluing of Major in the academic literature in comparison to his predecessor, Margaret Thatcher (Conservative, 1979 -1990), and successor, Tony Blair (Labour, 1997 - 2007), and, latterly, the literature on David Cameron (Conservative, 2010 – 2016). Such undervaluing within the literature provides a significant opportunity for further research.

### **1.2.1 The Reputation of John Major**

The political leadership of Conservative Prime Minister John Major has been subject to criticism, ridicule and, at times, open abuse which took place to a large extent during his time in office between November 1990 and May 1997. The most damning attacks came from Major's own backbenches, perhaps most famously Norman Lamont telling the House of Commons in June 1993:

“There is something wrong with the way in which we make our decisions. The Government listen too much to the pollsters and the party managers. The problem is that they are not even very good at politics, and they are entering too much into policy decisions. As a result there is too much short-termism, too much reacting to events, and not enough shaping of events. We give the impression of being in office but not in power” (HC Deb June 9 1993 Col. 285).

Blair was even more damning, telling Major “I lead my party, he follows his” (HC Deb 25 April 1995 Col. 656), and shouting “weak, weak, weak” at the Prime Minister (HC Deb 30 January 1997 Col. 503) during two famous occasions at Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs).

Major's own predecessor was equally disparaging, Thatcher telling a newspaper after Major's very personal triumph at the 1992 election:

“I don’t accept the idea that all of a sudden Major is his own man. He has been prime minister for seventeen months and he inherited all these great achievements of the past eleven-and-a-half years which have fundamentally changed Britain” (*Newsweek*, April 27 1992).

Major’s political leadership was equally at times subject to outright ridicule. Major was the ‘grey man’ of British politics in the television show *Spitting Image*, regularly lampooned by cartoonists as wearing his underpants outside his trousers, as was depicted in the *Guardian* (Baker 1995, 186).

For Major this was all part of a regular pattern of daily attacks he was to suffer in the media:

“Fantasies all too often took the place of facts. Under the heading “Can Major take the strain?” the *Times* reported in October 1992 that I was losing weight, giving up alcohol and turning my hair grey – all of which was as false as it was silly. “If I really were tinting my hair”, I said to Alex Allan, “would I have chosen this colour?” Such daily opposition ripped into my premiership, damaged the Conservative Party and came close to destroying the government” (Major 1999, 360).

The attacks on the Major premiership therefore went beyond the political: they were deeply personal.

Alongside the criticism of political elites and journalists between 1990 and 1997 which Major was subjected to, there was also what can almost be described as an atmosphere of permanent crisis within the government during the 1992 Parliament. Indeed, within months of his 1992 election victory Major’s government was to suffer the humiliation of Black Wednesday, September 16 1992, the day the pound plunged out of the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), with concomitant effects on both Major’s and the government’s popularity, which plunged dramatically and would never recover (Crewe 1996, 421). From that point onwards Major’s legitimacy as leader of the Conservative Party was openly questioned, which was only resolved in the Prime Minister’s favour in June 1995 after a divisive leadership contest (Heppell 2007a, Heppell 2007b).

Throughout much of the 1992 Parliament, the Parliamentary Conservative Party (PCP) was convulsed by some of the worst in-fighting since the Corn Laws in the 1840s, over the issue of further European integration, and a potential split was seen as likely (Baker et al 1993b, 428). This was even before John Major opened up the question of standards in public life and sleaze in high office after his infamous 'Back to Basics' speech (Major 1993b; Doig 1998). The spectre of Europe and sleaze continued to haunt Major up to and including the 1997 election, before his government eventually was to fall with the Conservative Party's worst election result since 1832 (Norris 1997, Butler and Kavanagh 1997).

The level of negativity directed toward Major when Prime Minister, and his two governments, has continued since he left office, academics and commentators seemingly deciding to judge his premiership of limited consequence. This was reflected by early rankings of Major in the list of twentieth century premiers, being ranked at the lower end of the league table. Indeed, the 2004 MORI/University of Leeds survey ranked Major fifteenth out of a possible twenty candidates representing all occupants of Number 10 in the twentieth century, with a rating of 3.67 out of ten (Theakston and Gill 2006, 198).

When the survey was repeated in 2010, Major remained in the bottom half of the Prime Ministerial league table, scoring 4.6 out of ten and being placed eighth out of twelve candidates representing all the occupants of Number 10 since 1945. This was, however, a slight improvement, which ensured that the Major premiership leapfrogged his predecessor but one as Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, and Gordon Brown, who had only recently resigned as Prime Minister following the 2010 general election (Theakston and Gill 2011, 70-71).

It is arguable that Major's ranking has continued to improve since the 2010 survey by MORI/University of Leeds, such has been his dignity in public life since leaving office (Theakston 2010, Seldon and Davies 2017, 325). This was reflected particularly during the premiership of Cameron, Major playing an active part in the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, speaking in opposition to it (Major 2014), then in the 2015 election during the campaign (Major 2015), and

finally in the 2016 EU Referendum, where he was deployed again by Downing Street to speak passionately against the Leave campaign (Major 2016).

During the 2016 Scottish Parliament election, Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, openly proclaimed herself “a John Major Conservative,” telling journalists:

“That is always what Conservatism was about for me – it’s about clearing obstacles away from people, empowering people and using education as a means of bettering themselves” (*Daily Telegraph*, May 7 2016).

Following the 2016 EU referendum result Cameron’s successor, Theresa May, has not utilised John Major in a similar fashion, but Major continues to contribute to the national debate (Major 2018). And his contributions are not solely on Europe, being also related to other policy areas where his government’s decisions are being revisited as a more revisionist approach is taken to the Major government. Most recently this included recognition of the National Lottery’s importance in the staging of the 2012 Olympics (Jeffreys 2017)<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, an argument can be made that in view of this reputational improvement and a growing revisionist attitude to the Major government (Seldon and Davies 2017, 325) it is appropriate that John Major’s premiership is revisited, some twenty years after the Major government fell from office in 1997 (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). But what this thesis seeks to do, ultimately, is to answer the key question which the passage of time and events now allows: should Major’s premiership now be viewed differently, or was the view of his critics and detractors, right?

### **1.2.2 John Major’s Place in Academic Literature**

The premiership of John Major has been largely overlooked within academic literature, seemingly dwarfed as it has been by the literature on the much more recognisable premierships of Thatcher, Blair and Cameron. Thus, whilst his tenure as Conservative Prime Minister is acknowledged within books on

---

<sup>2</sup> See chapter six

Conservative Party history (Bale 2010, Heppell 2014), and in stock biographies (Lamont 2000, Heseltine 2000), rarely has a detailed single-volume analytical study examined solely the political leadership of Major.

Indeed, the immediate reference point for academics has continued to be the seminal biography of Major written by Anthony Seldon in 1997 (Seldon 1997), aside from John Major's own memoirs, published two years after he left office (Major 1999). The exceptions to the Seldon and Major biographies as single-volume works are the monograph on Major written in 2006, by Tim Heppell (Heppell 2006), as well as two edited books on the Major premiership some eighteen years apart: by Peter Dorey (Dorey 1999a), and Kevin Hickson and Ben Williams (Hickson and Williams 2017).

Of the academic literature which currently does exist on Major's premiership, aside from that pertaining to either political history or biographies and memoirs, this can be demarcated into a number of headings, the subject matter of each one exposing gaps which arguably provide an avenue for further exploration of Major's political leadership through use of the Greenstein model and its six criteria for leadership (Greenstein 2000). Each of the following headings on Major will be discussed with a view as to how the Greenstein model can seek to fill the gaps in the literature, or build on the current academic work already undertaken, before moving on to analysing the historical and biographical literature available.

#### *Rhetoric and Communication studies: Public Communicator*

Taking the first of the Greenstein criteria, *public communicator*, which is explored in chapter three of this thesis, the main backdrop to it within the academic literature on Major comes from rhetoric and communication studies. Rhetorical studies are a relatively new field in academia which has been "under scrutinised" - particularly in relation to political leadership (Hayton and Crines 2015; Hayton and Crines 2016). In both fields the literature on Major is sparse, thus providing grounds for further exploration.

Tim Heppell and Thomas McMeeking's joint chapter on the oratory of John Major (Heppell and McMeeking 2015) attempts to put Major's leadership in context,

looking at the Prime Minister's rhetorical techniques in a number of different forums: Parliament, Party Conference, and when electioneering. The authors argue that Major's oratory is "of importance as he is communicating to the electorate on the ongoing appeal of Conservatism during a period of crisis" (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 138)

And a premiership dominated by crises often did produce rhetoric of a 'boomerang' nature, memorable as self-inflicted wounds rather than as oratorical triumphs. Such rhetoric was a by-product of the political environment Major faced (Europe, New Labour, Thatcherite legacy). Despite this however the authors view Major's own style (through use of *antithesis*, *pathos*, *utilititas*) as producing 'notable oratorical moments' during his premiership in each forum, referencing the adept use of *pathos*, particularly in the House of Commons, through humour and, on solemn occasions, sadness, such as on the death of John Smith in 1994 (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 140, 147).

Within communication studies, the most significant academic work done on Major's approach to media relations was by Tim Bale and Karen Sanders in their 2001 article for *Contemporary British History* (Bale and Sanders 2001). Bale and Sanders clearly wished to set Major's approach to media relations within the context of the new Blair era of Alastair Campbell and 'spin' in the early 1990s, largely to display its shortcomings.

They argue that whilst the Prime Minister's wish to demarcate between the 'political' and the 'professional' in terms of media management in his use of career civil servants as Press Officers could be viewed as a success – in allowing him to 'rise above' the sleaze allegations which engulfed his government, - at the same time it could also be viewed as an abject failure as Major's image was fatally undermined by 'Back to Basics' and the failure to get a grip of the 'sleaze' allegations. Furthermore, they argue that such a failure was the *sole* responsibility of Major (*not* the Number 10 Press Office) – success or failure on the whole dependent upon the "chief executive's media strategy" (Bale and Sanders 2001, 94).

Beyond the work of Heppell and McMeeking (2015) and Bale and Sanders (2001) there is very little within rhetoric and communication studies on the Major premiership, the exception being the works of Seymour-Ure on Major (Seymour-Ure 1994, Seymour-Ure 1995), but these both lack the ability to offer a conclusive overview due to their having been written whilst Major continued as Prime Minister. This gap was eventually filled by Lance Price (2010), who gives an overview of the Major premiership in his book on post war premiers and their relations with the media – but very much from a Blairite perspective.

#### *Government and Civil Service: Organisational Capacity*

Taking the second of the Greenstein criteria, *organisational capacity*, which is explored in chapter four of this thesis, the main backdrop to it within the academic literature on Major comes from governmental studies. Academic works on Major in this field, which looks at the work of civil servants and political advisers in Whitehall and in Number 10, is once again sparse, thus providing further possibilities for exploration.

Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999) included Major's premiership in their examination of life in Number 10 since 1945; as did Peter Hennessy (Hennessy 2000), in his constitutional exploration of the premiership during the post-war era. Both Kavanagh and Seldon (1999) and Hennessy's (2000) accounts are written from a constitutional historian's standpoint, laced with - on the whole - anonymous primary source-based material which seeks to paint a picture of what life was like in Number 10 during the Major premiership. Both do this very well, Hennessy's account on the development of the Citizen's Charter and other Whitehall reforms set within the overall context of constitutional history.

The best account on life inside Major's Downing Street was from the staff that saw events first-hand alongside the Prime Minister. These have been provided by former staffers Jonathan Hill and Sarah Hogg (Hogg and Hill 1995), as well as Christopher Meyer (Meyer 2003), and Hywel Williams (Williams 2003), who worked for Redwood and who wrote a book on the period.



Both Meyer (2003) and Williams (1998) are, on the whole, negative towards Major, Meyer's twenty-five page account of his short spell as Press Secretary (1994 to 1996) revealing a largely chaotic account of the Downing Street media operations. Williams, on the other hand, seems to be writing using his master's voice, which leaves a one-sided view of the Major premiership.

It is Hogg and Hill (1995) who present the best picture of the work of top level civil servants and political advisers at the time. They were with Major upon his acquisition of the premiership, through the 1992 election and, in the case of Hogg, offered advice when the Prime Minister resigned the Conservative leadership in 1995 (Hogg and Hill 1995, 264-283).

#### *Leadership and Party management: Political Skill*

Taking the third Greenstein criteria, that pertaining to *political skill*, which is explored in chapter five of this thesis, the main backdrop to it is the academic literature that looks at the main point of controversy and crisis during the Major premiership: namely parliamentary dissent on the issue of further European integration and national sovereignty and the internal warfare and concomitant damage to Major's leadership that ensued within the PCP as a consequence.

Importantly, the literature is narrowly based. The literature on Major and the EU is mainly dissent studies. The literature on Major's leadership mainly looks at the leadership rules that surround retention and acquisition. Therefore arguably neither area of study goes far beyond their narrow remits, or explore Major's travails on Europe and leadership from a new perspective. Indeed, the most innovative approaches to the problematic 1992 Parliament have come in other areas of controversy and crisis, such as Black Wednesday, as is discussed below.

Firstly, dissent studies. The most productive authors in this regard, who wrote three articles for *Parliamentary Affairs* between 1993 and 1994, were David Baker, Andrew Gamble and Steve Ludlam. Their focus was the internal divisions created by the Maastricht ratification process through Parliament and its effects on the Conservative Party in the House of Commons. Their first article, in 1993

(Baker et al 1993a), described the operation of the Whips' Office and the motivations of the Maastricht rebels in the run-up to the 'Paving' vote in November 1992. This was followed swiftly with an article which questioned whether the Conservative Party might survive at all due to its divisions or experience a permanent schism, linking the rebellions over Europe to past sizeable divisions such as over Tariff Reform and the Corn Laws (Baker et al 1993b).

In 1994 they again returned to the question of Maastricht (Baker et al 1994), providing more detail on the whipping operation during the treaty ratification process within Parliament between 1992 and 1993, including the vote on the Social Policy Protocol motion in July 1993 and subsequent vote of confidence. At the centre of their argument remained the question as to whether the Conservative Party in Parliament could survive as a cohesive body, such was the existential crisis that had gripped it during the Maastricht ratification process.

The subject of party cohesion and backbench dissent within the Conservative Parliamentary Party over the issue of further European integration was the focus of interest for other authors who were more analytical in nature in comparison to Baker et al, focusing their investigations into the ideological motivations of members of the PCP in the 1992 to 1997 Parliament through typology studies.

Matthew Sowemino, in his article in *Party Politics* (Sowemino 1996), used evidence from Early Day Motions (EDMs) of an anti-federalist nature, particularly the Fresh Start EDM of June 1992, and the Thatcherite lobby groups, such as the No Turning Back Group, within the PCP, which supported them. Sowemino sought through his typology to analyse the impact of what he refers to as the 'anti-federalists' within the PCP, arguing that of his three types (Thatcherite Nationalists, Neoliberal Integrationists and Interventionist Integrationists) the Thatcherite Nationalists, who were Atlanticists, supporters of the free market and anti-federalists in his view, had "shifted the centre of gravity" within the parliamentary party towards nationalism on the question of further European integration (Sowemino 1996, 83).

John Garry sought a different approach, in his article for *West European Politics* (Garry 1995), using a postal survey of PCP members to “estimate the significance of European policy within Conservative politics” in comparison to other policy fields, both economic and moral, tested by ranking a list of seven leading Conservative politicians (which included former Prime Minister Edward Heath and former Cabinet minister Norman Tebbit) (Garry 1995, 172).

Garry argued his moral-economic-EC opinion groups were the most ‘comprehensive’ since Philip Norton’s typology, which sought to sub-divide the Thatcherite wing of the PCP between Pure, Neo-Liberal and Tory Right and the rest as Populists, Damps, Wets and Loyalists in the 1987 to 1992 Parliament (Norton 1990). Garry concludes, despite his article having been sent for publication in April 1995 and therefore before the 1995 leadership contest and subsequent arguments on a single currency in the run-up to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), in the same way as Baker et al 1993b, with an open question as to whether the Conservative parliamentary party can remain intact, such was the PCP so “evenly and deeply split over Europe” (Garry 1995, 186).

The interest by academics into backbench dissent during the 1992 to 1997 Parliament, and the impact of Europe on Conservative politics in general, continued following the government’s fall from office on May 1 1997. Further typology studies of Conservative backbenchers continuing to be developed by Hugh Berrington and Rod Hague (1998), Philip Norton and Philip Cowley (1999) and Tim Heppell (2002).

Cowley and Norton, in their article for the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (Cowley and Norton 1999), sought to build upon Philip Norton’s earlier studies into backbench dissent since the war. They were also notable in that they drew their conclusions from parliamentary division lists alone between 1992 and 1997, some 1,294 altogether (Cowley and Norton 1999, 85), as compared to Berrington and Hague and Heppell who sought to expand their evidence material into other displays of PCP cohesion, such as EDMs, party

groupings and public statements – Heppell's the most comprehensive in this regard (Heppell 2002, 308-309).

It was possibly because Cowley and Norton solely relied upon division lists for their analysis that their conclusion, that "for much of the parliament Conservative MPs showed a remarkable level of cohesion," and dissent was merely "front-loaded; concentrated on the first session [during the Maastricht ratification process, with Conservative MPs rebelling in 23 per cent of divisions]" (Cowley and Norton 1999, 99) was likely to be questioned amongst academics. This was not least because it contradicted all previous conclusions thus far by Baker et al 1993b, Garry 1995, Sowemino 1996 and Berrington and Hague 1998.

And Heppell in his article, also for the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* (Heppell 2002), was able to challenge Cowley and Norton by his 'more rigorous' three-dimensional, eight-fold typology which analysed moral, economic and European variables within the PCP, enabling him to "destroy their party of tendencies theory" and conclude instead that during the 1992 to 1997 Parliament: "The loyalty and unity tendencies were decommissioned and the PCP chose to pursue an 'ideological creed' in preference to the 'governing code'" (Heppell 2002, 309, 320).

Second, leadership acquisition and retention studies. The question of Major's leadership itself, and its precariousness, was an ongoing issue which dogged Major throughout his premiership. Keith Alderman wrote about both the 1990 (with Neil Carter) (Alderman and Carter 1991) and 1995 contests for *Parliamentary Affairs* in there almost immediate aftermath (Alderman 1996), giving accounts which sought to examine the contests from a factual chronological perspective.

The main criticism therefore is that there is little or no examination from an institutional perspective on the PCP rules for the selection of party leaders. This is particularly the case for the 1990 contest, which is entirely centred upon Mrs Thatcher's downfall and does not even consider the second ballot when Major and Douglas Hurd entered it to challenge Michael Heseltine. Indeed, on the 1990 contest first ballot, Alderman and Carter posit that "Mrs Thatcher was not

technically brought down by the formal election processes. But...the procedures played an essential part in producing the circumstances which ultimately rendered [Thatcher] vulnerable to the more informal pressures on her to resign” (Alderman and Carter 1991, 125-126).

This then is not expanded upon further in the article, other ‘factors’ given higher credence in Thatcher’s final decision, despite the fact that it was her failure to reach the required number of PCP members that led to her resignation and a new premiership under John Major. Alderman was more willing to engage on the impact of Conservative selection rules in his analysis of the June 1995 leadership contest, acknowledging that “[t]he Prime Minister’s predicament arose in large measure from the provision for annual re-election contained in the party’s election procedures” (Alderman 1996, 317).

Despite having been written at the time, in the autumn of 1995, it did raise a number of questions which were essential in any exploration of the 1995 contest: principally, the Major campaign’s tactics; the tactics used by Redwood; the question of “victory” under PCP rules and, finally, the likely impact long-term on the Prime Minister’s ability to survive. On the central question of the advantages versus the disadvantages of the element of surprise in Major’s decision in 1995, Alderman argues that the Prime Minister had little option in reality as “most alternative strategies for maintaining party cohesion had already been exhausted”(Alderman 1996, 319). Perhaps because these were Alderman’s almost immediate conclusions however the article was weakened as a result as it could only guess as to the long-term impact on Major’s leadership and premiership.

Philip Cowley and John Garry sought to continue their own work on party dissent through typology studies in their joint article for the *British Journal of Politics and International Studies* (Cowley and Garry 1998) on the 1990 leadership contest, and thereby attempted to tackle one of the central questions resulting from Major’s succession. Namely, the ideological motivations and behaviour of the PCP members who voted for Major, most especially on the defining issue of the 1992 Parliament, Europe.

Ideological motivation is in fact the final in a series of three hypotheses Cowley and Garry posit, the others relating to: occupational and educational background, or, alternatively, career status, electoral vulnerability and parliamentary experience. Using various bivariate and multivariate analyses, their conclusion is stark, that there was a “highly significant relationship” between “scepticism on EU matters and voting for Major.” Indeed, they go further: “*Once Europe is introduced, it is the sole significant factor* [their italics],” which meant that “by the final phase of Thatcherism, the problematic issue of European integration had risen to primary importance and become the key issue by which candidates for the succession were judged” (Cowley and Garry 1998, 489-492, 496).

The point of fascination still was the 1995 leadership contest however, Philip Cowley following Keith Alderman in offering his voice in an almost-immediate-response paper in his 1996 article for *Politics* (Cowley 1996). The article, by pure coincidence of timing, filled a seeming gap in Alderman’s own 1996 article by addressing the contest from an exclusively institutional perspective.

Cowley, in a short article, was essentially trying to determine what amounted to a ‘convincing’ victory under the PCP rules for the election of a leader, the first hurdle being an absolute majority and the second hurdle being an extra fifteen per cent added to that total. Cowley used as comparisons both the 1989 and 1990 Conservative leadership contests, Thatcher having fallen in 1990 due to her failure to surmount the so-called ‘second hurdle’ by four votes against Heseltine. Cowley did play-out a number of likely scenarios between Major and Redwood in the 1995 contest, largely on the basis of how mathematically Major would not have been able to continue under the institutional rules of the PCP (Cowley 1996).

On the so-called ‘third hurdle’ Cowley suggested that a ‘convincing’ win related to the following: First, the nature of the contest, in particular whether the incumbent was facing a serious challenger; second, the result in comparison to previous contests – in this case 1995 in comparison to 1990; and, finally, and in light of Major’s supporters flocking on to College Green to proclaim the Prime Minister a clear victor immediately afterwards, the media reaction to the result. But, all this

is trumped by Cowley's conclusion that it is essentially, "*they themselves set the size of the third hurdle* [Cowley's italics]" (Cowley 1996, 80-86). This proved to be a correct assumption, as revealed in Major's own memoirs: 215 was the figure Major regarded as his own 'third hurdle' he had to reach, or resign (Major 1999, 645).

Looking at the 1990 and 1995 Conservative leadership contests from an institutional perspective remained the general thrust of the academic literature throughout the 1990s, tied in as they were with other articles on historic leadership contests and rules pertaining to Conservative Party leadership in the post-war era (Wickham-Jones 1997, Alderman 1999, Cowley and Bailey 2000). The articles dovetailed between and around the seminal work by Leonard Stark (Stark 1996) and latterly by Andrew Denham and Kieran O'Hara (Denham and O'Hara 2008), adding to their in-depth examinations of Conservative Party leader-eviction rules from their inception in 1965.

These included Tim Heppell, who continued this work on security of tenure with an examination of the 1995 leadership contest in an article for *Contemporary British History* (Heppell 2007b), and at the precariousness of John Major's political leadership, in the same year, for *The Political Quarterly* (Heppell 2007a). To these two articles can be added Heppell's book on Conservative leadership contests (Heppell 2008a), Heppell positing in each piece of literature the argument that because Major was the unity candidate to the PCP in 1990 and 1995 he was merely the leader by 'default' – a case he argues comprehensively.

Outside of academic works on party dissent and leadership, there have been a number of books and articles on Black Wednesday and Britain's exit from the ERM in September 1992, a critical event in the life of the second Major government from a leadership perspective. The lead in this regard was written by Philip Stephens (1996), who gives a detailed, chronological account of the government's counter-inflationary policy since 1979 and the events leading up to and including September 16 1992 itself (Stephens 1996). The impact of Black Wednesday on the government's reputation for economic competence is also recalled in an article of the same year for *Political Studies* by David Sanders

(Sanders 1996), which gives a detailed account of the impact of Black Wednesday on the government's popularity.

By complete contrast, the effectiveness of the Major government's counter-inflationary policy from a political skill perspective – chiefly as a means of political manipulation, - is examined by Steven Kettell in his article for *The British Journal of Politics and International Studies* (Kettell 2008). The most fascinating element to the article is that it opens up the key question, in what other areas of politics did John Major successfully manipulate events to his advantage?

Other points of controversy and crisis that have been examined in relation to the Major government include academic works on the pit closure programme and the crisis that ensued in October 1992, with a number of articles, the first by Mike Parker and John Surrey in their article for *The Political Quarterly* (Parker and Surrey 1993), followed two years later by Ralph Negrine in a 1995 journal article for *Parliamentary Affairs* (Negrine 1995). Both are largely chronological accounts of the crisis more appropriate for historical reference, but still a valuable resource.

There were also a number of articles on sleaze and standards in public life. Alan Doig wrote two articles for *Parliamentary Affairs* on this area of controversy surrounding the government, one on the resignation of David Mellor (Doig 1993), the other on the 'cash for questions' scandal (Doig 1998) – both chronological historical accounts which offer an insight into the events that took place. The most revealing aspect of the Mellor article was the prominent part played by Sir Marcus Fox, the Chairman of the backbench 1922 Committee, in Mellor's resignation, which is explored later in this thesis<sup>3</sup>.

The crises and controversy surrounding the Major governments, particularly after 1992, led academics to re-assess the statecraft model by Jim Bulpitt (1986) regarding 'governing competence,' Christopher Stevens examining this comprehensively in his 2002 article for *Contemporary British History* (Stevens 2002). For Stevens, the key turning point was Mrs Thatcher's Bruges speech in 1988, in which the contradictions of Thatcherite policy of 'small state' came into

---

<sup>3</sup> See chapter five



direct conflict with the EU's desire for further integration. It remains a seminal article.

Tim Heppell added to this work on governing competence by looking in an article for *Parliamentary Affairs* at the symptoms of 'degeneration' which can be seen by a party that has been in office for a prolonged period, linking Major's travails to those in the past of Harold Macmillan and the, at the time, current - the article was written in 2007/8 - government of Gordon Brown (Heppell 2008b). What Heppell demonstrated was that the loss of moral authority (Profumo, sleaze, expenses) was a clear sign post of degeneration in long-serving governments, thus spelling the end of the governing coalition.

#### *Ideology and Policy: Public Policy Vision*

Taking the fourth Greenstein criteria, that pertaining to *vision*, which is explored in chapter six of this thesis, the main backdrop to it in the academic literature on Major is that pertaining to ideology and policy, chiefly exploring the Major premiership's relationship both in ideational and policy terms to Thatcherism.

Four edited books stand out in this area of the literature. The first is Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon's 1994 edited volume (Kavanagh and Seldon 1994), which was an early attempt to assess the Major government at mid-term. The other edited volume of note, published before the 1997 election, was by Steve Ludlam and Martin Smith (Ludlam and Smith 1996a). Once the Major government fell, there has only been a further two edited books on John Major from an ideational and policy perspective. These were by Pete Dorey, who edited his own volume on the Major era (Dorey 1999a), and by Kevin Hickson and Ben Williams (Hickson and Williams 2017), released to mark the twentieth anniversary of the 1997 election.

As has already been seen in the party management and leadership literature, the pervading impression is once again of crisis at the centre of government under Major in these four edited books. This is also the principal rationale for both Kavanagh and Seldon (1994) and Ludlam and Smith (1996a) to produce their edited books whilst Major was still Prime Minister, thereby ensuring that they

could cover Black Wednesday, Maastricht and sleaze in a topical manner. But is clear that for both they were seeking to answer the central question: is there a Major agenda? (Kavanagh and Seldon 1994, 3). Neither is able to answer the question however, principally because, as contributors pointed out, the Major premiership continued in office at the time and thus no definitive judgement could be given.

This could not be said of Pete Dorey's (1999a) edited book, which takes the question head-on and answers it directly. Dorey makes it clear from the outset that, despite John Major's 'ambiguity' ideationally in so far as he represented the One Nation or Thatcherite wing of the Conservative Party in 1990, in terms of policy there was a clear 'trajectory' which evinced a continuation of Thatcherism. As Dorey states, "this is amply borne out in the chapters that follow" (Dorey 1999b, xvii).

And Dorey's (1999a) book appeared to have settled things until another edited book emerged to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the 1997 election, by Hickson and Williams (2017). Their book however failed to shed much further light on the Major government, the contributions on policy matters thin. This book is more useful due to the primary sources who were invited to contribute about their experiences of Major himself, including a short offering by Redwood. Therefore Dorey's (1999a) edited book remained the most detailed attempt to understand what was the so-called Major agenda, thus allowing for the opportunity of a further up-to-date revision of Major's premiership from an ideational and policy perspective.

#### *Political history:*

Alongside the academic literature there have also been a number of books documenting the history of the Conservative Party and, concomitantly, the development of Conservatism. The most comprehensive were written in the mid to late 1990s, with the aim perhaps of putting the Major government and its travails in the context of past Conservative governments. This was the clear intention of the book published in 1996 edited by Anthony Seldon (Seldon 1996),

which included a chapter by Ivor Crewe on the Thatcher and Major governments, “1979-1996” (Crewe 1996).

Brendan Evans and Andrew Taylor wrote perhaps the most comprehensive account of twentieth century Conservatism in their book (Evans and Taylor 1996). Alan Clark, by contrast, wrote perhaps the most witty and lyrical history of the Conservative Party up to Major (Clark 1998). And, in an equally historical but perhaps more acerbic perspective, Ian Gilmour and Mark Garnett’s book (1998) ends with the final chapter on inevitable Conservative decline under Major, entitled ‘Drifting with Dogma’ (Gilmour and Garnett 1998, 349).

It was then several more years (and resulting from the arrival of Cameron as Prime Minister and a new era of Conservative government) before a further set of histories emerged, by Tim Bale (2010) and Tim Heppell (2014). Bale’s (Bale 2010) book, whilst readable and full of anecdotes, contrasts to the more thoughtful account by Heppell (Heppell 2014), who seeks to posit his arguments on Conservatism from an ideational perspective. Both are equally valuable as a research tool however.

#### *Biographies and memoirs:*

Autobiographies and accounts of backbench PCP members and Cabinet ministers can largely be demarcated as to their positivity towards John Major and his government, Major receiving criticism for his tenure as Prime Minister from both wings of the PCP in the biographies and memoirs of his contemporaries both during and then subsequent to his leaving office in 1997.

Possibly the most critical of the memoirs pertaining to Major’s time as Prime Minister was by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer Lamont in his autobiographical account of the Major government between 1990 and 1997 (Lamont 2000). Lamont’s memoir could indeed be viewed as no more than a justification for his own actions in office, but the former Chancellor is very critical of Major personally and in his decision-making as Prime Minister. Arguably, this makes his account something that should be treated with extreme caution.

The account of Maastricht rebel Teresa Gorman (Gorman 1993), which was written when the rebellion was at its height, is openly hostile to Major in a book that was published, arguably, at a time to cause maximum harm to the government. The same is true of Emma Nicholson's account, which gives a stinging critique of John Major personally and the Major government (Nicholson 1996), written immediately following her defection to the Liberal Democrats in November 1995 and designed to cause maximum harm again. And to this list must be added both of the autobiographies of Thatcher (Thatcher 1993, Thatcher 1995), each of which were highly critical of Major.

Sympathisers and sympathetic accounts of 1990 to 1997 have come largely from former Cabinet ministers who were regarded as close colleagues to Major during his premiership. As a consequence they are opaque often in style, rarely offering a critical view – thus enabling them to protect the Major legacy. Some of the most recognisable are by Gillian Shephard (Shephard 2000), Ian Lang (Lang 2002), Douglas Hurd (Hurd 2003), Michael Heseltine (Heseltine 2000), William Waldegrave (Waldegrave 2015), and, most recently, by Chris Patten (Patten 2017a). And, to coincide with his up-coming retirement, the former Chancellor, Ken Clarke, has also released his autobiography (Clarke 2016), which, uniquely amongst all memoirs on Major in a very readable piece of work, but appears to not mention the 1995 leadership contest.

There have of course been diary accounts of the Major era, the most comparable to Alan Clark's depiction of the Thatcher government (Clark 1993) being that of Gyles Brandreth (Brandreth 2000), which was at times both witty and acerbic from a former government whip and loyalist. Norman Fowler (Fowler 2008) however sought more to emulate Richard Crossman or Tony Benn with his factual diary accounts of his recollections on his time working with both Thatcher and Major.

Biographies of Major began to emerge upon his elevation to the premiership, all largely sympathetic in their depictions of the Prime Minister. The main ones were by Edward Pearce (Pearce 1991), Bruce Anderson (Anderson 1991) and Penny Junor (Junor 1996), whose account of Major's upbringing and childhood is

particularly valuable to researchers and which was updated during Major's premiership following the 1995 leadership contest.

The stand-out biography of Major, still recognised today for its depth and analysis of Major the man, is by Anthony Seldon (Seldon 1997), in which Seldon was given unique access to John Major in the final two years of his premiership. The access of biographers could not compensate for the voice of the man himself however, John Major (Major 1999) able to give his own version of events two years after he left office, the publication becoming a bestseller, largely due to the open honesty of Major about his life and time as Prime Minister.

### **1.3 Research Methodology**

This project is underpinned by material gained by research methodology most associated with qualitative research, a form of methodology which is aligned with interpretative epistemology (Devine 2002, 197-215). Of the primary resource material utilised, the principal resource was from elite interviews and questionnaires with surviving contemporaries of John Major who were available to take part in this project. The pool of participants include former civil servants, former special advisers, former Members of Parliament (from the 1992 to 1997 Parliament principally) and former Cabinet ministers.

The total number of participants in this project's research sample was fifteen, who all consented to be interviewed, plus questionnaire and written responses from four others: a seventeen per cent response rate from a total of 110 recipients of interview requests. Some participants also agreed to have some of their comments quoted, but only on a strict condition of anonymity, whilst being attributable in other comments. Such conditions were agreed with the author.

Evidence from House of Commons Select Committees by John Major and members of his Number 10 staff and from Public Inquiries was also utilised, including evidence given by Sir John Major to the Leveson Inquiry in 2012 (Major 2012). Archive material from Conservative Central Office and the Conservative Research Department from 1990 to 1997 was accessed as well, including pamphlets and booklets published at the time. This material was especially useful

alongside the archived speeches and broadcast interviews made available by the website dedicated exclusively to John Major: <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk>. Alongside these primary sources should also be added the autobiographies and biographies already referred to earlier, plus all secondary resource material from books and journal articles on the Major era.

#### **1.4 Organisation of the Thesis**

The organisation of this thesis is as follows:

##### *Chapter two: The Greenstein model in context*

This chapter seeks to place Greenstein's *The Presidential Difference* (Greenstein 2000, Greenstein 2005, Greenstein 2009a) within the context of both American Presidential studies of leadership and British Prime Ministerial studies of leadership. Once the Greenstein model has been placed in its proper context it is then possible to argue what 'added value' it provides over its American and British counterparts.

##### *Chapter three: Public Communicator*

John Major's effectiveness as a public communicator is assessed from two perspectives. Firstly, from a *rhetorical* perspective. This section will look at the oratorical and rhetorical style of Major on three public platforms whilst Prime Minister in order to judge his effectiveness as a public speaker. These platforms are: the House of Commons, the Party Conference and when on the campaign trail. This will include an examination of the Prime Minister's effectiveness as a stump speaker on the famous soapbox during the 1992 election. Secondly, from an *institutional* perspective. This section will look at the communication strategy of the Number 10 Press Office between 1990 and 1997, and Major's own approach to media management whilst Prime Minister. Having looked at Major the communicator from these two perspectives, his effectiveness as a communicator is judged overall.

#### *Chapter four: Organisational Capacity*

John Major's organisational capacity is assessed through an examination of the Prime Minister's operations at Number 10 between 1990 and 1997, including the work of the Private Office, Political Office, Policy Unit and, finally, the Press Office. Also included within this chapter is an assessment of the Cabinet Office and its work, overseen during Major's time by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler. In each instance Major's organisational capacity will be judged as effective based upon two important elements within the Greenstein definition: 'effectiveness at institutional arrangements' and, concomitantly, effectiveness of advisory structures (Bose 2006). Finally, an examination is made of key Whitehall reforms under Major, with the 1991 Citizen's Charter used as a case study to assess Number 10's organisational effectiveness overall.

#### *Chapter five: Political Skill*

Major's political skill is assessed through the use of five different skills from five different analytical frameworks. First, skill at negotiation (Greenstein 2000). This section examines Major's ability to negotiate, at both domestic and international level, with particular focus on the 1991 Maastricht Treaty negotiations (Hogg and Hill 1995), and the Northern Ireland peace process (Norton 1999).

Second, skill at persuasion (Neustadt 1990, Ellis 2002). In Prime Ministerial leadership under the Neustadt 'precepts' a Prime Minister can protect their reputation in two ways: first, by 'protecting their own stakes'; second, by 'increasing the insecurities' of any opponents (Ellis 2002). Both precepts can be achieved through advice from the Parliamentary Whips' Office (Searing 1994). To Major this advice was crucial during the 1992 Parliament on Europe, particularly the Maastricht ratification process and on other important EU legislation, as well as in relation to the issue of sleaze.

Third, manipulation (Riker 1986). This section examines Major's effective use of two manipulative techniques, agenda control and binding, in his approach to intra-party division on Europe. During the 1992 Parliament the main focus of such division surrounded the UK's possible entry into a single currency in 1999.

Fourth, the ability to hide (Norton 1987). This is defined within the Norton typology as a leader's ability to disassociate themselves from problematic policies and ministerial personnel. Such problems Major had to respond to on a number of occasions, and can be regarded as another manipulative technique the Prime Minister utilised in relation to Europe (Williams 1998). How effective Major was at 'hiding' will be examined in this section of the chapter.

The fifth and final skill looks at Major's ability to discern (Hargrove 1998, Hargrove 2002). This skill examines to a leader's ability to respond effectively to the political environment which they inherit. For Major, the political environment he inherited imposed a number of constraints, which included: the legacy of Margaret Thatcher; the issue of Europe; and, latterly, a reduced majority following the 1992 election (McAnulla 1999). How effective Major's response was to such constraints is examined in this section of the chapter. Having examined Major's ability in each of these five analytical frameworks and applied them the Prime Minister's effectiveness as a political operator can then be judged overall in the chapter's conclusion.

### *Chapter six: Vision*

This chapter seeks to establish whether John Major was able to formulate a public policy vision for the 1990s, and a new direction for post-Thatcherite Conservatism, using the Greenstein definition of vision (Greenstein 2000). The four elements of vision under the Greenstein definition are: overall direction; policy agenda, consistency, and, finally, a capacity to inspire. When looking at the premiership of Major there remains a degree of ambiguity over whether the arrival of the new Prime Minister evinced a continuation of Thatcherism or possibly a new vision, or even possibly a return to the values of One Nation represented by Major's predecessors (Dorey 1999b). Whilst initially the latter looked possible from an ideational, policy and discursive perspective as the new Prime Minister sought to create 'a classless society' and 'a nation ease with itself' (Major 1990a, Major 1990b), following the 1992 election a more ambiguous picture began to emerge. Was John Major a visionary leader or a pragmatist in the mould of his predecessors? Did his policy agenda seek to continue the



Thatcherite agenda, or offer a new Majorite agenda? This chapter seeks to answer such questions.

### *Chapter seven: Cognitive Style and Emotional Intelligence*

This chapter seeks to assess the psychology of John Major. *Cognitive style* looks chiefly at Major's style of decision-making at both a *personal* and a *collective* level. Personal level decision-making examines Major's ability to make individual decisions within government, including his ability to master civil service briefs and handle complex policy detail (Lang 2002). Collective level decision-making examines Major's decisions at Cabinet level, the focus often whilst he was Prime Minister being upon the Prime Minister's style of chairmanship in comparison to his predecessor. This section, as part of its analysis, includes two case studies which compare and contrast Major's style of collective decision-making pre and post the 1992 election: the abolition of the Poll Tax in 1991 (Seldon 1997), and Black Wednesday in 1992 (Lamont 2000), before reaching an overall judgement.

The section of the chapter on *emotional intelligence* looks at Major's personal background, and its impact on his character-makeup. This includes an analysis of the following of Major's alleged character traits: a sensitivity to criticism, not least in relation to the level of attacks and lampooning by the media to which he was subjected between 1990 and 1997 (Foley 2002); a pride at his achievements, which led Major to defend the pound sterling within the ERM (Stephens 1996) and Maastricht (Hurd 2003); toughness and resilience, which was recognised by Number 10 staff and close colleagues (Hill 2017, Turnbull 2017), and Major's opponents, who could receive a response from the Prime Minister which was not always keeping within parliamentary etiquette or high office (Seldon 1997). Finally, Major displayed a cacophony of emotions during the 1992 Parliament, often recorded through the observation of parliamentary colleagues (Brandreth 2000). The impact of such emotions on Major is discussed before the overall mental state of the Prime Minister is judged.

## 1.5 Conclusion

Thus, the rationale for this thesis is twofold. Firstly, the reputational improvement of John Major and his 1990 to 1997 premiership over the past twenty years. This is witnessed by prime ministerial surveys since 1997 (Theakston and Gill 2006, Theakston and Gill 2011), as well as his dignity as a former Prime Minister since leaving office (Theakston 2010). Such an improvement has allowed Cameron whilst Prime Minister and other prominent Conservatives, such as Ruth Davidson in 2016, to wish to utilise him in a more prominent fashion, and on transformational issues, within the national debate (Major 2014, Major 2016).

Second, the scarcity and relative narrowness of the academic literature available on the Major premiership in comparison to Thatcher and Blair. The majority of the literature constitutes biographies and memoirs, which have steadily emerged since the Conservative government fell in 1997. Of the remainder, much written in the 1990s and early 2000s, it often narrowly focused and thus provides opportunities for further exploration.

Therefore it is the argument of this thesis that further research into John Major's political leadership is justified, from both a reputational perspective, and from the perspective of the nature and focus of the current academic literature. The justification for the utilisation of the Greenstein model is discussed with the next chapter of this thesis. It should thus be read in conjunction with this chapter in order to provide an overall rationale and justification for this thesis.

## **Chapter Two: The Greenstein model in context**

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first looks at the concept of leadership itself and the development of early strands of thought in this specialism, its beginnings philosophically emanating from the structure-agency debate. The second section will look at both British and American studies of political leadership, at times revealing a correlation between the two in terms of their development and evolution. Finally, having looked in-depth at leadership as a concept and its underpinnings, and the development of American and British leadership studies, it is therefore possible to discuss the Greenstein model within its proper context and the conclusions that can be drawn thereof.

### **2.1 Introduction**

Fred Greenstein's *A Presidential Difference* (Greenstein 2000), and subsequent editions (Greenstein 2004, Greenstein 2009a), is an analytical framework, or a model for assessing political leadership, which is designed to shed light on a part of the American polity that is the subject of continuing speculation and debate: the American Presidency. Its six criteria – *public communicator*, *organisational capacity*, *political skill*, *public policy vision*, *cognitive style* and *emotional intelligence* – seek to do this. It is the intention of this thesis to apply the Greenstein model to the political leadership of former Conservative Prime Minister John Major.

In order to justify such a decision a number of questions are immediately posed which deserve clarification. Firstly, why the Greenstein model? Second, what are the chief criticisms of the Greenstein model and how are they addressed? Third, what advantage, or 'added value,' does the Greenstein model offer against its contemporaries and counterparts within the academic community? Finally, how can an American model for assessing political leadership be used to assess British prime ministerial performance?

### **2.2 Conceptualising Leadership**

Leadership, as a concept, is entirely socially constructed, thereby allowing the possibility of a variety of different interpretations and definitions within the social

science community (Elgie 1995, 2). Blondel highlights the number of different elements which could be examined when trying to get to grips with the concept of leadership. These include:

“personality while not forgetting the role of the environment;...behaviour while not ceasing to be interested in the roles and institutional structures that are embedded in these roles, or...the characteristics of leaders whilst not losing sight of the problems posed by their aims and achievements” (Blondel 1987, 2).

With such a variety of elements that could be said to encapsulate leadership, it is not surprising that there are a variety of definitions of the concept, social scientists able to pick and choose which they feel are the most apt for their purposes. Essentially leadership, at its central core, is linked to another abstract social science concept, power. As Tucker asserts, “leadership is a process of human interaction in which some individuals exert, or attempt to exert, a determining influence upon others” (Tucker 1981, 11). However, even power does not necessarily bring leadership. As MacGregor Burns says: “All leaders are actual, or potential, power holders, but not all power holders are leaders” (MacGregor Burns 1979, 18).

The abstract nature of leadership and concomitantly power as concepts, and the fact that they are both open to such wide interpretation, is a by-product of the so-called structure-agency debate, with political scientists pitched on either side of the argument within the debate (Blondel 1987, 3). Put simply, structure is defined as “the material conditions which define the range of actions available to actors”; agency is defined as the individual actor’s “ability to affect their environment” (MacAnulla 2002, 271, Byrne and Theakston 2018). Thus, it is possible to demarcate proponents of conflicting viewpoints within the leadership spectrum into arguably either structuralists or individualists within the structure-agency debate.

One of the earliest proponents of the individualists strand of thought within the leadership spectrum was Thomas Carlyle, who propounded his Great Man theory in the late nineteenth century. Carlyle felt a leader of moral virtue could be an

agent for political and social change whatever the leadership environment they faced. By complete contrast however, cultural determinists disputed this notion of individuality, arguing that the interplay of social and political forces - the political leadership environment - shaped the leader's actions, leaving them with little or no opportunity to shape political events (Elgie 1995, 5-6). Such reductionist viewpoints soon were developed into more interactionist approaches by later political scientists, but, essentially, the arguments surrounding the influence of the political actor or individual in relation to their leadership environment and context remain (Hargrove 1993, 69-73).

Therefore to structuralists the chief constraining influences on the political actor within their political leadership environment are both institutional as well as contextual (Lowi 1985, 136-139). Institutionalists particularly "are interested in the whole range of state and societal institutions that shape how political actors define their interests and that structure their relations of power to other groups" (Thelen et al 1998, 2). It is these institutional structures which "partly [determine] the ambitions and styles of political leaders," dependent upon the 'structure of resources' they have at their disposal. These include certain constitutional and procedural powers, plus staff and resources within government to enable them to influence the internal policy-making process and other institutions and colleagues as they seek to achieve their policy objectives (Elgie 1995, 13-20).

Of equal, if not greater, importance to the structuralists when examining political leadership are the constraints imposed upon a leader by their context, historically, culturally, and "across time and place" (Blondel 1987, 17). This is in the belief that "the impact of individual leaders on events and institutions is greater or lesser depending upon the historical situation and the opportunities available to them" (Hargrove 1993, 69-70). Thus a political leader's behaviour in office is dependent upon the context, or the needs of the society which they inherit from their predecessors (Elgie 1995, 19). Therefore, as a consequence of these constraints, "[t]he [leadership] environment structures the situation in which the leader has to cope and from which he cannot escape" (Blondel 1987, 17).

Despite the importance placed upon the constraining influence of the political leadership environment (by institutions and the historic context inherited) on the political actor in political science there was also another school of thought which disagreed with such a viewpoint, arguing that more emphasis should be placed upon the study of the agency of the individual political actor within their political leadership environment in any study of political leadership. However, what were known as personality studies, and taking the view that individuals can make a difference in politics, was treated with deep suspicion within the political science community, particularly in its earliest form in America, where it had “more critics ..than practitioners” (Reisman and Glazer 1961). One of its earliest pioneers was Fred Greenstein (Greenstein 1987), whose contribution to the structure-agency debate is discussed later in this chapter.

### **2.3 British and American Studies of Political Leadership**

Therefore already it is possible within the political leadership spectrum, and despite the abstract nature of leadership and power as concepts (Blondel 1987), to see a number of different areas of political thought which have been developed by early political scientists. Flowing from this, the next logical step is see how such strands of thought were developed within the political science community in Britain and America in the fields of Prime Ministerial studies, which looks at British political leadership, and Presidential studies, looking at American political leadership.

As has already been stated, within the political science community personality studies were treated with deep suspicion, in both Britain and America, yet over the decades such suspicions arguably changed to acknowledgement and acceptance of this variable. The key question therefore, is how did this evolution occur?

Indeed, within Britain, the political science community steadily moved away from the traditional Westminster model, epitomised in the Prime Ministerial government versus Cabinet government debate (Mackintosh 1965, Crossman 1985, Jones 1990) towards new interpretations of British political leadership and ways to assess prime ministerial performance. This was represented by

innovations such as the core executive model, which introduced the idea of networks within government (Smith 1999), and Michael Foley's notion of a British Presidency (Foley 1993) – Foley thus putting personality centre-stage within British leadership studies.

In the American political science community there has been a comparable move away from looking at the American Presidency as an institution toward an examination of the part a President's personality can play in making a difference (Greenstein 1987). As in the British debate, there became three distinct, evolving categories of American political leadership studies. First, those who took a contextualist approach, which seek to place Presidents in their historical context, including an analysis of 'skill in context' (Skowronek 1997, Hargrove 1998, Hargrove 2002). James MacGregor Burns was to add a further moral dimension to this category (MacGregor Burns 1979, MacGregor Burns 2003).

The second category was what could be described as the institutionalist approach, which looked at the American Presidency as an institution, as propounded by Richard E. Neustadt. Neustadt, however, broke new ground in this field, emphasising how a President has 'the power to persuade' through the institutions at their disposal which can be used to enhance an individual's professional reputation and public prestige (Neustadt 1990).

The final category of American political leadership studies are those based upon personality studies, developed within political psychology studies by Greenstein in his seminal work, *Personality and Politics* (Greenstein 1987). Greenstein was not one of the first to apply notions associated with political psychology to political leadership however, that being achieved by James David Barber (Barber 1992). Greenstein did build upon the work of Barber (as well as the work of Neustadt) however in his own analytical framework, utilising it to ensure he had what was a catch-all model to assess political leadership.

### **2.3.1 The Prime Minister: A Definition**

The premiership is defined by former Prime Minister Herbert Asquith in his regularly utilised remark that "[t]he office of the Prime Minister is what its holder

chooses and is able to make it” (Wilson 1976, 1). This is because the functions and powers of the Prime Minister are based principally on constitutional conventions which have become established over time, rather than by statute.

George Jones concurred, arguing:

“At present much of the prime ministerial role, including being the most senior adviser to the monarch and chair of the Cabinet, remains defined in convention and is often exercised under the Royal Prerogative. While some of the powers of the office – mainly about public appointments – exist under statute, the premiership has a slimmer statutory existence than many other offices of state” (Jones 2011, 17, Para. 2).

This was similarly re-enforced by Kevin Theakston and Tim Heppell:

“The extent to which the job bears the imprint of personality and circumstance is well understood. Functions, responsibilities and demands on the office and its holders have expanded over time but that brings overload as much as extra ‘power’ in any straightforward sense” (Theakston and Heppell 2011, 43, Para. 1).

The closest the office of Prime Minister has come to codification is the *Draft Cabinet Manual* (2010, 36-37). The key functions, roles and powers of the Prime Minister within the *Draft Cabinet Manual* include: the Prime Minister is head of the government by virtue of being able to command a majority in the House of Commons (Para. 74); the Prime Minister advises the Monarch on uses of the Royal Prerogative, such as the appointment, dismissal and resignation of ministers (Para. 75); by modern convention, the Prime Minister sits in the House of Commons (Para. 76); the Prime Minister has few statutory functions but takes the lead on many matters of state (Para. 77); by tradition, the Prime Minister is also The First Lord of the Treasury and Minister of the Civil Service, with special responsibility for overall management of most of the Civil Service and other statutory functions (Para. 79).

The most important relationship, constitutionally, is that between the Prime Minister and their Cabinet. To Bagehot, writing *The English Constitution* in 1867



(Taylor 2001), the Cabinet was the fulcrum of the British Constitution, the essential link between the executive and the legislature. It was the country's Board of Control, the Prime Minister and Cabinet the Monarch's chief ministers, able to occupy that position as long as they had the confidence of the House of Commons. The glue that cemented the Cabinet together (and the government as a whole), both in Parliament and to the electorate, over matters of policy, was the doctrine of collective Cabinet responsibility.

The three key principles of the convention of collective Cabinet responsibility, codified in the *Draft Cabinet Manual* (2010, 53-55), are, firstly, that the Cabinet is the ultimate decision-making body of the government (Para. 133). Second, the Cabinet system of government is based on the principle of collective Cabinet responsibility: all government ministers are bound by the collective decisions of the Cabinet (Para. 134). Third, this means that in practice, a decision of the Cabinet, or one of its committees, is binding on all members of the government, regardless of whether they were present when the decision was taken or their personal views (Para. 135).

### **2.3.2 Prime Ministerial government versus Cabinet government**

Despite Bagehot's assertion in 1867 of the importance of the role of the Cabinet within *The English Constitution* (Taylor 2001), what he was not able to foresee was by how much the power of the Prime Minister would evolve exponentially to accommodate the growing responsibilities of the office, both at home and abroad, since the late nineteenth century. It led to some notable figures to argue that the net result of such evolution has seen a concomitant diminution of the role of the Cabinet as a decision-making body as a new form of executive power has emerged (Foley 1993, 8). This is so-called Prime Ministerial government thesis (Mackintosh 1968, Crossman 1985).

As one notable protagonist, John Mackintosh asserted, writing in the second edition of his book, *The British Cabinet*: "the role of the Cabinet and the way decisions were taken had changed and changed in a manner which left more influence and power of initiative with the Prime Minister" (Mackintosh 1968, 624). Richard Crossman, another notable protagonist of the Prime Ministerial

government thesis, went further than Mackintosh, arguing that the dominance of the Prime Minister over his or her Cabinet was such that, even by 1867, "it was probably a misnomer to describe the premier as chairman and *primus inter pares*" - the Prime Minister holding "near presidential powers" (Crossman 1985, 186, 189, 191).

The principal aspects of Prime Ministerial power which led to the Prime Ministerial government thesis concerned the following formal powers occupied by the Prime Minister: the Prime Minister's right to select individual members and their portfolios and dismiss them from his or her Cabinet at will; to decide the Cabinet's agenda; to unilaterally override the Cabinet and take a decision without a formal vote; to select the subject-matter and composition of Cabinet committees; to control government and party patronage; to have first access to the formidable network of government information and administrative direction through the Cabinet Secretariat (James 1992, 92; Foley 1993, 8). Thus, such was the power of the Prime Minister that it led Crossman to argue that, "in so far as ministers feel themselves to be agents of the premier, the British Cabinet has come to resemble the American Cabinet" (Crossman 1985, 189-190).

However, by complete contrast, there are the advocates of the Cabinet government thesis (Jones 1985, Jones 1990). One of the leading proponents, George Jones believed that "assertions of prime ministerial power were not only politically motivated, but were based upon a fundamental misunderstanding of political reality...prime ministerial or presidential government, therefore, was a fascination of mind, or rather of overactive minds" (Foley 1993, 13-14). Thus the Prime Minister is, in fact, "only as strong as his party, and particularly his chief colleagues, let him be" (Jones 1985, 207), Jones exposing "the simplistic unreality of Crossman's claims" (James 1992, 92).

For instance, on Cabinet selection, far from having a free hand, the Prime Minister was in reality limited in his choices, the Cabinet having "to include the leading figures in the parliamentary party, and they may be so influential within the party and in the country that they may even dictate which office they will have." Equally, on dismissals: "No prime minister threw out or forced the

resignation of a man who had support enough to displace him.” The Prime Minister similarly does not have unlimited control over the Cabinet’s agenda and “[h]e cannot impose his own views on a reluctant session, especially if the chief figures in the cabinet oppose him” (Jones 1985, 206-212).

Jones also dispels the myth of Prime Ministerial cliques at the top of government in the form of an ‘inner’ Cabinet: “He consults them, not because he likes their company, but because they are the most powerful men in government.” Furthermore, these bilateral discussions did not exclude the need for the most important decisions to be taken at full Cabinet level. As a consequence therefore, “Cabinet government and collective responsibility are not defunct notions. Shared responsibility is still meaningful, for a prime minister has to gain the support of the bulk of his cabinet to carry out his policies” (Jones 1985, 216).

Jones’s thesis on Cabinet government has remained remarkably resilient during subsequent evolutions in the role and powers of the Prime Minister, even when Britain was viewed at home and abroad as being governed not by an ordinary run-of-the-mill leader in Margaret Thatcher who was displaying distinct signs of ‘presidentialism.’ Jones acknowledges this in April 1990, agreeing that Thatcher had indeed “stretched the elastic” of Prime Ministerial performance during her reign as Prime Minister, but then qualified his remark by saying: “but if her luck runs out and she appears a liability, she will be dropped. The elastic will snap back” (Jones 1990, 4).

But the Prime Ministerial government versus Cabinet government debate was by the 1990s looking distinctly stale. Anthony King summed up the frustrations of the academic community when he wrote: “The two sides contend furiously (and interminably); but it is rather like the old argument about whether the bottle is half full or half empty. The evidence is there to support either contention” (King, quoted in Foley 1993, 15). And students seemed equally unimpressed when writing papers on the prime minister, “unwilling to adjudicate between competing claims, tended to list the powers of the prime minister ‘on the one hand’ and those of the cabinet ‘on the other,’ squaring the circle through an ‘either/or’ analysis” (Heffernan 2005a, 607).

The importance of the Prime Ministerial versus Cabinet government debate is twofold however. First, through the argument of Crossman and Mackintosh on the powers of the Prime Minister, and the indication of a correlation between the British Prime Minister and American President, proponents of the Prime Ministerial government thesis had inadvertently introduced the notion of 'presidentialism' within the British polity, leading to its later development by Michael Foley (Foley 1993, 9). Second, the Prime Ministerial versus Cabinet government debate allowed other attempts to develop new methods to evaluate Prime Minister power beyond the 'stale' Westminster models, such as the core executive model (Bevir and Rhodes 2006). Therefore before turning to notions of 'presidentialism,' it is necessary to first look at the core executive model within Prime Ministerial studies.

### **2.3.3 The Core Executive**

The core executive is defined by Rhodes as:

“the heart of the machine, covering the complex web of institutions, networks and practices surrounding the prime minister, cabinet, cabinet committees and their official counterparts...bilateral negotiations and interdepartmental committees” (Rhodes 1995, 12).

The core executive defined, the essential starting point of any analysis of it is that “all actors within the core executive have resources, with no actor, or institution, having a monopoly.” Therefore “no actor or institution controls all the resources necessary to achieve their goals.” As a consequence “actors within the central state depend upon each other” (Smith 1999, 1). Key actors and institutions within the core executive are therefore dependent upon each other for resources in order to achieve their goals (Rhodes 2000, 352).

The core executive model, as a consequence, is different to the Prime Minister versus Cabinet government debate for a number of reasons. First, Prime Ministerial power is shown not to be positional, but, in reality, is relational and contingent, being dependent upon the power of each of the individual actors (Bevir and Rhodes 2003, 57). Second, that the Prime Minister is constrained by

institutions and outside political and economic factors: “their operating environment” (Heffernan 2003, 349).

Third and fourth, as is asserted by Smith (1999), because a Prime Minister is constrained by other actors to achieve their goals, outcomes are “to some extent reliant on strategy and tactics.” And such a power-dependency model, being based upon the interdependence of actors and institutions within policy networks, makes an examination of the personality of the Prime Minister almost irrelevant (Smith 1999, 2, 71).

Notions of ‘prime ministerial predominance’ therefore, within the core executive, are conditional, because “prime ministerial authority is both contingent and contextual, and prime ministerial predominance can be real, if temporal.” Thus, Prime Ministerial power can only be acquired and enhanced if the Prime Minister uses the power resources at their disposal effectively. Predominance therefore only comes through “using a number of *personal* resources and making full use of the *institutional* resources that are available. Personal power resources enhance the use of these institutional resources” (Heffernan 2003, 350). Ultimately such resources ensure that a Prime Minister can check ministerial autonomy (Heffernan 2005b, 614, 616) and Whitehall departmentalism (Rhodes 2000, 350-352).

Is it possible to disaggregate the personal and institutional power resources that are available to the Prime Minister within the core executive? First, *personal* power resources. These are: reputation, skill and ability; association with actual or anticipated political success; public popularity; and, finally, high standing in his or her party (Heffernan 2003, 350-356)<sup>4</sup>. Second, *institutional* power resources. This, effectively, denotes the power resources that are available to the Prime Minister by being at the centre of the Whitehall machine, or at the centre of the “core of the core” (Smith 1999, 71).

Key institutional resources that specifically relate to the office of the Prime Minister are: being the legal head of government (including powers to delegate

---

<sup>4</sup> These personal power resources within the core executive are also included in Bennister et al’s ‘Political Capital Index’ (Bennister et al 2017)

matters of policy to other ministers and be consulted at all times on policy, under the Crown prerogatives); setting the policy agenda of the government through agenda-setting and control of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committee system within Whitehall; the organising of a de facto prime minister's department by strengthening Downing Street and the Cabinet Office; finally, setting the policy agenda through management of the news media (Heffernan 2003, 356-368).

It was Blair who was able to utilise such personal and institutional power resources effectively in order to display distinct signs of 'predominance' within the core executive model. Sir Richard Wilson, a former Cabinet Secretary, speaking in 2004, felt that, in his first term, Blair became:

"the most powerful Prime Minister we had had in the country for many years; the most disciplined cabinet; the most disciplined party; with the highest ratings ever in public opinion – all the things you look for in checks and balances (including the press, cabinet government, political parties, Parliament) were in a quiet state" (Hennessy 2005, 8-9).

Indeed, not only would Blair have a set of special advisers with more power than Whitehall officials to ensure he had complete control over policy decision-making inside Downing Street, but this approach would be backed up by institutional reforms at the centre of Whitehall, both in the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office. This was summed up one of Blair's former advisers:

"the Blair and Brown era...saw the emergence of a distinctive approach to governing, with a significant strengthening of the strategic centre of British government, the development of new central units and policy and delivery capabilities, and the tentative emergence of a new philosophy of public management" (Diamond 2011, 146).

Diamond's comments were confirmed by Blair's remorseless attempts to achieve 'joined up government' through the integration of the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Office under a Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, and the ongoing focus on 'public service delivery' through the enhancement of not just the Prime Minister's Policy Unit inside No 10 (which after 2001 was merged with the Private

Office to become the Policy Directorate), but also through the creation of a Delivery Unit (based in the Treasury but reporting directly to Blair). In the Delivery Unit can be seen what Diamond referred to as a ‘new philosophy of public management’ under New Labour, four high spending departments (Health, Home Office, Education and Skills and Transport, up to 2005) each being given a ‘delivery priority,’ with clear performance indicators and a delivery contract signed by either a minister or senior civil servant – and directly responsible to the Prime Minister (Burch and Holliday 2004, 2-19).

Such an approach to government was highly unusual – more like the “corporate headquarters of a multi-dimensional company,” and at times incoherent, but they served their purpose: through Blair and his closest advisers all the business of government flowed, Blair’s authority as Prime Minister not only enhanced by such institutional reforms, but strengthened to such a degree that ‘prime ministerial predominance’ was perhaps the wrong description of the outcome from them. Blair was arguably showing instead distinct signs of what could only be described as ‘presidentialism’ (Hennessy 2000, 389; Burch and Holliday 2004, 2-19).

#### **2.3.4 The British Presidency**

In his seminal work *The British Presidency* (Foley 1993) Michael Foley, through an examination of the highly ‘personal’ leadership styles of Thatcher and Blair, charts the increase in Prime Ministerial power within the British polity:

“[t]he properties and concepts associated with the presidency providing appropriate benchmarks to reveal how far expectations of political leadership in Britain have made the prime minister’s position amenable to presidential terms of description” (Foley 1993, 22).

The key properties and concepts of the American Presidency that lie behind his thesis are as follows: First, ‘spatial’ leadership. This is a concept which allows the President to distance himself from the government in Washington, whilst at the same time being at the heart of it. Second, the use of television and other forms of mass media in America, which allows the President to ‘go public,’ thereby

generating a personal following that “displaces the traditional need for political negotiation and accommodation within Washington” (Foley 1993 24-25; 89).

To Foley the ‘public presidency,’ through the medium to television in particular and other forms of modern media, had transformed the nature of Presidential politics. The media was used most effectively by George H W Bush in particular, who used it to develop his own outsider status, having been seen for years as the quintessential ‘insider’ as a former Vice President and Head of the CIA (Foley 1993, 95-103).

Foley equally recognised the disadvantages of adopting the mantle of the outsider, since it could run the risk of “associating detachment with weakness or incompetence,” seen under the Presidencies of Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter, but was effectively utilised during the prolonged period of Republican administration during the Ronald Reagan and Bush Presidencies (Foley 1993, 32-58, 95-103).

Both Thatcher and Blair were adept in utilising their outsider status. Thatcher utilised certain aspects of her outsider status as Prime Minister - her sex and social origins, to take on established interests, especially those in Whitehall (Theakston 2002, 292-293; 296). But it was Blair who took this concept of ‘spatial’ leadership to “unprecedented levels of development and sophistication” by distancing himself from his party and government and projecting a new form of ‘public leadership’ using modern media methods, epitomised by his ‘spin doctor’ Alastair Campbell (Foley 2000, 110-111).

Indeed, the power occupied by Campbell as a special adviser increased visibly in Whitehall, firstly when he was head of the Strategic Communications Unit and then still further as head of the Communications and Strategy Directorate, both based in the Prime Minister’s Office (Burch and Holliday 1999, 34; Burch and Holliday 2004, 5, 9). Essentially, Campbell “was the prime minister’s voice. His job was to ensure that the prime minister’s voice was also that of the government.” Blair also made sure he was associated with key policies and seen to ‘step in’ personally when results did not seem to be going his way (Bevir and Rhodes 2006, 675). Thus through such a use of “personal projection...Blair’s



project and his personal vision have been given central significance in the party's electoral strategy and in its governing priorities" (Foley 2004, 293).

Thus, a clear trajectory in Prime Ministerial studies is becoming clear, with arguments moving towards notions of 'presidentialism' within the British Polity. This was seen particularly with the advent of the premierships of Blair and Thatcher. It also introduced, and just as importantly, notions of 'personal leadership,' thereby further raising awareness of the personality of the leader against more traditional institutional approaches in any analysis of leadership, as seen in the core executive model and the Prime Ministerial government versus Cabinet government debate.

### **2.3.5 The American President: A Definition**

The evolution of the presidency from that envisaged by the Founding Fathers of the American Constitution to the modern presidency that is recognised today began under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), who made many institutional changes to The Executive Office of The President in response to two major World crises: the Great Depression and the Second World War. Other Presidents made reforms to the office subsequent to FDR, notably President Dwight Eisenhower and President John Kennedy, both in an effort to make the White House more efficient, but equally in response to the modern media age and television – Kennedy the first 'modern' President in this regard.

Of the changes that have taken place since 1933, the most notable were: First, Presidents acquired far greater formal and informal powers to make decisions on their own initiative. Second, Presidents became the chief agenda-setters in federal-level policy making, despite the risk of raising expectations which could not be fulfilled if the President and Congress were not aligned politically. Third, Presidents acquired over time an ever-increasing staff and support network to aid them, beginning with President Eisenhower, who formalised arrangements in the White House and was the first holder of the office to employ a Chief of Staff in a hierarchical power structure. Finally, with introduction of television, the President became the most visible of all the actors on the political stage in the media, dwarfing even the most influential legislators on Capitol Hill. President Kennedy

was the first President to utilise television effectively, introducing regular White House press conferences during his time in office (Greenstein 1988, 1-4, 298-352).

Despite presidential power ensuring “the individual at the top mattered” (Greenstein 2000, 2-3), not all American constitutionalists believed that presidential government was superior to parliamentary government. Chief amongst them was President Woodrow Wilson, an academic scholar as well as a statesman, who agreed with Walter Bagehot’s assertion in *The English Constitution* that the separation between President and Congress – between the executive and the legislature, - was “destructive” constitutionally, whereas Britain’s bi-cameral majoritarian parliamentary government was “responsible”, or, as Wilson described it, “a perfected party government” (Hargrove 2001, 51-61).

It has been suggested that Wilson’s interest in Parliament was an effort on his part to try to resolve the aspect of the separation of powers within the American constitution that left Presidents at their weakest: a President’s relationship with Congress, particularly one occupied by an opposing party. Crucially however, Wilson and other American constitutional scholars who agreed with him have often felt the Prime Minister had far more power through the executive and legislature sitting together under the British Constitution than the President ever could have unless the party affiliation of the President and Congress was in tandem, an event that has happened only infrequently throughout American history. Wilson’s views are therefore important, not least in the light of the debate mentioned within the British political science community on ‘presidentialism.’

### **2.3.6 Historical Context**

Stephen Skowronek (1997), in his seminal work *The Politics Presidents Make*, put himself squarely in the contextualists school when he argued that “the most valuable faculty is the president’s perceptiveness about the potential context in which they find themselves.” As a result they “must see the possibility of political action in their time, whether it is to create, invigorate, or preserve a regime” by “situating themselves in the public discourse” (Hargrove 1998, 37). Thus Skowronek repudiates the importance of the individual actor in his own work.

Indeed, Skowronek suggests in history that a President's political authority and scope for institutional action is dependent upon their identity in relation to the 'established regime.' As Skowronek states: "leaders either come to power from their opposition to the pre-established regime, or they come to power affiliated to its basic commitments." Skowronek argues that, of the two, affiliated leadership is the harder to maintain, because "[t]he office these leaders hold calls forth independent action, disruptive of previously established political and institutional arrangements, and it demands that each incumbent establish legitimacy anew on his own terms." This is possible with an opposition leader, who has such leverage of independent action coming, as they do, with a measure of independence from the pre-existing regime (Skowronek 1997, 34-35).

On this basis, Skowronek established a four cell typology to assess American Presidents, their political identity within the typology based upon whether they took office opposed to or affiliated to the previous regime, and on the strength or resilience of that regime. These were the following. First, the *presidents of reconstruction* (Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln and FDR), who challenged the previous vulnerable regimes and built new coalitions to take their place, eventually being challenged themselves. Second, *presidents of articulation* (Theodore Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson), who carry out the unfinished but promised agenda of the presidents of reconstruction, such is the resilience of their regime (Hargrove 1998, 36). These first two types under Skowronek's typology are regarded as the successful ones.

By complete contrast, *presidents of disjunction* (John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, Herbert Hoover) were regarded as 'incompetents' in office by Skowronek. They are men who happened to come into office affiliated to "a set of established commitments that have in the course of events been called into question as failed or irrelevant responses to the problems of the day." Therefore to affirm such a political stance and continue the work of the regime "becomes at moments like these a threat to the vitality, if not survival, of the nation, and the leadership collapses." The choice of these Presidents was thus an impossible one. They either must affirm commitments to the existing regime, thereby aligning themselves with political failure; or, repudiate the

established regime, and thereby alienate their natural allies, thus rendering themselves impotent in the eyes of their followers (Skowronek 1997, 39-40).

Finally, we come to those Presidents who gained office in opposition to a resilient regime (John Tyler, Andrew Johnson, Woodrow Wilson, Richard Nixon): *the presidents of preemption*. These are often viewed as the ‘wild cards’ of history, with flawed characters, who, unlike the presidents of reconstruction, are, due to the previous regimes resilience, “manifestly limited by the political, institutional, and ideological supports that the old establishment maintains” (Skowronek 1997, 41-42).

As a result they: intrude into an ongoing polity as an alien force; they interrupt a still vital discourse; and they try to pre-empt its agenda by playing upon the political divisions within the establishment that affiliated presidents instinctively seek to assuage. Such Presidents were so order-shattering in their attempts to build new bases of political support that they put the political establishment to the test to such an extent that it galvanised it into an order-affirming defence of both the government and constitution (Skowronek 1997, 41-42).

### **2.3.7 The Moral Dimension**

James MacGregor Burns, in his own seminal book *Leadership* (1979) added a moral dimension to the concept of leadership, arguing it is the difference between leaders being merely ‘transactional,’ or ‘transformational.’ As MacGregor Burns asserts:

“the ultimate test of moral leadership is its capacity to transcend the claim of the multiplicity of everyday wants and needs and expectations, to respond to the higher levels of moral development, and to relate leadership behaviour - its roles, choices, style, commitments – to a set of reasoned, relatively explicit, common values” (MacGregor Burns 1979, 46).

Thus, transactional leaders bargain favours during times of stability. Transformational leaders on the other hand, “articulate and reinterpret the historical situations in times of uncertainty and, as they do, appeal to revised versions of fundamental moral and political beliefs and values” (Hargrove 1998,

30). MacGregor Burns therefore was able to articulate the difference between leaders who were 'mere office holders' and those who were able to be 'transformational' due to their ability to judge their followers "wants and needs" as well as their own. MacGregor Burns was able to apply his analytical framework to leaders as varied as Adolf Hitler and Gandhi (MacGregor Burns 1979, 20, 27)<sup>5</sup>.

### **2.3.8 Skill in Context**

Erwin Hargrove, in his own seminal work, *The President as Leader* (1998)<sup>6</sup>, whilst acknowledging the "superiority of Skowronek's historical approach," and thus its incorporation into his own analytical framework 'skill in context,' does argue that it did have one important omission: that it "did not look at presidents themselves and consider the possible effects of their styles of leadership on the quality of political life" (Hargrove 1998, 38). Indeed, to Hargrove, historical context and political skill is not a "chicken and an egg" situation, where one has to be looked at before the other, or visa-versa, but that they are mutually reinforcing (Hargrove and Owens 2002, 199-200).

And by introducing political skill, Hargrove is directly moving into Greenstein's own work on personality studies, as will be discussed below, a position he asserts in a 2002 journal article. Within the article Hargrove argues that: "historical continuities and discontinuities may be joined with agency usefully," and that the agency variable is as dynamic as its contextual counterparts because "interaction occurs in all directions." Thus Hargrove concludes that: first, skill and context reinforce each other; second, skill can be effective at the margins, even in unfavourable contexts; and, finally, that ineptness makes a difference, often for the worse (Hargrove 2002, 213). Therefore Hargrove is one of the most recognisable of American contextualists to acknowledge the importance of personality and the individual actor in any leadership analysis.

---

<sup>5</sup> See chapter eight for further discussion on morals in leadership

<sup>6</sup> See chapter five for further discussion of Hargrove's 'skill in context' model

### 2.3.9 Personality Studies

Over thirty years before *The Presidential Difference* (2000) Fred Greenstein wrote an equally seminal book in 1969: *Personality and Politics* (Greenstein 1987). Greenstein's 1969 work was significant because it sought to answer those critics within the political science community who sought to downplay the importance of the study of the personality of the political actor in judging political behaviour (Reisman and Glazer 1961). Personality, as defined by Greenstein, is "a construct that is introduced to account for the regularities in an individual's behaviour as he responds to diverse stimuli" (Greenstein 1987, 3).

Greenstein in *Personality and Politics* sought to confront such critics directly, answering their 'objections' in turn using techniques which were more associated with psychological studies. The five objections to the study of the personality of the political actor were as follows:

"(1) political actors are randomly distributed in roles and therefore their personalities 'cancel out'; (2) political action is determined more by the actor's political environments than by their own characteristics; (3) the particular stratum of the psyche many political scientists equate with personality...does not have much of a political impact" (Greenstein 1992, 106).

The final two objections were as follows: "(4) the social characteristics of political actors are more important than their psychological characteristics; and (5) individuals are typically unable to have much effect on political outcomes" (Greenstein 1992, 106).

Of these, Greenstein dismisses (1) and (4) as 'erroneous objections,' preferring to concentrate on (2), (3) and (5), which bear on:

"(a) how much impact individual actors have on political outcomes; (b) whether the situations in which political actors find themselves impose uniform behaviour on individuals of varying characteristics...; (c) the numerous questions that can be raised about the impact on behaviour of particular classes of personal characteristics, including the so-called 'ego-defensive' personality dispositions..." (Greenstein 1987, 35, 36 and 40).

Greenstein's response to those objections he views as valid therefore is to subdivide the behaviour of the political actor into two types: 'actor dispensability' and 'action dispensability.' In defining each one in turn, Greenstein states that: "action dispensability asks [w]hat are the circumstances under which the actions of single individuals are likely to have a greater or lesser impact on the course of events?", whereas "actor dispensability asks [w]hen does personal variability affect behaviour?" it arguable that despite personality variations political actors will act in a uniform manner in similar situations (Greenstein 1987, 41, 46).

Behind both types of behaviour the key component relates to the political actor's 'dispensability' in certain situations. As Greenstein explains:

"We can conceive of the actions performed in the political arena as being on a continuum, ranging from those that are indispensable for outcomes that concern us through to those that are utterly dispensable. And we can make certain very general observations about the circumstances which are likely to surround dispensable and indispensable actions" (Greenstein 1987, 41).

In the case of 'action dispensability' there are three particular scenarios in which a political actor could affect their political environment: Firstly, the degree to which the action takes place in an environment "which admits of restructuring." Secondly, the "location of the actor in the political environment." Third, "an actor's peculiar strengths and weaknesses" (Greenstein 1987, 42).

The first proposition relates to situations in which even modest interventions could lead to a radical change of outcome, due to the instability presented by the environment. However, Greenstein emphasises that the nature of such instability is not necessarily political per se, a political actor's interventions in unstable countries rarely altering political outcomes. Far more significant are the second and third propositions, both pertaining to skill, an important revelation within political science. Thus, "the skill (or ineptness) of the political actor...may be a key determinant of the manipulability of his environment" (Greenstein 1987, 45).

'Actor dispensability' responds to another important objection to the study of the political actor: "that political behaviour...is frequently dependent upon situational

stimuli...to the exclusion of variations in the actor's personal characteristics." This objection can be answered directly, as Greenstein explained: "If individuals vary in personality but perform identically when exposed to common stimuli, we clearly can dispense with the study of their personality differences: a variable cannot explain a uniformity" (Greenstein 1987, 46).

As compared with 'action dispensability,' which concerns the political actor's actions, 'actor dispensability' concerns the question of whether an actor's personal characteristics are dispensable to a political outcome. There are some situations which leave no possibility of predispositions to variability in the personality of the political actor however, such as political party leaders who, when confronted by powerful local groups, take decisions that tend to converge (Easton 1953, 996). Conversely, there are situations which allow the possibility of such predispositions manifesting themselves, of which there are many examples. Political leadership is one such example, since variations in personality are possible in roles that are free from expectations or fixed content (Greenstein 1987, 49-57).

Thus it is already possible, due to Greenstein's early work into political behaviour utilising techniques associated with psychology, to see approaches that he would take to the analysis of political leadership in his own analytical framework years later. Perhaps the most significant discovery was Greenstein's work on the 'dispensability' of the political actor, which arguably introduced the concept of political skill<sup>7</sup>, which would become one of Greenstein's six criteria for leadership (Greenstein 2000, Greenstein 2004, Greenstein 2009a).

#### **2.4 The Influence of Neustadt and Barber**

It was however another political scientist, James David Barber, in his own work: *The Presidential Character* (Barber 1992), written in 1972, which was to first utilise techniques associated with psychology in order to assess Presidential leadership. Barber was especially concerned as to one particular variable, character, arguing that "the Presidency is much more than an institution. It is a

---

<sup>7</sup> See chapter five



focus of feelings.” It is through these ‘feelings’ that Barber sought to sub-divide presidents from Theodore Roosevelt to Richard Nixon into distinct psychological types. These types were as follows: active-positive, active-negative, passive-positive and passive-negative. To Barber, a President is ‘active’ or ‘passive’ dependent upon how much energy they give to their job. On the other hand, a President is ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ dependent upon how they feel. As Barber argues, “does he seem to experience his life as happy or sad...or positive or negative?” (Barber 1992, 1, 8-10).

The influence of Barber is significant upon Greenstein’s own model, principally because of the clear psychology-orientated nature of the Barber typology used to judge presidential performance. The psychological elements within the Greenstein model are those leadership criteria assessing cognitive style and emotional intelligence<sup>8</sup> (Greenstein 2000). It is however the criteria for leadership of emotional intelligence which Greenstein developed based upon the Barber typology (Greenstein 2009a, 296-297).

Greenstein is a critic of Barber and his typology, and used the criticisms of Alexander George (1974) as a starting point in his analysis, which Greenstein explained were as follows. First, George argued that Barber’s attributes of character appear to be more a ‘function of ideology.’ Second, George felt that there was ‘no empirical evidence’ for Barber’s claim that such complex and varied manifestations of the psyche can be compartmentalised into four categories (Greenstein 2006, 19).

Greenstein takes the criticisms of George and incorporates them into his own critique of Barber, which is twofold:

“My own assessment of Barber’s analysis, which is consistent with George’s, is that he performs an important service by highlighting the president’s inner makeup, but his emphasis on the psychic depths is too limiting. Moreover, his effort to reduce personality to a handful of types ignores the complexity of

---

<sup>8</sup> See chapter seven

human motivation...presidents and others are not always positive about their obligations” (Greenstein 2009a, 296).

Thus, Greenstein felt that Barber’s approach was too reductive in nature and therefore limiting in terms of analysis.

As Greenstein explained further in *The Presidential Difference*, this then led directly to his creation of the leadership criterion of ‘emotional intelligence’:

“My approach to the problem of emotional fitness for the presidency is to eschew classifications and examine each president inductively. For this purpose I employ ‘emotional intelligence’ as shorthand for identifying presidents whose emotions enhance their leadership. Its antithesis, which might be called emotional obtuseness, provides a common denominator among presidents who are alike in not being masters of their own passions but as disparate on the surface as Bill Clinton and Richard Nixon” (Greenstein 2009a, 297).

Greenstein concludes thus: “While I reject Barber’s typology of presidential character, I fully agree with him about the importance of emotional fitness in the chief executive” (Greenstein 2009a, 297).

Another important influence upon Fred Greenstein in the development of his model was the seminal study on Presidential leadership written by Richard E. Neustadt in 1960: *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (Neustadt 1990). Neustadt was chiefly interested in answering the question posed by President Wilson, as discussed earlier, as to how a President could counter a Congress which was recalcitrant, either due to being occupied by an opposing party, or other reasons. So how could a President respond to such a Congress in order to enact their agenda? For Neustadt, the answer was to look at the institution of the presidency itself and assess how it could be used to enhance an occupant’s ‘reputation’ and ‘prestige’ in order to persuade lawmakers to enact their programme, Neustadt’s analysis of presidential power being: “The power to persuade is the power to bargain” (Neustadt 1990, 32; Greenstein 2006, 19).

It is through Neustadt that Greenstein was able to develop three of his criteria for leadership: organisational capacity<sup>9</sup>, political skill<sup>10</sup> and public policy vision<sup>11</sup> (Greenstein 2000). The underpinnings of each of these criteria for leadership have come from Greenstein's own assessment of the criticisms of Neustadt's *Presidential Power* that have emerged since its conception.

Peter Sperlich's (1975) criticisms of Neustadt are varied, but they are centred upon two principal objections which Greenstein wished to note. First, Neustadt's 'overemphasis' on political bargaining which ignores 'nonreciprocal' sources of influence, such as conscience, shared ideology and personal commitment to the chief executive. Greenstein then explains:

"The second is that Neustadt under-emphasises the role that loyal aides can play in presidential leadership. The result, according to Sperlich, is a prescription that overloads the president by insisting that he be personally responsible for the operations of his White House" (Greenstein 2009a, 294).

Such a critique Greenstein directly addressed with his own leadership criteria related to organisational capacity, particularly in relation to the emphasis placed upon 'advice' (Bose 2006).

But to Sperlich's critique Greenstein wished to add his own, namely that "Neustadt's formulation needs to be amended to take account of the importance of harnessing a president's political skills to a realistic vision of public policy" (Greenstein 2006, 19), which once again is incorporated into Greenstein's own analytical framework (Greenstein 2000).

In his own summation, Greenstein himself explains exactly how he was influenced by Barber and Neustadt, asserting following his criticism of each that:

"Although my own approach to analysing the presidential psyche builds upon Neustadt's and Barber's work, it contrasts with the former by considering the

---

<sup>9</sup> See chapter four

<sup>10</sup> See chapter five

<sup>11</sup> See chapter six.

political qualities of the president, and with the latter by not seeking to compress presidential political psychology into a master typology” (Greenstein 2006, 22).

Thus, Greenstein feels his own analytical framework is the best of both Neustadt and Barber, a view which is contestable, as will be discussed further in the final section of this chapter.

## 2.5 The Greenstein Model in Context

Greenstein proposed six criteria to assess presidential performance. The first, which pertains to the “outer face of leadership,” is the president’s proficiency as a *public communicator*. The second, which relates to the “inner workings” of leadership, is the president’s *organisational capacity*: “his ability to rally his colleagues and structure their activities effectively.” The third and the fourth bear on the president “as a political operator.” This refers to *political skill*, and “the extent to which it is harnessed to a *vision* of public policy.” The fifth is *cognitive style*, “with which the president processes the Niagara of advice and information that comes his way.” The last is *emotional intelligence*. This refers to “the president’s ability to manage his emotions and turn them to constructive purposes, rather than being dominated by them and allowing them to diminish his leadership” (Greenstein 2000, 5)<sup>12</sup>.

In order to justify the usage of the Greenstein analytical framework it is necessary to address a number of the criticisms of it which have emerged since its inception<sup>13</sup> in 2000. These criticisms are discussed below, some of which impinge directly on the arguments already seen in the structure-agency debate in relation to both Prime Ministerial and Presidential studies.

### *Character*

This is the critique of Meena Bose (2006), who analysed the Greenstein model in comparison to Neustadt and Barber and argued that its main deficiency was the

---

<sup>12</sup> Each of these criteria will be discussed in more detail in chapters three to seven of this thesis

<sup>13</sup> The hierarchy of the Greenstein criteria will be discussed in chapters three to seven of this thesis

absence of character as a reference point in its assessment of leadership, a key element of the Barber typology. Bose uses the Barber typology to suggest that the key question that Greenstein misses is: “to what extent, if at all, should a president’s personal standards of behaviour be considered in evaluating that person’s leadership?” (Bose 2006, 35), feeling her criteria could equally be applied to a chief executive of a company instead of the occupant of the highest executive office.

Bose argued that a President’s private life and character should be included in any evaluation of presidential performance, thereby creating a further criteria for leadership assessment within the Greenstein model as well as the six already available. Bose does, however, seem to subsequently qualify her own argument later, saying that, having ranked the six Greenstein criteria in order of importance, “[p]erhaps character, like cognitive style and emotional intelligence, is one of those variables that merit consideration in evaluating a presidency but should not be the decisive factor” (Bose 2006, 28).

Bose’s critique of Greenstein was related in part to the impeachment of Bill Clinton in 1998, but Greenstein was able to show that Barber’s own typology was insufficient to address the impeachment scandal. As he asserted: “Barber’s types are defined by externals, but people who differ on the surface may be similar under the skin, and those with similar appearances may have different underpinnings.” Thus:

“On the face of it, the hyperactive, ever-ebullient Clinton would seem to be a quintessential example of Barber’s emotionally robust, active-positive character type. But in fact, Clinton’s presidency was marked by the kinds of self-inflicted wounds Barber predicts for active-negative presidents... most strikingly...in entering into the sexual liaison that led to his impeachment” (Greenstein 2006, 21-22).

### *Context*

This is the critique of Chris Byrne et al (2017), who argue that Greenstein’s analytical framework is unsuitable to assess leadership performance because it

fails to account for the political environment in which leaders operate. As Byrne et al assert, “[t]he nexus between leaders’ personal qualities and the demands of the times is central to their effectiveness” (Byrne et al 2017, 203). And such a critique of Greenstein is long-standing, having been argued also in relation to assessing prime ministerial performance ten years before by Kevin Theakston (Theakston 2007, 60).

Greenstein first conceded this point in a private communication four years after the publication of *The Presidential Difference*, accepting that such contextual factors can impact on a president’s effectiveness: “The capacity of a president is a function not only of his personal attributes, but also the political environment in which they are brought to bear. A president who is well suited to serve in one setting may be ill suited for another” (Greenstein 2005, quoted in Theakston 2007).

However, Byrne et al were not placated, repeating after their acknowledgement of Greenstein’s concession: “But Greenstein does not develop this aspect of the model in any detailed or extended way” (Byrne et al 2017, 203). Other assessors of British prime ministerial performance concur, feeling Greenstein’s private communication with Theakston “lacks the conceptual practical-analytical vocabulary to incorporate structure explicitly into the model” (Buller and James 2012, 552).

But such criticisms do seem arguably harsh, Greenstein mentioning ‘context’ within *The Presidential Difference* and justifying his different approach to it quite explicitly. As he explained: “In seeking to provide such a context, I avoided two common approaches to assessing American presidents.” These were the following:

“I have abstained from judging the ends that presidents pursue so as better to focus on their means. I have avoided ranking presidents, because there is at least as much to be learned from their failures and limitations as from their success and strengths” (Greenstein 2009a, 220).

Greenstein did again seek to address the question of context sometime after his private communication with Theakston by asking the question: “Is a preoccupation with the presidents’ personal qualities a distraction from attention to the larger political system?” Greenstein then answers this question with an analogy which compares the American political system to the complex machinery of a ballistic missile, and the President to its trigger mechanism. As Greenstein asserts:

“Would paying close attention to the mechanism preclude closely examining the mechanism in which it is contained? Obviously not. By the same token, there is no conflict between an intensive analysis of the American political system and a comparatively close analysis of the pivotally placed occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Both are mandatory, and neither excludes the other” (Greenstein 2006, 25).

Thus, to Greenstein, the context and personality variables are not mutually exclusive and the one does not preclude the other.

### *Transferability*

This critique of Greenstein is propounded by Jim Buller and Toby James (2008, 2012), who argue that the Greenstein criteria for assessing American presidents is not applicable for judging political leaders in a parliamentary system such as Britain’s. They assert that the statecraft model advocated by Jim Bulpitt (1986) is a more appropriate tool to assess prime ministerial performance instead (Buller and James 2012, 537-540).

The basis for their argument is the comments of Fred Greenstein himself: “The United States is said to have a government of laws and institutions rather than individuals...who occupies the nation’s highest office can have profound repercussions. That is not everywhere the case.” Greenstein then asserts:

“In Great Britain, with its tradition of collective leadership, for example, the rare Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, or Tony Blair is far outnumbered by the many Stanley Baldwins, Harold Wilsons and John Majors, whose personal impact on governmental actions is at best limited” (Greenstein 2009a, 2-3).

Based upon Greenstein's statement, Buller and James were thereby able to posit that the Greenstein model is "unsuitable for assessing leadership in Britain. The United States is a presidential system, whereas in formal terms, Britain is a parliamentary democracy" (Buller and James 2008, 12).

Buller and James have since modified their critique, arguing that they did not mean that the Greenstein model was of "no help when it comes to assessing political leadership in Britain. Rather, [Greenstein's] benchmarks will have to be revised to account for the peculiarities of governing the UK polity" (Buller and James 2012, 537).

Their solution is therefore to apply the four elements of the statecraft model – a winning electoral strategy, governing competence, party management, and political argument hegemony (Bulpitt 1986, 21) – to prime ministerial performance, which they feel accounts for the 'peculiarities' of the British system of government.

To Buller and James the key advantage of Bulpitt's statecraft model over Greenstein is that Bulpitt himself "stressed the importance of collective leadership," being "an elite theorist who gave analytical priority to the existence of a leadership clique in his research" (Buller and James 2012, 538-539). Therefore Bulpitt allowed for the fact that:

"While the PM was a key individual within this group, it encompassed a number of other figures including senior party leaders, advisers and top civil servants. Such a conception, arguably, provides a more *realistic appreciation* [their italics] of political leadership than those that focus just on the PM" (Buller and James 2012, 538-539).

Buller and James do however immediately qualify their proposition, by stating that "one disadvantage of defining leadership in this way is that the operational content of this category becomes less clear and open to interpretation," having beforehand stated that both Kevin Theakston (2007, 2011, 2012) and Victoria Honeyman (2007) had made "good cases to utilising [the Greenstein model] to



assess British prime ministers” (Buller and James 2012, 537, 539), which is a notable admission.

And Greenstein has since modified his own views as first posited in the first edition of *The Presidential Difference* in 2000, accepting in 2010 in comments to Theakston that the personal qualities of ordinary or even ‘second-rank’ prime ministers can make a difference “and believes that his model provides yardsticks that would permit comparisons across nations” (Theakston 2011, 82). Theakston thus concludes that Greenstein’s model can be applied comparatively, but ‘with care.’

## **2.6 Conclusion: The ‘Added Value’ of the Greenstein Model**

It is clear that the one pervading question throughout all leadership studies in both America and Britain from its earliest pioneers continues to dominate to this day: how important is the study of personality in any analysis of leadership? Gradually opinions have evolved and changed, but it is clear that until the work of Fred Greenstein and his colleagues in the late 1960s, and his seminal study, *Politics and Personality* (Greenstein 1987), studies of political leadership were more institutionally and contextually focused than personality focused.

Therefore the work of Fred Greenstein in 2000 arguably represented a new departure from both British and American studies, whilst at the same time a continuation, Greenstein acknowledging the work of the forerunners from both strands of the structure-agency debate within leadership studies: James David Barber (1992) and Richard E Neustadt (1990).

Barber therefore represented the psychological and thus more personality-focused criteria of Greenstein’s model (emotional intelligence), Neustadt the contextual and institutional elements, particularly in terms of how a leader can use the powers available to them from within their office (organisational capacity, political skill, and public policy vision) (Greenstein 2009a).

Furthermore, the Greenstein model can be applied to British Prime Ministers and the British polity, despite the problems in analysis surrounding the collective nature of Prime Ministerial leadership in comparison to American counterparts

(Buller and James 2012). This is also despite Greenstein believing in 2000 that such collective leadership was a potential stop to the application of his model to British Prime Ministers (Greenstein 2000). Greenstein has since changed his viewpoint, in comments to Kevin Theakston in 2010, accepting not only that his model is comparable within the British polity, but that it can be applied across nations (Theakston 2011).

The one point of argument on the Greenstein model which continues to be debated amongst political scientists concerns the issue of context, a question which of itself goes to the heart of the structure-agency debate, and Greenstein's failure to explicitly acknowledge its importance (Byrne et al 2017). It is also another point of debate concerning the Greenstein model which Greenstein himself has conceded, twice (Greenstein 2006, Theakston 2007).

The key question therefore is, which is more appropriate, an examination of the 'means' or the 'ends' (Greenstein 2009a), the perennial 'chicken and the egg' question of political scientists in leadership studies (Hargrove 2002). This thesis will show through the application of the Greenstein model to the political leadership of John Major that such questions are meaningless, notions of personality and context not mutually exclusive but rather mutually reinforcing and thereby as equally important as the other. Furthermore, the application of the model to Major will not only build upon studies that have looked at his premiership before, but add further insights, Greenstein's work thereby bringing a further value to the work done already within Prime Ministerial leadership studies.

### **Chapter Three: Public Communicator**

To assess Major's skills as a public communicator this chapter is divided into two sections. The first, which examines John Major's media operation at No 10 between 1990 and 1997, explores the work of the No 10 Press Office and its relationship with the print and broadcasting media, with new insights provided by Sir John Major's evidence to the Leveson Inquiry in 2012 (Major 2012). The second section examines Major's rhetorical skills and oratory whilst Prime Minister in three forums: the House of Commons, Party Conference and in the media and at public meetings. To conclude, Major's skills as a public communicator whilst Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party will be put in context and assessed to decide their effectiveness.

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The art of good public communication, or, as Greenstein described it, "the outer face of the presidency" (Greenstein 2009a, 5) incorporates various facets of political leadership that are essential in the modern polity, including: personalised leadership projection through institutionalised relationships between the government and the media (Foley 1993, 2000); ideological definition through the institution of the speech (Finlayson and Martin 2008); rhetoric as a means of enhancing political power (Toye 2011); use of classical rhetorical techniques to persuade an audience through a number of different forums (Glover 2011).

How important is communication in modern political leadership? For Bose, in her examination of the Greenstein criteria assessing American Presidents, public communicator is out-ranked as a criteria for assessing political leadership by three of the remaining five criteria: organisational capacity, political skill and public policy vision, because "it is the substance of these qualities that ultimately determine the success of communication" (Bose 2006, 28, 33).

Greenstein himself seemed to acknowledge this when he stated:

"For an office that places so great a premium on the presidential pulpit, the modern presidency has been surprisingly lacking in effective

communicators...Roosevelt, Kennedy, Reagan, Obama, and Clinton at best are shining exceptions” (Greenstein 2009a, 225).

Crucially, it is through their rhetoric that Presidents get “situated in the public discourse” (Skowronek 1997, 27).

It is also an aspect of political leadership that connects to Greenstein’s other criteria, public policy vision, as it is through the communication of a political leader’s beliefs and ideologies that the policy agenda is set down for that person’s time in office (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 449). Therefore, a President’s ability to ‘teach reality’ to the nation (Hargrove 1998, 42) through “popular or mass rhetoric has become a principal tool of presidential governance” (Toye 2011, 176).

In Britain, equally, there has “been only a few real communication ‘stars’ in Number 10 since 1945 and more whose performance has been poor or ineffective” (Theakston 2007, 230). Of these, the most effective (Macmillan, Wilson, Thatcher and Blair) each recognised that dealing with the media – both print and television – was an essential part of the Prime Minister’s armoury, a clear link existing between presentation and substance in all government decisions (Seymour-Ure 1995, 169-171).

Cameron’s media handling operation in Number 10 was effectively deployed during his premiership, his own communication skills honed whilst employed as a party staffer at Central Office and subsequently as a marketing consultant at Carlton Communications (Theakston 2012, 196). Cameron was gifted in this respect, but not in his oratorical skills, unlike Harold Wilson and Blair, who could – as did Blair in his final party conference speech as leader in 2006 (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 453-454) – reach out to an audience at an emotional level through their abilities on the public platform. Only Churchill could really surpass them.

Reputations can also be won or lost during the now-weekly jousts of Prime Minister’s Question Time (PMQs) in the House of Commons, in what is viewed by both sides as a gladiatorial contest between the Prime Minister and the Leader of

the Opposition (Lovenduski 2012, 320-322). Wilson was particularly adept at this, both as Leader of the Opposition and then as Prime Minister, regularly getting the better of his opponents – first Alec Douglas Home and then Edward Heath, both of whom were not natural parliamentary performers (Jones 1973, 263).

Neil Kinnock, when Leader of the Opposition against Margaret Thatcher during the 1980s, fatally showed his own weakness at PMQs through his long-winded questions, which allowed government backbenchers to regularly interrupt him whilst he was speaking and to put him off his argument (Alderman 1992, 73).

A party leader's success in the Commons at PMQs, and on other set-piece occasions, is vital for backbench morale and failure at the despatch box can quickly result in the demise of a leader due to their perceived lack of competence, as the short tenure of Iain Duncan-Smith as Leader of the Opposition proved in 2003 (Hayton 2012a, 199-200).

The impact of radio in 1978 and television in 1989 in the broadcasting of parliamentary events cannot be overlooked either at this juncture in terms of its effect on a party leader's reputation for competence, the desire always for favourable media coverage meaning that on a bad day the leader's team's efforts to control the agenda can be blown off course for the rest of the week as policy announcements are replaced in the media cycle by a return of leadership speculation (Toye 2011, 181).

Public communication is also increasingly important in electoral politics, the less voters have chosen their party allegiance since 1945 on class-based considerations (Butler and Stokes 1974, Crewe, Sarlvik and Alt 1977; Sarlvik and Crewe 1983; Frankin 1985; Heath et al 1985), turning instead to more valence-based explanations, such as leadership competence (Clarke et al 2004, Clarke et al 2009; Green and Jennings 2011). As a consequence political campaigning has moved towards a greater emphasis upon the strengths and weaknesses of individual party leaders.

Hence, in election campaigns there is now more emphasis on issues pertaining to the personality of individual party leaders, such as 'charisma' and 'likeability,'

as influences on voter choice (Denver 2005). This was partly a by-product of the following: modern political campaigning methods, and the development of modern political communication (Stanyer and Wring 2004); and the 'personalisation' of politics (Langer 2007, Langer 2011), which has led to more emphasis on the image of individual leaders as much as policy content (Smith 2009, 212, 214). As a consequence, issues surrounding the 'general demeanour' of the individual leader have come to "carry wider meaning in the minds of the voters" (Smith and French 2011, 719)

The key point is that public communication is not just an optional extra for a Prime Minister in the way they conduct themselves on a daily basis, as Churchill felt was possible in the early 1950s. It is a vital pre-condition for any modern political leader in the multi-media age (Theakston 2012, 196).

Major was not rated highly as a public communicator during his premiership, on either an institutional level, due to his lack of media strategy whilst in No 10 – immediately replacing Thatcher's loyal and media-savvy Press Secretary, Bernard Ingham, with a more orthodox career civil servant without a background in journalism upon taking office (Bale and Sanders 2001, 95); or personality-wise, his style of speech being seen as "anti-rhetorical" in nature when compared to his predecessor, Thatcher (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 236).

This was quite deliberate, however, as Major was determined, from the outset of his premiership, to be, in leadership style, the absolute antithesis of his predecessor: "[a]n integral part of his original appeal had been that he was *not* Margaret Thatcher" (Foley 2002, 27). Whilst, initially, this proved a successful tactic in the first phase of his premiership (1990 to 1992) and during the 1992 General Election campaign (Butler and Kavanagh 1992, 29-31), those strengths and contrasts were quickly to come to be seen as weaknesses as the government was rocked by crisis after crisis during the 1992 to 1997 Parliament, leaving Major looking both weak and ineffective (Heppell 2007b).

In amongst all this, Major's difficulties were compounded further by a new and formidable Leader of the Opposition, Tony Blair, who was happy to steal the

Thatcher mantle in his style of media management or ram home his advantage by great oratorical flights of his own as he tamed the Labour Party, such as his Clause IV speech in 1995 for example (Seldon 2004, 227). Major also had to contend with Cabinet colleagues such as Michael Portillo and Heseltine, who used every Party Conference as a beauty contest for the leadership, such as in 1994 (Seldon 1997, 497). And to the dominance of the Major premiership with the rhetoric of opponents, both in Parliament and at Party Conference, can be twinned the 'boomerang rhetoric' of Major himself, caused often by party management considerations (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 147-148).

The list of such examples are many, the cause often Europe. For instance 'put up, or shut up,' in June 1995 (Major 1995a); or, equally dramatically, 'don't bind my hands as I negotiate our future with our European partners [on a single currency]' at a hastily arranged press conference during the 1997 election (Major 1997). To this list should also be added Major's rhetorical 'own goals,' such as the 'bastards' remark in July 1993. But this was most seen in a key *deliberative* forum in which to display Prime Minister power, the Party Conference, Major's 'Back to Basics' speech at the 1993 Party Conference spectacularly back-firing due to failures in communication, both institutionally and rhetorically (Major 1993b).

### **3.2 Number 10 Communications Strategy, 1990-1997**

The Press Office within Number 10 was comprised of the Prime Minister's Press Secretary, his deputy and eight other press secretaries. The role of Press Secretary has been occupied by either a career civil servant who may or may not have specialised in information, such as Heath's Press Secretary Donald Maitland, or journalists already known to the Prime Minister, such as Thatcher's Press Secretary, Bernard Ingham, or Blair's Communications Director, Campbell. It was Ingham and Campbell who became most identified with the occupant at Number 10 during their tenures, their counsel often viewed as crossing the "hazy boundary between advice on how to communicate one's message to advice on what the actual message should be" (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 20).

Major however was much more in the former category of premiers in choice of Press Secretary, being determined to follow the strict constitutional tradition of a separation between government and party political media managers:

“The Number 10 press office wasn’t so political...There was a very strict dividing line between the Number 10 Press Office and Conservative Central Office. The Tories had this feeling that they had to play things by the book and the rules were that government information was done on an impartial, Civil Service basis and not on a party political basis. There should be no blurring of the line” (Bale and Sanders 2001, 94-95).

As a result within Number 10 John Major’s first Press Secretary, Gus O’Donnell, a Treasury economist who got the job “by accident,” was very much in the non-political civil service mould, with no background in journalism – unlike Bernard Ingham (Seldon 1997, 143-144). O’Donnell’s brief: to speak for the government when handling the media, not just be the Prime Minister’s mouthpiece in No 10 (Burch and Holliday 1999, 34). Major explained his own thinking on the appointment of O’Donnell at the Leveson Inquiry in 2012: “I did appoint a press secretary who I thought would serve the press well, be uncontroversial, and would be able to speak in a manner that the press would accept as being authoritative” (Major 2012, P4 14-17).

And O’Donnell was a popular choice initially, bringing in innovations such as the doorstep press conferences outside No 10 and some of the newspapers which had largely been ignored under Ingham, such as the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, were given greater access to the Prime Minister and other ministers. For all of his likeability he lacked Ingham’s gravitas however, lobby briefings described as, variously “anodyne”, “diffident” and “lack[ing] any clear steer as to the direction of government policy”: “By temperament and experience he was less adept at countering or deflecting the politically loaded probing of the tabloid journalists” (Seymour-Ure 1994, 412-413).

O’Donnell’s approach would have succeeded in more benign political times, but, after the 1992 election, as the political waters became choppy for Major and his government, his lack of journalistic skills were to become deeply problematic.



Indeed, it could be said that “Major seemed by 1994 to have a kind of anti-Midas touch: everything he touched turned to dross” (Seymour-Ure 1995, 194). As a result, Downing Street communications, which had probably been managed under Ingham “more effectively than at any previous time, certainly since television intruded into politics” under Major, “by contrast, seemed woefully ineffective” (Seymour-Ure 1994, 400).

In January 1994 O’Donnell was replaced by Christopher Meyer, a Foreign Office mandarin. As if to sum up his tenure, O’Donnell managed to give the Prime Minister a bad press even at his farewell dinner, which excluded most of the tabloids (Seymour-Ure 1994, 413). Despite such criticisms, Major did not wish to or desire to change course with any of O’Donnell’s successors at No 10, both Meyer and Jonathan Haslam still firmly in the non-political civil service mould (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 340-341).

Meyer was subsequently to be particularly scathing of the Number 10 media operations under Major, being shocked to find that he had to “make his own arrangements, like everyone else” to get the daily newspapers, despite being at the centre of the government machine and head of the Press Office. The morning Prime Ministerial briefing in the flat above Number 10 as a result became an ordeal, which Meyer described as “horrible”: “It was typical of Downing Street. Tradition is one thing, amateurish improvisation another. It was very hard to shift the ‘this-is-the-way-it-has-always-been-done’ attitude” (Meyer 2005, 14).

Major gave his opinion on why he did not use the opportunity to get in a more political and media-savvy press secretary rather than another civil servant who may or may not have a background in communication at the Leveson Inquiry, the evidence of Campbell’s tenure as press secretary under Blair only reinforcing his point of view:

“I disagree with it very strongly and I always have. I think so for several reasons. Once you have a political appointee rather than an independent civil servant, the word of the government is no longer unquestioned. With an independent civil servant, the press lobby knew what they were going to get, or

should have got, the unvarnished truth without any political gloss or spin” (Major 2012, P19 4-11).

The net consequence of this principled stand by Major was that public relations problems seemed to become the almost weekly and often the daily norm following the UK’s decision to leave the ERM, ‘Black Wednesday’, in September 1992, such was the political damage it caused to both Major and the government (Seymour-Ure 1994, 411-412). And as Major was to admit in his memoirs many years later: “Such a daily opposition ripped into my premiership, damaged the Conservative Party and came close to destroying my government” (Major 1999, 360).

However, as a former Cabinet colleague explained to the author:

“After the disaster (politically not economically) of ejection from the ERM, which cost the Tories their reputation for economic competence, and the emergence of ever worse splits in the party, his message appeared, unfairly, to be a weak one. But I doubt whether any communicator could have done much better in those circumstances, and after the Tories had been in power for so long” (Waldegrave 2017).

Major’s own capricious moods on whatever happened to be in the newspapers that day was however the driving force which dictated much of Number 10’s approach to media management. Staff regarded the Prime Minister’s obsession with the press “morbid,” attempts at reconciliation failing at the first hurdle due to Major regarding such courting of the press as “beneath his dignity.” Early in his premiership Major had given Friday breakfasts for editors and journalists, but these broke down due to Major’s sensitivity to media criticism. The Prime Minister preferred instead to spend time at weekends phoning media sympathisers from both newspapers and television (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 214).

Major’s failure to court the press and journalists was recognised by former Cabinet colleagues, one recalling:

“Sometimes he would have these breakfast meetings. He wasn’t always good at them. There would be an article he’d read in a newspaper recently, and he’d

say 'did you check your facts?' whereas what he should have done is left it, as they were always sensitive about what they had written" (Wakeham 2017)<sup>14</sup>.

Number 10 was further weakened by hostile leaks and press briefings from departmental special advisers, often regarded as speaking directly on their Secretary of State or minister's behalf. With a schism at the heart of the Conservative Party on further integration into the EU often providing an ongoing distraction for any policy initiatives attempted by the Major government during the 1992 Parliament, such conduct by departmental special advisers only highlighted further government division (Blick 2004, 245).

Major found the conduct at times bemusing:

"I do wonder how many of the ministerial spats and difficulties that suddenly exploded in the media – unbeknown to me, that I was at terrible loggerheads with someone I was actually having lunch with at the precise moment for example – came from political advisers" (Major 2000, Q12).

Government leaks rose from between sixteen and twenty a year between 1990 and 1993 to between thirty-five and forty between 1994 and 1996. The amount of leaks was more than at any time during the Thatcher government. This was despite the fact that after 1994 there were three overlapping groups within Number 10 and Whitehall co-ordinating information management – including a new Cabinet Committee (EDCP), specifically established to advise on communications strategy and presentation, – yet there still was a seeming lack of co-ordination and coherence as to the direction of government policy. Major did at one point think that coherence could be achieved and the leaks reduced if the Number 10 Press Office was put entirely 'on the record' with a daily summary of lobby briefings to be circulated to Cabinet ministers, but the idea never came to fruition (Beesley 2017, 544).

Initially, between 1990 and 1992, Major's own personal style and approach to the media won him praise from journalists who had got used to dealing with Ingham

---

<sup>14</sup> See chapter seven for discussion on John Major's sensitivity to press criticism

directly, Thatcher largely concentrating on good relations with newspaper owners:

“When he came in, he was seen as the complete opposite of Thatcher. He made a virtue of being Mr Nice. His press secretary also made a virtue of being Mr Nice...The PM would actually talk to the journalists on the plane. And there was no question about it that, at the very beginning, it did work extremely well for him” (Bale and Sanders 2001, 95).

Major therefore displayed a much more clubbable attitude in comparison to Thatcher.

This is confirmed by a former Cabinet colleague:

“Well it started well with the media. If you remember the contrast with Thatcher that he deliberately worked at – to be more congenial, more affable, more gentle even. Even if in the long-term it didn’t work out it certainly acted as a brake and recognition of something different. And initially things went well with the press, he was affable to them. And the fact that he won the 92 election with more votes than any other party in history all helped him initially. Later they sensed his vulnerability, particularly after Black Wednesday” (Lang 2017).

In another change of style and approach, Major refused to be ‘packaged’ as his predecessor had been by media consultants who were to become embedded in Downing Street during her time in office, such as Tim Bell, Ronald Miller, and Gordon Reece. It was Reece who famously got Thatcher to modify her voice, her hair and her clothes in an attempt to perfect a screen image of her of “toughness with femininity” (Cockerell 1988, 253).

Major may have thought that his ‘Mr Nice’ approach should have brought dividends as the government entered political difficulties in late 1992. He was, however, to receive a rude shock as the press, particularly the Conservative broadsheets and tabloids, viciously turned against him (Bale 2010, 44). Most famously, - in an incident which Major does not recall, - Kelvin McKenzie, the editor of the *Sun*, informed Major on the night of Black Wednesday that he had a

“large bucket of shit” on his desk and he was going to “pour it all over [Major’s] head” in the newspaper the next day (Seldon 1997, 326).

His clubbability with journalists was also not to provide a safety net in terms of the abuse that was levelled at him once the government’s fortunes changed. Alastair Campbell was to epitomise this in the way he was to treat John Major, ruthlessly exploiting Major’s insecurities to devastating effect by showing him none of the deference that was expected of lobby journalists towards a Prime Minister. Once, he shockingly told Major as he wandered to the back of the Downing Street VC10: “Oh, sod off, Prime Minister...I’m trying to do my expenses” (Osborne and Walters 2004, 87-90).

Campbell was also responsible for perhaps the cleverest and also perhaps the cruellest jibe which was to open Major up to national ridicule: that he tucked his shirt into his underpants. In fact, the jibe was so devastating that it led to the whole lobby eventually turning against Major, the theme then spreading to the rest of the country. As a result: “[t]here is a strong case to be made that it all started with Alastair Campbell and the underpants” (Osborne and Walters 2004, 87-90).

So what was Major’s relationship with the media after Black Wednesday? In recalling his relationship to Leveson, Major disputes the charge of hostility, feeling that to court the press barons or newspaper editors, as Thatcher had, was “rather undignified” for a Prime Minister: “I thought a relative distance between the press and the government, and particularly myself, was a good idea” (Major 2012, P4 14-25; P5 5-10).

His coolness did seem justified when it was revealed that Major’s own reference to a dinner with Rupert Murdoch in February 1997 – just before the election in May of that year – in which Major had claimed in his memoirs that “he made no offer of support and I asked for none” (Major 1999, 709) was in fact not the whole story. As Major was to state: “It is not often someone sits in front of a prime minister and says to a prime minister: “I would like you to change your policy [on Europe], and if you don’t change your policy, my organisation cannot support you” (Major 2012, P33 20-23). Major made short shrift of such a remark and the

conversation quickly moved on, but this was a valuable insight into the power play between newspapers and governments (Seymour-Ure 1995, 181-182).

Thatcher recognised the need for such support and her policies reflected this, so Murdoch's support remained strong; Major did not, so Murdoch quickly lost patience and was already being wooed by New Labour in any case (Seymour-Ure 1995, 181-182). Thus it was arguably Campbell and Blair who had learnt the most from Ingham and Thatcher's approach, not Major or any of the occupants of the No 10 Press Office.

Yet Major refused to court the media. This was despite the Prime Minister being attacked after Black Wednesday "so extensively and in such terms [not seen] since before the Second World War" (Seymour-Ure 1994, 415). And as Major had ruefully admitted to Leveson: "If the electorate are fed a particular image day after day, it sticks" (Major 2012, P11 16-17). Arguably Major needed all the allies in the media he could get during this period, yet no strategy was forthcoming, either from Number 10 or John Major.

This was confirmed by a former Cabinet Office minister who sat in on government communications briefings after 1995:

"There wasn't a very good communications strategy in the technical sense because they never really got to the top of the mechanics of what a really good communications strategy was, as Blair and Campbell did, whereas John Major, who was relying more on civil servants, was either unwilling or unable to, or lacking the imagination to, appoint a journalist/politician chap" (Horam 2017).

Thus the net result was inevitably seen as ineptness and drift within Number 10 during the 1992 Parliament under Major, rather than an actual coherent approach to media relations: "[n]o prime minister since Churchill, arguably, seemed so unaware of the need for an active communication strategy or else so incompetent" (Seymour-Ure 1995, 194-195).

### 3.3 John Major's Rhetorical Skills

If Major's style differed from Thatcher's in the way he handled government and media relations whilst at Number 10, then equally so did his style of rhetoric (Kavanagh 1997, 206). Gone would be the war-like rhetoric of the past - most memorably when Thatcher declared at her party conference in 1980, "The lady's not for turning" (Toye 2011, 183; Crines et al 2016), it being replaced by a much more conciliatory approach and style of speaking by Major. This was quite natural to the new Prime Minister: "My politics was a quiet politics. I disliked brash populism. I distrusted conflict. I was at ease with the knitting-up of conciliation. It may have been boring to some; it may have been seen as grey, but it had its points" (Major 1999, xxii-xxiii).

As one former adviser explained:

"One-to-one John Major was excellent, as a conversationalist, good in a meeting or informal gathering like a charity function. Whereas when it came to a prepared script he spoke as Trollope would write it, highly grammatical" (Turnbull 2017).

Major therefore was 'anti-rhetorical'<sup>15</sup> in style, his tone in public speaking "not triumphalist but almost conversational," which was very similar to both Clement Attlee and Alec Douglas Home when they were on a public platform (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 236-237). The correlation between the three of them – Edward Heath should also be included on the list – is that their limitations on the platform were borne out of a desire not to be seen to 'sell' themselves to the electorate, or to promote their policies as though they were selling soap powder (Theakston 2007, 230). Major was the most natural platform speaker compared to either Heath or Thatcher – in Ronnie Millar's opinion, based upon a highly developed sense of his own style (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 237).

An effective use of rhetoric can not only enable the acquisition of Prime Ministerial power, but also can enhance it (Toye 2011, 185). This is because the institution of the "political speech" has three purposes: first, in order to display

---

<sup>15</sup> See chapter six for discussion on Major's capacity to inspire

competence; secondly, in order to generate political thought and ideas; thirdly, and finally, “heresthetically,” or in order to manipulate the political agenda (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 447-453).

For any Prime Minister to survive at the top of the British polity there are certain rituals, or occasions, on the political calendar which, if not performed effectively, will lead to mutterings and questions being raised of that individual’s competence to do the job. These are chiefly in the House of Commons, and at Party Conference. Thatcher survived the 1986 Westland debate, caused by the resignation of Michael Heseltine and Leon Brittan, not because of her great rhetorical skill but because of Neil Kinnock’s rhetorical failure at the despatch box (Toye 2011, 185; Crines et al 2016).

Though the House of Commons is important in a leader being able to display competence it is perhaps the annual Party Conference which is taken most seriously by party leaders. Indeed, it is a widely held belief that Gordon Brown had to perform well at the 2008 party conference or else his premiership would be in serious jeopardy (Toye 2011, 184-186). This rule has, however, been somewhat tested after Theresa May’s widely seen as disastrous performance at the Conservative Party’s Annual Conference in Manchester in 2017 (*Independent*, October 4 2017). Despite grumblings, May survived the ordeal.

Through the public speech, concomitantly, are revealed the beliefs and ideas of the party leader and Prime Minister: the speech allowing the political actor to become engaged in a particular type of “creative action,” all contexts and concepts in politics having become “essentially contested.” The variable throughout is the audience which the individual is addressing and its possible ‘bias.’ This is the strategic dimension to the institution of the public speech, which enables an individual to use language to manipulate people in order to set or control the political agenda. This can involve presenting a situation in a particular light, affording it a new definition and associating it with a motivating emotion. Often this is through figurative or metaphorical language, such as the trope or *paradiastole* (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 449-453).



One of the best examples of a Prime Minister who was able to use heresthetics through his rhetoric was Harold Macmillan his famous 1960 'winds of change' speech. Within the speech Macmillan was able to please three different audiences at the same time in order to begin a shift in ideas and policy towards Africa (Myers 2000, 555-575).

Before examining John Major's own rhetorical ability in the most well-known public rituals on the political calendar - the House of Commons; at the Party Conference; media and at public meetings, - it is important to define briefly some of the tools a rhetorician uses in the act of public speaking. The point to state first is that rhetoric is the *content* of a speech, whilst oratory is the *delivery* of that speech (Crines 2013, 81).

Orators in ancient Greece had to contend with three different contexts within which they would be speaking: the law court, the assembly and funerals and other occasions of this nature, all of which would demand a different style of delivery, either *deliberative* (considered), *judicial* (reflective) or *epideictic* (performance) (Olmsted 2006, 14).

Within each context there were then three different forms of rhetorical appeal which a speaker could use within their narrative (or statement of facts) to win over an audience: to *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. *Ethos* relates to the character of the speaker, the appeal based upon their honesty, or their authority, such as the qualifications they have for the job or the direct experience they had to deal with the matter in hand. *Logos* refers to the offering of logical reasoning to a particular argument, through use of syllogisms or enthymemes (quasi-logical reasoning). Finally, *pathos* is the direct appeal to the emotions, by playing on emotions of fear, pity or even anger in order to spur others into action, or inaction, dependent upon the context of the speaker's performance (Finlayson 2007, 557-558).

The rhetorician must put all of these things together in order to decide which style of speech to make, which will be decided based upon *decorum*, which literally means the ability to speak in the audience's language. This is why there are only three possible styles available: low, middle or high. And if a speaker adopts a too high-handed manner, through vulgarity or boastfulness, all of the good work in

preparation, and in efforts to appeal to the audience, will be lost entirely (Leith 2011, 117).

### 3.3.1 House of Commons

The House of Commons was a *deliberative* arena to John Major in the form most recognised in ancient Greece. Major was not regarded as a great parliamentary orator by parliamentary colleagues, being described by a former minister in terms of performances in the House of Commons as being “competent, but no more than that” (Horam 2017). And not in the same category as either Thatcher, or Heseltine or Blair, who were masters of the *epidictic* display rhetoric on big occasions.

Major would use both *ethos* as well as *pathos* on parliamentary occasions, but, at PMQs<sup>16</sup>, in order to gain backbench support, *pathos* would come most to the fore. Major’s best weapon against his opponents was an appeal to *pathos* through humour, but could equally be seen in aggressive attacks towards opponents at difficult moments for his leadership, particularly after Black Wednesday. It was often used therefore for party management purposes (Seldon 1997, 340, 381).

It was, however, on occasions when Major was at his most vulnerable that he could put in his most effective performances, as one former adviser recalls his “brave and brilliant speech (hailed as one of his best in the House)” on the vote of no confidence on the Social Policy Protocol in July 1993 (Lyne 2017).

But he could equally reproach himself if the exchanges became too personalised, as happened after the summit on Qualified Majority Voting broke down in March 1994. In the Commons he had derided John Smith as “Monsieur Oui, the poodle of Brussels” (HC Deb 22 March 1994 Col. 134), a phrase he regretted afterwards (Seldon 1997, 451). Smith however, who could be an effective Commons performer, did use one the most devastating sound bites in the Commons against Major in the debate following Britain’s withdrawal from the ERM, describing him as “a devalued Prime Minister in a devalued government.” John Major was not

---

<sup>16</sup> See chapter four for discussion of John Major’s preparation for PMQs

able to fully recover from in his own contribution immediately afterwards (Stuart 2012, 158).

The most noticeable aspect of Major's performances at PMQs is how quickly they went from statesmanlike – *ethos* superseding *pathos* in this respect - back to the rough-and-tumble of party politics, as evidenced by the comparison of parliamentary performances during the First Gulf War between 1990 and 1991 and subsequently. Almost overnight, once the troops were withdrawn, Major quickly went from being good-mannered to being insulting towards MPs (Burnham et al 1994, 553).

If Major could effectively deploy humour and aggression to galvanise the backbenchers twice-weekly at PMQs, he could also equally be moving at times of great national mourning on set-piece occasions. In 1994 he deployed *anaphora* when speaking about the death of Smith by repeating “the waste of a” at the beginning of each sentence: “His language may not have been Churchillian, but he spoke from the heart, and often extempore, and he judged the mood perfectly.” Two years later, after the Canary Wharf bomb attack by the IRA in February 1996, by deploying *epiphora* by repeating “we will start again” at the end of every sentence, he was able to strongly emphasise to the Commons that the peace initiative would continue despite the damage and loss of life caused (Seldon 1997, 461, 625).

After Black Wednesday the most memorable rhetoric was often not by Major but from his intra-party opponents in Parliament, who would mercilessly deploy sound bites against him to devastating effect. This was a seemingly recurring theme of the deployment of rhetoric throughout Major's premiership (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 147). One such example is Euro-rebel Tony Marlow telling Major openly in the Commons in March 1994 that he should “stand aside and make way for somebody else who provides authority and direction of leadership” (*The Times*, March 30 1994). Perhaps most astonishing of all is former Chancellor's Norman Lamont's famous attack on Major and his government for “being in office but not in power” (HC Deb June 9 1993 Col. 281).

Of all of Major's opponents, perhaps the most brutal rhetoric, aside from that from his own backbenchers, came at inter-party level from the one individual in the House of Commons who had most to gain from exploiting the internal divisions of the PCP and the impact it had on the Prime Minister's leadership: Smith's successor, Tony Blair. Major, only occasionally, would get an advantage over Blair through *pathos*, using humour as an appeal. This was most in evidence in the PMQs following his resignation as party leader in June 1995 (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 141).

The main event was Thursday's PMQs between Major's announcement and the first ballot of MPs the following Tuesday. Major had asked his staff at Number 10 and his campaign team to think up jokes the day before. As a result on the day at the despatch box he was able to deploy the jokes prepared effortlessly to swot not only Redwood, but also would-be challenger Michael Portillo, as well as Blair himself. The best joke was when Blair asked the Prime Minister why Redwood had not resigned earlier if he had disagreed with government policy so much. Major, "with impeccable timing," responded: "I understood that he resigned from the Cabinet because he was devastated that I had resigned as leader of the Conservative Party" (HC Deb 29 June 1995 Col. 1078). This exchange achieved two goals: "not only had [Major] paraded his oratorical skills under duress, but also belittled his principal antagonists" (Seldon 1997, 581-582).

This rare occasion was made up by Blair's ability often to viciously exploit Major's weakness within his own party to devastating effect, a prime example being when Blair deployed his own style of rhetoric: *repetition*, to hammer home to the House of Commons and to the electorate the predicament the Prime Minister was engulfed by, tormenting Major by shouting "weak, weak, weak" during exchanges across the despatch box in January 1997 (HC Deb January 30 1997 Col 503).

### **3.3.2 Party Conference**

Margaret Thatcher described the leader's conference speech as "poetry" to "inspire the party faithful as well as ease the worries of the doubters" (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 448). This may be the rhetorical purpose. The dilemma, however, which has existed ever since party conferences began to be broadcast

on television, is how to ensure the speech satisfies multiple audiences: on the one hand, the party grassroots; on the other, the public and electorate (Toye 2011, 183).

For John Major, if he had wanted to appear the national statesman rather than the party leader on the conference platform he was not always able to do so because, as in the House of Commons, his rhetoric often was driven by party management concerns rather than towards those of the country - particularly on the issue of Europe (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 146).

The 1992 conference had taken place, not against a backdrop of electoral triumph and mutual celebration as it should have been, but instead took place in a climate of disunity and acrimony and open speculation as to Major's future as leader following Britain's exit from the ERM only three weeks earlier (Evans and Taylor 1996, 263). Major did however recover some lost authority at the 1992 Party Conference, through the annual Leader's Speech (Seldon 1997, 329-330). And this is what each leader's speech became for Major during the 1992 Parliament: another means to fight back against his critics and re-assert his authority.

The party conference is another forum, like the House of Commons, for *deliberative* rhetoric, but it does also lend itself equally to *epideictic* rhetoric, and can be a chance for a keynote speaker to display their oratorical skills - of which Major was not regarded as amongst their number. This was not to say that, at times, Major could be effective at Party Conferences. As one former Cabinet colleague observed:

"I can still remember he came to our Party Conference in Scotland after John Smith's death when I was Secretary of State and he made a quite magnificent speech which was sensitive, sympathetic and quite above and beyond what you'd expect at a Party Conference. And largely without a note, before he moved into the prepared part of his speech. But it was a very effective speech. He could occasionally make a really good speech at conference" (Lang 2017).

More often than not however, such moments were lost amidst leadership speculation, allowing rivals to the Prime Minister from within the Cabinet an opportunity to use their keynote speeches during the annual Party Conference to display their oratory. Of these, Portillo and Heseltine were perhaps the most effective. Heseltine was the undisputed ‘darling’ of the conference platform ever since his famous use of *metaphor* and *repetition* in quick succession in a final peroration of powerful *imagery* when he attacked James Callaghan’s government as being like a “one-legged army” moving forward “Left, left – left, left, left” at the 1976 conference. As a researcher commented at the time:

“The standing ovation was to do with the manner of delivery, not the content. If he’d read out the New York telephone directory with that rigour and style he’d have got a standing ovation” (Crick 1997, 185-187).

Portillo’s own oratory reached its height in the conference hall with a “barnstorming” speech in 1994 at Bournemouth in which the Employment Secretary declared that he would, using an easily recognisable *metaphor* to appeal to the right of the party, “stop the rot from Brussels” over jobs, which earned him a four minute standing ovation (Seldon 1997, 497). Portillo however could overplay his hand with his appeals to the right, as he proved the following year in Blackpool when, this time as Defence Secretary, he crudely invoked the motto of the SAS in relation to defence policy by stating: “We dare. We will win” (*The Times*, October 11 1995).

Though Major enjoyed inserting his own anecdotes into his speeches, and was at his best off the cuff, the key draftsman for his party conference speeches during this period was Nick True, from the Policy Unit at Number 10 (George Bridges replaced True in 1995). Discussions on drafts also always included the watchful head of the Downing Street Policy Unit, Sarah Hogg, and other key political staff, such as Jonathan Hill (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 236-237).

As Jonathan Hill recalls, “Nick True did help with speeches. And Ronnie Millar sprinkled some magic dust on PM’s speeches” (Hill 2017). Gyles Brandreth also offered advice:

“I was only involved [in Major’s speeches] to the extent that I supplied jokes and turns of phrase. I’ve done it for several leaders. They always want jokes to make them human. I say to them that the people don’t want you to make jokes to make you seem funny; they want you to be Prime Ministerial. They think it makes them more likeable” (Brandreth 2017).

Gyles Brandreth was to regularly lament Major’s speaking style and use of words in his *Diaries*, hence his offer to help the Prime Minister improve his style (Brandreth 2000, 332).

Of all of Major’s speeches to conference as Prime Minister, perhaps the most famous, or perhaps well known as a self-inflicted wound from a communications perspective such as its ‘boomerang’ nature, was the ‘Back to Basics’ speech in October 1993 at Blackpool (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 144)<sup>17</sup>. The 1993 Party Conference speech was intended to be a much-needed fight back after a summer parliamentary session which saw the Maastricht Bill becoming law in July and only a few weeks after the first anniversary of Black Wednesday (*The Times* September 17 1993). The speech itself was well received by the party faithful (Seldon 1997, 403-404).

Major’s use of humour for *pathos* litters the speech from the beginning, his opening *exordium* poking fun at Heseltine on his return to the front line after his heart attack that summer: “And isn’t it good to see Michael back? Did you see those exercises? I dare say they are going to enliven quite a few Cabinet meetings in future” (Major 1993b). Major does also establish rapport with the audience by pitching his *decorum* perfectly, by speaking in a *plain* style which suits the *deliberative* context of his Prime Ministerial speeches. The Prime Minister does this by reminding the audience that he is just a party worker like them, who has been coming to conferences for thirty years “on and off,” which does establish *ethos*.

As would be expected, there are large chunks of the speech in which Major does explain the government’s programme through *logos* having established his *ethos*

---

<sup>17</sup> See also chapter six

at the beginning. This allows him to talk with authority on matters such as crime, education, defence and the Northern Ireland peace process; his mentioning of each Cabinet minister concerned by name a consensus building gesture towards the Cabinet and an indication of his style of collective leadership (Foley 2002, 30). He uses *pathos* again later to attack the opposition leadership, - Smith and the Liberal Democrat leader, Paddy Ashdown, - which, once again, is the usual rhetoric expected in a leader's conference speech.

What is unusual, however, is his direct plea to party unity at almost the very beginning of his *narration*, which seeks to highlight the divisions still further from a party management perspective. What is more startling is his reference to the conference as a "private gathering", which seems to underestimate the effect of his words on the *other* audience – the electorate - outside. The central theme, which was ill thought through in that it might appear to be a wish to return to old-fashioned moral values, is based around the sound bite 'Back to Basics.'

Major then uses *repetition*, in a clear signal to the Right of the PCP, of "wrong, wrong, wrong" (Major 1993b) on putting treatment ahead of punishment when it came to dealing with criminals, before following the famous sound bite with an *epanalepsis*: "We must go back to basics. We want our children to be taught the best, our public services to give the best; our industry to beat the best" (Seldon 1997, 404). Major's *peroration* ended on a patriotic note, talking about Northern Ireland. Despite what happened subsequently, this was the Prime Minister at his best rhetorically and one of his best performances, and the grassroots loved it (Evans and Taylor 1996, 266).

### **3.3.3 Media and Public Meetings**

If party management remained the overriding objective in the House of Commons and at annual party conferences in the style of Major's rhetoric, it was no less so outside those two recognised forums: in the media and at public meetings, which encompasses all other forums and mediums through which the Prime Minister could speak to various different audiences. This included television, campaign rallies, press conferences and some of the other political rituals which a Prime Minister cannot avoid on the political calendar.



Television is probably the one medium which, as with 'Back to Basics', added another hostage to fortune to Major's critics. The most memorable 'gaffe' was in July 1993 when the Prime Minister let his guard down in front of ITN journalist Michael Brunson. At the time he was clearly tired and rattled after passing the Social Policy Protocol motion through the House of Commons using a vote of confidence earlier that day. Major also believed that the microphone he had used in the interview with Brunson was now turned off, so he let off steam in what he thought was a private place, and to a journalist he liked:

"Just think of it from my perspective. You are the prime minister, with a majority of only eighteen, a Party that is harking back to a golden age that never was, and is now invented. You have three right-wing members of the Cabinet who actually resign. What happens to the Parliamentary party? ...We don't want three more of the bastards out there" (Seldon 1997, 389-390).

Major admitted later in his memoirs: "It was careless of me to have spoken to Brunson so freely" (Major 1999, 343), and the three ministers referred to became a matter of huge speculation in the media (Crick 2005, 317-318). Loyalists view the blame as not solely on the shoulders of the Prime Minister, as a former minister argued:

"[The "Bastards" gaffe] is the matter of a man developing a relationship with a journalist and being betrayed. It was a gaffe in the sense that it went wrong for him, but I don't think he can be blamed for it" (Lang 2017).

Indeed, very rarely did the Prime Minister's ventures on television, whether inadvertent or planned, produce what can have been desired by Number 10. During the 1992 election campaign the media advisers finally got approval from Major to do a Party Political Broadcast (PPB) dedicated entirely to his rise from Brixton to Downing Street: *The Journey*, which was produced by the *Chariots of Fire* Director, John Schlesinger.

Though well received at the time, Major had no time for this type of electioneering or packaging by 'spin' experts, as he explained in his memoirs:

“I was famously reluctant to make the film, and to this day I remain embarrassed about it. Others say it is a moving and effective portrayal of what I stand for and where I come from, but I have always been uncomfortable about personalised politics, and disliked using my upbringing in an attempt to win votes” (Major 1999, 300).

The PPB was effective, however, because it only further enhanced the Prime Minister’s *ethos* with the public, making them feel that he was down to earth and on their level, in direct contrast to Major’s predecessor, Thatcher (Broughton 1999, 204-205). This was equally shown in his Gulf War PPB, which powerfully touched the right chord with soldier’s families as British troops took part in Operation Desert Storm in spring 1991, ending as it did with the memorable “God Bless” (Seldon 1997, 157).

As a former Cabinet minister recalled:

“He was very sensitive about it and communicated it very effectively and in a tone which was completely different to what Margaret Thatcher would have done. She would have been “Britannia with her battleaxe,” whereas he was “our boys are going to war” and you know it’s going to be tough” (Lang 2017).

At press conferences Major could set the right tone and be statesmanlike, as he did during the Northern Ireland peace process with many important Downing Street press conferences, such as the famous Downing Street Declaration in December 1993 (Norton 1999, 116-119).

Press conferences during election campaigns were more problematic however, particularly when it came to producing coherent sound bites for news bulletins. This was recalled by a former Cabinet colleague:

“There was a problem at press conferences during the [1992] General Election. The journalists would ask him intelligent questions. John [Major] always wanted to argue his point, which he did brilliantly, but what I was looking for on the monitor upstairs was a sound bite for the One O’ Clock News” (Wakeham 2017).

This was not always forthcoming. One of the more memorable press conferences the Prime Minister gave was during the 1997 election, and was another example of his 'boomerang' rhetoric (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 147-148). This was when Major was forced by events, namely MPs and junior ministers breaching his 'wait and see' policy on a single currency openly in their election manifestos, to make a direct plea for the PCP to accept his negotiating position on a single currency. As Major said: "Whether you agree with me, or disagree with me, like me or loathe me, don't bind my hands when I am negotiating on behalf of the British nation" (Major 1997).

Whatever *pathos* the press conference may have engendered amongst the Conservative Party's core supporters through Major's appeal to their emotions, within the country at large it left the image of a Prime Minister being brought to almost breaking point by his own party's intra-party warfare over the issue of further European integration (Butler and Kavanagh 1997, 105-106). Party support rather than public support for Major at his performance is confirmed by one of the errant ministers in the 1997 campaign, and thus one of the causes of Major's press conference, John Horam, who argued to the author that the Prime Minister gave an "effective" display at the time (Horam 2017).

Major's famous "put up, or shut up" press conference in 1995 was also caused by events beyond his control within the PCP (*The Times*, June 23 1995), and thus a further example of his 'boomerang' rhetoric (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 148). The statement Major made in Downing Street in June 1995 displayed many of the characteristics of his style of rhetoric. For instance, the use of *ethos*, which appeals to the grassroots and through them the PCP, such as the opening line in which he talks of having been "involved in politics since I was sixteen." This time the *pathos* is not through humour however. It is, rather, a powerful plea for unity to the PCP, using *metaphor*, such as "I am not prepared to see the party I care for laid out on the rack like this anymore." Most powerfully, it ends with a great sound bite: "In short, it is time to put up or shut up" – a strong unity *metaphor* to conclude with (Major 1995a).

Where Major excelled, particularly in the 1992 election, was in the rough-and-tumble of political campaigning. This relates to the famous 'soapbox' which has become synonymous with Major as a style of campaigning for elections. Major had developed his skills as a public speaker through standing on a soapbox in Brixton market from the age of sixteen (Junor 1996, 38-39). The inspiration for the soapbox in the 1992 election came from Major's visit to Kuwait after the country had been liberated from Saddam Hussein. As Major recalled:

"I came back from the Gulf very enthusiastic about standing on tanks and talking to people. It was direct communication. It was old street theatre: you were surrounded by people...what I actually wished to do in the election was something that hadn't been done in yonks. That was to hold meetings with me just standing in the middle of a large crowd, talking to them unscripted, and answering questions" (Seldon 1997, 257).

The effect therefore of the soapbox was to boost Major's *ethos* as a man of the people from the moment it was first used at Luton on March 28 1992 (Toye 2011, 184). This was confirmed by a former Cabinet minister:

"I thought that [the soapbox] was quite an effective effort during the [1992] election myself. I think he came over very much as a person of the common people, if you know what I mean. There was no side to him at all" (Former minister B 2017).

The soapbox was perceived therefore to be effective by Major's colleagues, its utility increased by how it sharply contrasted with the lack of substance of Kinnock and the Labour Party and their slick media-orientated campaign (Thorpe 2008, 234).

It also re-invigorated the Prime Minister and his campaign, which Major acknowledged in his memoirs:

"This aspect of electioneering suited me well. I felt at ease hemmed in by a noisy mass of jostling humanity. The people were there because they chose to be. So was I" (Major 1999, 290).

Major also felt that, aside from the intimacy of such occasions:

“I liked the unpredictability of the dialogue with the crowds. I was invigorated when things went well, and shrugged off the few unpleasant moments. Mostly the reception was friendly and genuinely eager. There was a fizz about the impromptu soapbox meetings. Everyone enjoyed them, and they gave me more of a “feel” for the electorate than any number of opinion polls, focus groups or position papers” (Major 1999, 290).

Views on the use of the soapbox remain mixed however, seen by some as too overrated in terms of its impact on the 1992 campaign. As one former MP recalled: “I think the soapbox was something about him, but it didn’t really alter politics one jot” (Maitland 2017). Others saw it as a useful tool to get media attention, but not any other electoral effects, one recalling how the soapbox was more useful in that it “undoubtedly gave him coverage” during the election campaign (Lang 2017).

What worked so effectively on the campaign trail: the genuine, man of the people, approach, still could not make up for other occasions when Major could use words and phrases that could leave open a potential hostage to fortune. This was what occurred when Major went to the Scottish CBI in September 1992, a week before Black Wednesday (Major 1992b), in a further example of Major’s ‘boomerang rhetoric’ (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 147)<sup>18</sup>.

Major, in an effort to stave off devaluation of the pound following the Italian lira’s devaluation the week before, had decided to stake his own personal credibility on the pound keeping parity within the German DM 2.95 upper limit within the ERM:

“Let me say this to you, Mr Chairman, for it is something that I believe passionately – all my adult life I’ve seen Governments driven off their virtuous pursuit of low inflation, by market problems or political pressures. I was under no illusions when I took Britain into the ERM. I said at the time that membership was no soft option. The soft option, the devaluer’s option, the inflationary option, in my judgement that would be a betrayal of our future at

---

<sup>18</sup> See chapter seven for psychology behind speech

this moment and I tell you categorically that is not the Government's policy" (Major 1992b).

The language Major uses is powerful and strident, invoking conflict *imagery* – “betrayal”, “soft option” – which gave this part of his speech both *ethos* and *pathos* and struck home to the audience his passionate belief in the policy. As a piece of rhetoric therefore it was effective in getting Major's message across. Major was fully aware of how politically dangerous to his own credibility the words he used were and how he may come to regret them in the near future, later admitting:

“Events were making a dissembler of me. I had been discussing suspending our membership of the ERM, but to protect against market damage I was nailing my reputation firmly to staying within the mechanism. It was an irony not lost on me as I delivered the speech” (Major 1999, 326).

Despite party management concerns mainly being at the forefront of his speeches, Major could also invoke nostalgia in his rhetoric, using a very Baldwinesque style of speaking, such as when he spoke at the Conservative Centre for Europe in April 1993. Major's speech reaffirmed his commitment for Britain to remain at the heart of Europe, but it is most remembered for the style of language he used near the end of it:

“Fifty years from now Britain will still be the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and - as George Orwell said - “old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist” and if we get our way - Shakespeare still read even in school. Britain will survive unamendable in all essentials” (Major 1993a).

Such nostalgia provides a great deal of *pathos* to the listener, taking them back in time through lyrical *imagery* to another era when Britain was a less complex and more appealing place. It equally did achieve the objective of appealing to the PCP and the party's grassroots, as a former MP recalled:

“[It was a] nice image of a decent, 1950s Britain. It was Napoleon who said if you want to understand a man you must understand the world when he turned

twenty-one. So picture John Major in 1950s, aged twenty-one, those decent, Conservative, Church of England, middle-of-the-road images, the spinster on the bicycle, Meals-On-Wheels, warm beer” (Brandreth 2017).

The speech was ridiculed in large sections of the media however: “What a load of tosh” (*The Independent*, April 23 1993) was how one newspaper dismissed it.

### 3.4 Conclusion

So was Major a success or failure as a public communicator as Prime Minister? Certainly, in the first phase of his premiership, between 1990 and 1992, both institutionally and rhetorically, his communication strategy was seemingly a success, as was confirmed by Ian Lang (2017). Indeed, institutionally, Major’s determination to be the antithesis of Thatcher in his relationship with the tabloids and broadsheets, plus broadcast media, alongside an equally jovial Press Office led by Gus O’Donnell, did pay dividends as the media welcomed the change in style at Number 10 (Bale and Sanders 2001, 95-96).

Rhetorically the new style Major adopted also brought dividends, his Baldwinesque at times style seen as almost lyrical (Seldon 1997, 370). Equally when Major was in a position to be statesmanlike in his rhetoric, such as at times of national crisis, as during Operation Desert Storm in 1991, he could be (Lang 2017). And arguably the most effective rhetorical triumph of his premiership was when he used his famous soapbox in the 1992 election, which enhanced Major’s *ethos* with the public as the man of the people (Toye 2011, 184). This is despite the role of the soapbox being questioned by contemporaries of Major at the time (Maitland 2017). Major was therefore more *deliberative* in his rhetorical style, unlike the more *epideictic* Heseltine, Portillo, and Thatcher. Hence Major’s lack of memorable performances at Party Conference or in the House of Commons.

Following Black Wednesday in September 1992 Major’s public communication approach could be described as, at best weak, and at worst incompetent (Seymour-Ure 1994, 399-400). This was partly because a lot of the goodwill which both the Number 10 Press Office and the Prime Minister had generated in the 1990 to 1992 period with press and broadcast journalists, and the more

clubbable atmosphere between government and media that had been created as a result, was not enough to save Major from the political onslaught that ensued from all quarters of the press the day after the pound left the ERM (Seldon 1997, 322). No attempt was made to put an institutional strategy in place to rectify the situation either (Horam 2017). One of the main causes of this weakness was in the choosing a non-political civil servant as Press Secretary by Major three times whilst Prime Minister, each with no background in political journalism (Seymour-Ure 1995, 194), something Major refused to change.

From September 1992 the attacks in the media on the Major government were relentless and at times deeply personal towards Major himself, editors and journalists at times seemingly trying to outdo each other in their taunting, of which Campbell was perhaps the most personal (Osborne and Walters 2004, 87-90). Unlike Thatcher, Major had no time however for courting press barons or political journalists, describing such a notion as a “rather undignified” thing for a Prime Minister to do (Major 2012, P14 19; Wakeham 2017).

Major’s rhetoric after Black Wednesday equally became chiefly concerned with party management concerns as Major daily attempted to shore up his authority. And it is arguable that the rhetoric during this period was memorable only because of two reasons: First, the amount of self-inflicted wounds, of which there were many examples, which caused Major to regularly display ‘boomerang rhetoric’ – which always rebounded upon him. Second, the memorable rhetoric of his opponents, at both intra-party and inter-party level, of which once again there was many examples from September 1992. The most regularly effective in this regard was John Major’s Leader of the Opposition from 1994: Tony Blair (Heppell and McMeeking 2015, 147-148).

It is therefore possible to argue that Major’s failures at public communication only exacerbated and prolonged the media firestorm that engulfed the government from September 1992 onwards, the media able to effectively target a Prime Minister who was not self-aware enough of modern media techniques either at a personal or institutional level. This was an outlook on media relations mirrored by the Press Office in Number 10. Furthermore, these communication failures, far



from being new, were already embedded in 1990 when John Major acquired the premiership. Communication failures were thus inevitable, Major's media 'blind spot' a constant problem throughout his time as Prime Minister.

## **Chapter Four: Organisational Capacity**

The structure of this chapter is in three parts, each part looking at Major's organisational capacity through the prism of the two central elements of the Greenstein criteria: those pertaining to 'effectiveness at institutional arrangements' and 'advice' (Bose 2006). The 'effectiveness of institutional arrangements' element will include an examination of the structure of decision-making within Number 10 and Whitehall, as well as the reforms and innovations between 1990 and 1997 aimed to make government itself more efficient and effective. The 'advice' element will also look at the relations between Prime Minister and the political and official staff element during this period, and, latterly, how former officials regard Major today.

The first part, therefore, looks at the operation of Number 10 under John Major as Prime Minister, in particular the main advisory bodies within Downing Street - the Private Office, the Political Office, the Policy Unit and the Press Office, - and each one's effectiveness at the time and staff relationships.

The second part looks similarly at the operation of the Cabinet system under John Major and its effectiveness: in particular the Prime Minister's use of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees and any innovations in that regard. This also includes an analysis of the running of the Cabinet Office and Major's relationship with the Cabinet Secretary during his tenure as premier, Sir Robin Butler.

The final part is an assessment of the institutional reforms to government and Whitehall under John Major, including the significant Citizen's Charter initiative, and similarly assesses their effectiveness. To Hennessy, these institutional reforms ensured that "the Major premiership takes on a considerable constitutional importance" (Hennessy 2000, 451), but importantly, can act as a case study in the work of both Number 10 and the Cabinet Office at work. The chapter will then conclude with an overall assessment of Major's organisational capacity during his time in office as Prime Minister from 1990 to 1997.

## 4.1 Introduction

With this element of political leadership Greenstein was looking at what he described as “the inner workings of the presidency” which examines a President’s “ability to rally his colleagues and structure their activities effectively” (Greenstein 2000, 5). In particular, Greenstein saw that a President’s capacity as an organiser “includes his ability to forge a team and get the most out of it, minimising the tendency of subordinates to defer to him rather than present him with their unvarnished views” (Greenstein 2006, 23).

To Greenstein the success or failure of a President in organisational capacity is possibly best represented by, amongst other things, how alumni of a previous administration remember their boss and how little or how much affection they express (Greenstein 2009a, 226-227). But even Greenstein has not always regarded the advisory team around a President to be beneficial, having argued that “presidential bureaucracy can be a liability as well as a strength: aides can not only help their boss but can also abuse power in a president’s name, distort the information he receives, and contribute to other organisational pathologies” (Greenstein 1988, 4, 350-351). Advisers can therefore be a liability as well as a strength to a leader.

Organisational capacity also includes a quite different matter to Greenstein: a President’s proficiency at designing ‘effective institutional arrangements’ (Greenstein 2006, 23). Presidential proficiency at creating effective institutional arrangements was a rare ability amongst Presidents in Greenstein’s view, - even rarer than effective public communicators, - President Eisenhower being the only example he offered (Greenstein 2009a, 226-227).

Designing ‘effective institutional arrangements’ is not specifically defined by Greenstein, but Bose recognised the key elements displayed by the Eisenhower presidency. As she explained:

“he recognized the importance of having clearly defined responsibilities and chains of command for policy success...[Eisenhower] understood that a president cannot be involved with policy debates at all levels, but that a

carefully culled group of advisers can help to balance a president's responsibilities while ensuring that decision-making authority remains with the president" (Bose 2006, 31-32).

Bose therefore offers the appropriate benchmark for 'effective institutional arrangements.' The key element: "the importance of having clearly defined responsibilities and chains of command" in order to achieve policy success.

The decision of Greenstein to incorporate organisational capacity in his own analytical framework was a response to the shortcomings he had himself highlighted with regard to Neustadt in his seminal work *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (1990). Greenstein agreed with Peter Sperlich, who argued "that Neustadt overemphasizes the personal actions of the president, ignoring the role a president's aides play in his leadership" (Greenstein 2006, 19)<sup>19</sup>.

To Bose, organisational capacity and Greenstein's fifth leadership criteria of cognitive style are so closely related to each other as to be "interdependent," but Bose ranks organisational capacity higher than cognitive style in terms of impact on policy making (third overall), stating:

"A president who overburdens his schedule risks micro-management, while a president who balances his schedule may be better prepared to focus on the issues that most clearly demand his attention. Therefore, attention to organisation can mitigate a president's cognitive shortcomings, and cognitive strengths alone are no guarantee of effective leadership" (Bose 2006, 31, 33-34).

Within the British polity, organisational capacity relates to: "the Prime Minister and Number 10 staff, the machinery of government, and the organisation and use of the Cabinet system" (Theakston 2011, 85). Most importantly it is "about the Prime Minister's ability or willingness to be open to a range of points of view and variety of arguments and the quality of advice on policy and politics reaching him or her" (Theakston 2007, 233).

---

<sup>19</sup> See chapter two

This echoes Greenstein, who emphasises the need in the organisation of advice in “minimizing the tendency of subordinates to tell their boss what they sense he wants to hear” (Greenstein 2009a, 226). The importance of being able and willing give unfettered advice in political leadership is therefore important in both the British and American political systems of governance.

Whilst in America the Executive Office of the Presidency has grown with each occupant of the White House since FDR, - and it is clear where executive power lies within the American constitution, - this is not the case in Britain where the occupant of Downing Street has to operate within a collegial system with Cabinet colleagues with no Prime Ministerial Department of their own (Heffernan 2005, 65-67)<sup>20</sup>.

This is not to say that Prime Ministers have not attempted to rectify this situation and tried to strengthen the operations of Downing Street to ensure that a Prime Minister is at the centre of all executive networks throughout government. Harold Wilson did so with the creation of the Policy Unit at Number 10 for that very purpose, and reforms at the centre continued under Wilson’s successors (Burch and Holliday 2004, 3-4).

But John Major was not to be an innovator like Harold Wilson whilst Prime Minister, though he did contemplate expanding both the Policy Unit and the Cabinet Office if he had won the 1997 election (Blick and Jones 2013, 255, 259). Major’s orthodox view was confirmed by a former senior adviser: “Number 10 under J Major worked in pretty much the same way as under Mrs Thatcher. There was no great reform change until Blair 1997” (Hill 2017).

This lack of institutional innovation is important to explore in relation to Major, because, as Bose states: “attention to organisation can mitigate a president’s cognitive shortcomings” (Bose 2006, 33-34). The lack of innovation therefore was to have a detrimental effect on the Prime Minister’s ability to operate government effectively, the government being perceived by 1992 as having lost the strategic

---

<sup>20</sup> See chapter two

direction and purpose of Major's predecessor, Margaret Thatcher. This led to the charge of a 'hole at the centre of government' (Beesley 2017, 521-522).

One of the causes of the 'hole,' to some members of the Cabinet, lay in the fact that decisions appeared at times to be more and more official-led, rather than by ministers, with the Prime Minister's advisers taking a far more central role than some ministers believed to be constitutionally proper, as Norman Lamont felt about the interference of Sarah Hogg, the head of the Policy Unit, in the 1991 Budget for example (Lamont 2000, 44).

The role of Number 10 and its staff also was allowed to get conflated with the main charge against Major of weak leadership, the *Times* commenting in May 1993 after Lamont had struck a 'raw nerve' by accusing the government of 'being in office, but not in power': "The fall of John Major came closer yesterday...Downing Street is not working. He needs different eyes and minds to aid him...He needs to heed the truths that came yesterday from so close to home. Or he is going, almost gone" (Seldon 1997, 379).

The charge of governmental drift and 'a hole' at the centre of government never abated during Major's time in office, the mindset of Number 10 appearing to remain to both ministers and civil servants alike, that of "a [b]unker mentality and short-termism," seemingly always lacking in overall strategic thinking (Hennessy 2000, 474).

## **4.2 Number 10 Downing Street**

Number 10 is at the centre of a complex web of institutions, networks and practices within the core executive. Power within the core executive is locational: it is dependent upon where actors can be found within the core executive<sup>21</sup>. The Prime Minister, located at the centre in Number 10 Downing Street, has a number of personal and institutional power sources available but within the governance

---

<sup>21</sup> See chapter two

network this is not sufficient to achieve their policy objectives and therefore a Prime Minister is dependent upon other actors in order to do so, including both ministers and civil servants, through a process of exchange and bargaining within government (Heffernan 2003, 350-356).

Such bargaining takes place principally between Number 10 and the various departmental 'baronial courts' and their policy agendas, which represent the other competing networks for influence within Whitehall, with the Treasury being the most powerful. Importantly each department largely mirrors Number 10 in terms of institutional resources, with their own Private Office (Rhodes 2011, 137-149, 210-214).

The executive structure of Number 10, which John Major inherited from Margaret Thatcher in 1990, was, in comparison to other rival power centres in the western world, such as the White House, which employed up to 400 staff under President Bush Snr, small. In 1993 Number 10 was registered as having 107 staff, of which key staff numbered 34 (Blick and Jones 2013, 249; Burch and Holliday 1996, 27).

Aside from the Private Office, the Political Office, the Policy Unit and the Press Office it had become established practice to appoint special prime ministerial advisers on: "policy (usually foreign and defence affairs) and government efficiency and performance, and to create special units linked to or within the Prime Minister's Office to take on aspects of overall government policy as the need arose" (Burch and Holliday 2004, 3-4).

Major had within Number 10 appointed advisers on foreign affairs and efficiency up to 1994, before the roles were phased out gradually following the 1992 election (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 342). Major also was to have a special adviser on competitiveness whilst Prime Minister. Special advisers within Number 10 remained static at six or seven throughout Major's time as Prime Minister (Blick 2004, 227). Public service reform through the Citizen's Charter and other initiatives was promoted from within Number 10 by a special Citizen's Charter Unit, established in 1991 (Seldon 1997, 194).

Major largely enjoyed a warm relationship with the Downing Street "family":

“He brought out the protective side in people. They worried about his solitary late evening existence...and the unhealthy junk food he would have brought in, if he ate at all” (Hennessy 2000, 445-446).

The change in atmosphere at Number 10 was noticed throughout Whitehall, and was something Major felt was very important in his dealings as Prime Minister with officials and ministers alike:

“After the pomp and circumstance of the Thatcher years I was keen to present an antidote to that...I felt, too, that with the power and influence my new position brought with it, my capacity to hurt people...would be very real; particularly people who were in no position to answer back. I went out of my way to ensure that this did not happen. In Downing Street and elsewhere I wanted people without power to be treated with the same courtesy as heads of government. I thought they deserved it” (Major 1999, 210).

This did not stop Major at times becoming sensitive around some civil servants from the ‘grand corps’ who didn’t hide their over confident intellects (Hennessy 2000, 447). The good relationship that existed between Prime Minister and Number 10 staff was confirmed by one former adviser, Roderic Lyne, who recalled:

“Under [John Major], it was like a family. He and Norma [Major] (her role was important) are people with no side. They knew everyone’s names; chatted to the most junior staff; took no one for granted; and inspired tremendous loyalty from top to bottom. Twenty years on, many of the staff are still in touch with each other, and with the Majors. It is not by chance that [Major’s] Private Secretary since he retired has been someone who worked for him in No 10; and that all four of his PAs in this period had worked in the Garden Room at No 10” (Lyne 2017).

The Prime Minister’s typical day began at 6.30 am, meeting his Principal Private Secretary and Press Secretary in the Number 10 bedroom flat. Major would continue to see staff informally before starting work in the Cabinet Room at 9 am (the Prime Minister abandoned the first floor study used by Thatcher early on).



On Mondays there were regular meetings with the Party Chairman, Deputy Prime Minister (after 1995), the Chief Whip and other parliamentary business managers. John Major also saw his Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robin Butler, on Monday mornings to discuss forthcoming Cabinet business. The rest of the day was then spent in a “relentless procession of meetings” with Cabinet colleagues, outsiders and foreign visitors, usually preceded by detailed briefing and preparation. During the evening Major worked through his boxes (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 209).

The final ritual of the day would come with the last red box, as a former adviser recalled:

“Whoever was last, the Private Secretary would take the box to the PM at night. We had these things called ‘dips’ (Correspondence, Reading, Security briefing) in Number 10 and generally a Private Secretary would exert a form of quality control suggesting he read this Appendices, or this Executive Summary within the box” (Turnbull 2017).

There was less paper being sent to Major however, in comparison to Mrs Thatcher, as David Willetts, who worked for Thatcher in Number 10 recalled: “I was struck at how much less paper was going to the Prime Minister compared to earlier, when Mrs Thatcher was in office.” Willetts then explained further: “[w]ith John Major the important thing was to get to see him” (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 210).

Sleep was important to Major, Charles Powell, who worked with both Prime Ministers as a Private Secretary (Overseas Affairs), noting: “[Thatcher] was tensed up all the time, highly strung, very active. She would be up at five am, telephoning all hours of the day and night, meeting this person and that, saying get this done, never stopping for a moment” (Junor 1996, 209). In contrast:

“John Major has quite a placid temperament. He needed seven hours sleep a night [whereas she] could cope with three hours a night for weeks at a time and it didn’t affect her performance” (Junor 1996, 209).

Not everyone could get to see the Prime Minister, due to the daily workload and other commitments, thus ensuring that the main area of dispute for the staff in Number 10 was over the Prime Minister's time. This is recalled by former advisers. As Sarah Hogg, the head of the Policy Unit, explained:

“His Parliamentary Private Secretary wants him to spend time in the Commons tea-room. His Appointments Secretary wants him to see museums and holy men. His Press Secretary wants him to give interviews. His Political Office wants him to remember he is leader of the Conservative Party, and tries to keep days for him to stomp the country. His Private Office struggles to schedule committee meetings. His Policy Unit wants to carve out thinking time. The Diary Secretary does her level best to keep five minutes free for the Prime Minister to see his family or drop in at a cricket match. But at the periodic diary meetings, inspired by the Principal Private Secretary, the heaviest fire is exchanged between the “foreigners” and the rest” (Hogg and Hill 1995, 35).

Major was most keen to have space for thinking to be included in his diary, but these times often proved to be the most vulnerable, largely due to Major's own good nature and unwillingness to cause offense (Seldon 1997, 199). He was also not helped to start out with when he became Prime Minister by having no set idea as to how he wished to organise his time. Downing Street staff certainly felt that “[Major] was the main culprit” for his diary being over-loaded:

“One Cabinet minister sought a private meeting with the Prime Minister only to be told by a Private Secretary that it would not be possible within the next two months. When the minister raised this with Major, the latter expressed surprise and invited the minister round to dinner that evening” (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 209-211).

The Political Office was especially bemused at the amount of time John Major spent with ambassadors, usually at the urging of the Private Office (Hogg and Hill 1995, 36).

This poor management of time did have consequences, not least to government efficiency, as one former Cabinet minister recalled:

“There was far less planning than there ought to be. I’ll give you an example. John Patten, Secretary of State, had a bilateral booked with John Major to last thirty minutes, but Major’s meeting before, with an ambassador or something, overran, meaning his meeting with Patten lasted not thirty minutes, but five. This meant Major just had time to say how he’d read Patten’s White Paper proposing his Education Bill and to say he liked it. Then Patten came to I think 80 Committee (sic.), which I chaired, with the ‘big beasts’ on it such as Heseltine and Clarke, to present his Bill, and John gave the impression to the big beasts that the PM approved his Bill and that they had no say in the matter, and the upshot was that they duffed him up something terrible because of this. It was all terribly polite, and I summed up at the end saying we’ll return to this in a fortnight. So I rang Willie Waldegrave, and said you buggers may be better educated than me but you tell Patten that he shouldn’t treat the ‘big beasts’ as just ciphers and he’s got to be more conciliatory. Next time it was alright” (Wakeham 2017).

#### **4.2.1 The Press Office**

See Chapter Three: Number 10 Communications Strategy 1990 - 1997.

#### **4.2.2 The Private Office**

The main role of the Private Office within Number 10 was the co-ordination of government information as it was received from the Cabinet Office, Whitehall and other government departments. The Prime Minister received this information daily in government boxes, the attention required by each divided into: ‘Immediate,’ ‘Reading,’ ‘Weekend’ and ‘Signature’ (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 10).

The number of staff in the Private Office was small: six private secretaries in 1995, all of whom are career civil servants, led by the Principal Private Secretary (Burch and Holliday 1996, 2). Charles Powell was the most recognisable member of the Private Office in November 1990, largely due to his close association with Mrs Thatcher in foreign affairs. He agreed to continue in his role whilst John Major oversaw the first Gulf War before leaving (Hogg and Hill 1995, 25).

Another inheritance of the Thatcher era within Number 10 was free-standing advisers on foreign affairs. Thatcher's original appointment to this post, Anthony Parsons, came from Mrs Thatcher's own deep distrust of the Foreign Office, a view not shared by John Major. He had no interest as Prime Minister in second guessing his Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, who he regarded as a personal friend. The post was occupied by Percy Cradock, a former diplomat, when Major became Prime Minister. When Cradock's successor, Roderic Braithwaite, retired in 1994 the position was therefore allowed to lapse. This was opposed at the time by the Foreign Secretary. Hurd, sharing the view of Wall before he left in 1993, had become increasingly concerned at the ballooning workload of this section of the Private Office, which had Northern Ireland within its remit alongside the EU, the war in Yugoslavia and other routine foreign affairs matters. Instead of letting the position lapse, Hurd argued that with the loss of Braithwaite it was necessary to replace his advisory role on foreign affairs with a new Foreign Affairs Private Secretary. The Foreign Secretary was rebuffed by Major and the Cabinet Secretary, who decided instead to strengthen this section of the Private Office in light of the challenges it faced (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 213-214).

Leading the Private Office was the Principal Private Secretary. This was "a role that carries a bizarre range of responsibilities stretching from royal affairs to the rewiring of Downing Street, taking in all the Prime Minister's most sensitive meetings on the way. The job is traditionally filled by a Treasury civil servant marked out for the top" (Hogg and Hill 1995, 25). The Principal Private Secretary therefore "has management responsibility" for the departmental court and in Number 10 this was no exception (Rhodes 2011, 144). Initially the position was occupied by Andrew Turnbull, whom Major inherited from Mrs Thatcher. Major relied heavily on Turnbull in his early months, before Alex Allan replaced Turnbull in April 1992 (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 211).

Major was effusive in his praise of Allan in his memoirs, ending his praise by adding: "I was lucky to have him, and blessed the fact on many occasions" (Major 1999, 320). Alex Allan's indispensability was displayed by his attendance at all sensitive meetings – he accompanied the Prime Minister to all formal occasions as well, – seemingly stepping over the line from an impartial civil servant role to

an effective Chief of Staff at times. This was much to the chagrin of Cabinet ministers. Allan had showed his loyalty to Major before the 1995 contest when he remonstrated with John Redwood's Private Office team at the Welsh Office over failing to get advance clearance on speeches related to Europe and 'Back to Basics.' After the contest Allan had a level of input into the 1995 Cabinet reshuffle, which led to the appointment of Michael Heseltine as Deputy Prime Minister, which went far beyond any serving member of the government. The appointment of Heseltine, and the level of Allan's involvement in it, was to have a detrimental impact on internal government relations. One Cabinet minister, and senior member of Major's leadership campaign team, Robert Cranborne, was said to be left "furious" at the decision. The Prime Minister therefore had, by seemingly displaying more trust in an adviser than a fellow Cabinet colleague in an area of key decision-making, offended one of the most loyal supporters of his government (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 212).

The good rapport that existed between Major and Allan ensured that the role of Principal Private Secretary could be enhanced and expanded into advice on policy matters and beyond the effective management of government information (Burch and Holliday 1996, 30). Allan's remit therefore was to expand to overseeing evidence to the Scott Inquiry in 1996, and even into the divorce of the Prince and Princess of Wales in 1992. Allan was not alone in finding his remit more roving than expected for a civil servant: Mary Francis, the Economic Affairs Private Secretary, had the difficult task of liaising between the Treasury and Number 10 – on the whole to smooth relations between Major and Lamont – after Britain's exit from the ERM (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 212).

Under Major therefore the Private Office staff often found themselves going beyond what was regarded as their expected duties, and, at flashpoints, clearly to the resentment of Cabinet colleagues and thus to the detriment of harmonious internal government relations. This was to prove not confined to the Private Office.

The central role of the Private Office was the management of the paper flow between the different strands of the Downing Street operation, the Cabinet Office

and the Prime Minister. Briefings were arguably the most crucial aspect of the Prime Minister's boxes, allowing him to prepare for the daily round of meetings with Cabinet colleagues and visitors from overseas. For Major this was to prove problematic throughout his premiership, the 'battle of the memos' a constant distraction in his efforts to organise the Downing Street operation after Thatcher's departure. Indeed, even in 1993 Alex Allan was recording how the Prime Minister should always have one single brief "wherever possible" in a note to the Cabinet Secretary (Beesley 2017, 523).

Sometimes the Prime Minister could find, at the end of the day in his boxes, a memo from the Private Office and the Policy Unit plus a 'handling brief' for a Cabinet Committee – not infrequently giving contradictory advice. Whether this was because of a rivalry for attention whilst a new Prime Minister became more adjusted to their position or an element of power play within Number 10, for one Private Secretary it was totally unacceptable behaviour at the heart of government: "A Prime Minister has enough reading to do. Adding to it is bad and to be giving conflicting advice is even worse." Eventually an agreement was reached within Number 10 that the Principal Private Secretary and the Head of the Policy Unit would meet to decide which office would write the memo. Sometimes the Private Office and Policy Unit would write joint memos, incorporating different emphasises (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 213).

The notion that there was a 'battle of the memos' is disputed by former officials, Roderic Lyne (2017) and Andrew Turnbull (2017), both denying such claims. Turnbull felt that the only "problem" was "that sometimes Special Advisers wanted to get their point of view across" (Turnbull 2017), which is still an acknowledgement of a level of rivalry. The fact remains, however, evidentially through accounts by Beesley and Kavanagh and Seldon, of a level of dysfunctionality in the flow of paper to the Prime Minister, a clear bar to effective operational arrangements in a vital area of government.

#### **4.2.3 The Political Office**

The Political Office originates from the time of Harold Wilson, having been established in 1964, and was small in comparison to other units within Downing

Street, consisting of a Political Secretary and the Prime Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, whose role is to liaise with backbenchers. The Political Office handled all Prime Ministerial relations with Conservative Central Office and the voluntary sections of the Conservative Party, as well as dealing with all correspondence in Number 10 of a party political nature (Burch and Holliday 1996, 27). The role of Political Secretary is multi-faceted and wide ranging:

“helping with or overseeing party political speeches, attending and giving briefings, generally co-ordinating the work of Number 10 units, and encouraging the Prime Minister while keeping Central Office in the picture. The Political Secretary was also involved in preparations for Prime Minister's Questions...” (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 217).

Upon becoming Prime Minister Major had stated on staffing that he wished to see a far stronger Political Office and Policy Unit than had been the case under Margaret Thatcher (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 208). This aim organisationally was to prove problematic however under the Major premiership, largely because the Political Office began hesitantly under its first Political Secretary, Judith Chaplin, causing immediate friction between the Political Office and Policy Unit (Hennessy 2000, 447).

This was partly because Chaplin had become a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate in the Newbury constituency and had to spend more and more time away from Downing Street. But it was also because Sarah Hogg, the new head of the Policy Unit, was determined to use its new authority after the years of marginalisation by Mrs Thatcher (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 217, 219).

At its heart the dispute, more than anything, as Major acknowledges in his own memoirs, was a clash of ideas between these two powerful Downing Street women, each vying for the Prime Minister's ear. The Prime Minister referred to Chaplin as “robustly right-wing” who “did not share my views on policy,” yet offered him “wise counsel” (Major 1999, 210-211).

As seen from Major's reflective comments in his memoirs, and given their differing views on policy matters, it appears understandable why Chaplin

gradually attended less and less policy discussions at Number 10. The absence of Chaplin created a vacuum which Hogg was only too happy to fill, both physically and philosophically: “She was a powerful shaper of Major’s detailed thinking not just on the economy, but on Europe and social policy too...Certainly she reinforced Major’s own instincts on the need for caring Conservatism” (Hennessy 2000, 447).

The influence within Number 10 from a policy and party political perspective was clearly therefore flowing in only one direction from early on: towards the Policy Unit and away from the Political Office, from which the Political Office never fully recovered during Major’s premiership. By the time of the 1992 election Jonathan Hill, already within the Policy Unit doing much of the Political Secretary’s work, took over officially in April 1992 when Chaplin was elected the new MP for Newbury (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 217).

Unsurprisingly, thanks to its dwindling influence and thereby effectiveness as a unit within Number 10, the Political Office was not highly rated by backbenchers under Major, as Brandreth acerbically commented in a diary entry from June 1993, referring to Jonathan Hill and Graham Bright, who were Political Secretary and Prime Minister’s Parliamentary Private Secretary respectively at the time: “Oh dear, is this it?” As Brandreth then goes on to point out, “[t]he room is impressive enough...it’s the people”: “There’s nothing wrong with them – they’re decent, loyal, determined. It’s just they don’t seem special. They seem ordinary and I think I want to feel that the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is surrounded by people who are exceptional.” In the same diary entry Brandreth describes Bright as “Tweedledum,” which is no less flattering than his view on Hill: “I don’t know what to make of him” (Brandreth 2000, 185).

The Political Office was heavily involved in preparations for PMQs, something Major took seriously. The Prime Minister also wanted his staff to tell him what they thought of his performances and to be honest, being able to detect, as one adviser recalled, “bullshit a long way off” (Lyne 2017), stating to them after his first PMQs: “...I’d much rather you told me the truth. There were lots of things I could have done differently.” As someone at the meeting commented afterwards,



“Sycophancy is out.” The Prime Minister’s key advisers however decided in the end to resort to speaking in code - which provided Major with considerable amusement - as Hogg, Hill and O’Donnell often offered differing degrees of praise (from “fine” to “great” with “you certainly gave them their money’s worth” being a clear thumbs down) instead of telling him the truth (Hogg and Hill 1995, 32-33).

Roderic Lyne is clear on the levels of honesty Major as Prime Minister received from key staff at Number 10, recalling: “I was pleasantly surprised when I arrived in No 10 [in 1993, leaving in 1996] to find how frankly the senior staff were able to speak to John Major” (Lyne 2017). And this was possible due to the good atmosphere within Number 10: “What we all felt is that the relationships between the Political Office, Private Office, Press Office, and Policy Unit were all particularly harmonious. So we all got on” (Hill 2017).

For Downing Street staff, a complaint throughout his premiership was the amount of time John Major could lose out of the week in preparation for the twice-weekly joust at 3.15pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays in PMQs. The staff in retrospect felt that not only were preparations time-consuming, but more importantly from their perspective that “the demands on their time were disproportionate to any possible benefits from PMQs”: for each PMQs the staff would often prepare up to sixty briefs so that the Prime Minister could be ready for any eventualities (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 234). PMQs preparations therefore were neither efficient nor effective for the time consumed.

Major’s performances did improve however:

“After a year or two, the Prime Minister had learnt to handle PMQs with a professionalism that more than once dispelled the fractious turbulence of his own backbenchers. He could use the occasion to steady the party’s nerve...But at the beginning, the onus was on him demonstrate the necessary confidence and omniscience, and he had to absorb a massive amount of information on subjects which he had never had to deal with” (Hogg and Hill 1995, 33).

The routine itself would usually be the same, preparations beginning the night before in what was a twice-weekly ordeal for John Major between 1990 and 1997. The Principal Private Secretary (Turnbull or Allan) and the Political Secretary (Chaplin, Hill and Howell James after 1994), or Assistant Political Secretary (George Bridges, in what was a new position within Number 10, from 1994) would spend the evening before working on likely questions and responses and put them in a note in the Prime Minister's overnight box. This would be followed by a meeting between 9 and 9.30am on the Tuesday or Thursday morning between Major and key members of the Downing Street organisation: the Private Secretary, the Political Secretary, the head of the Policy Unit (Hogg was replaced with Norman Blackwell in 1995) and his Parliamentary Private Secretary (Bright was replaced by John Ward in 1994). Usually Major began these meetings by saying, "We must get through this quickly" before they went through the notes and a press digest provided by the Press Office (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 234).

The Political Secretary and Private Secretary would then go away and draw up a list of responses, whilst the Parliamentary Private Secretary would talk to backbenchers who were to put down questions, as Number 10 continued to anticipate what Labour MPs may ask. Major would then be presented with the Red Book of Qs and As for the Prime Minister to work on over lunch before leaving for Parliament at about 3.05pm. After PMQs the Prime Minister would then reassemble with the Downing Street team to review the session and discuss what had worked or not worked. The Press Secretary would also report from the Press Gallery opinions and suggest media management of the results of the exchanges between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 234).

#### **4.2.4 The Policy Unit**

The Policy Unit at Number 10 was first established in 1974 to be a resource for policy development for the Prime Minister. Within the Policy Unit the staff members were either from outside politics or career civil servants. All staff members were employed as civil servants for the duration of their time in

Downing Street. In 1995 there were a total of eight desk officers, with a support staff to five (Burch and Holliday 1996, 28).

The unit's work involved:

“developing the Prime Minister's ideas, commenting upon proposals put up by Whitehall departments, and disseminating the Prime Minister's approach to those developing policies in the departments” (Seldon 1994, 158).

Under John Major however the Policy Unit was viewed as “less an initiator and more an evaluator” of policies developed by other departments, despite the many policy innovations that were to emerge during Major's time as Prime Minister, particularly in the area of public service reform (Burch and Holliday 1996, 28).

When Major became Prime Minister he initially had no specific plan for the Policy Unit, such was his sudden rise to the premiership. It took a meeting with the new Party Chairman, Chris Patten, to lead to him appointing possibly the most influential staff member during his time in Downing Street as head of the Number 10 Policy Unit: Sarah Hogg. Major and Patten are said to have thought of Hogg, an economic editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, “at almost the same moment” (Major 1999, 211). The lack of planning and Hogg's unclear remit was to prove problematic for Major however.

Her impact was to prove immediate, as one person who stayed on in the transition witnessed:

“...she had the Prime Minister's ear...she was the Prime Minister's woman, selected by him, brought in by him to be a strong arm. She herself was very efficient and bubbling with energy, or so it seemed, had a terrific antennae, and we all felt re-energised. The message went around the bush telegraph in Whitehall very quickly that a new force was in town, whereas by late 1990 under Thatcher it was as if the system knew her power was waning and that therefore the Policy Unit couldn't deliver” (Seldon 1997, 141).

The *Evening Standard*, upon her appointment, suggested that Major had brought in Hogg because she represented “all the breezy intellectual self-confidence that

he lacks himself.” Major had spotted her “sharp brain, often hidden behind an engaging giggle” when he had met her as part of the breakfasts he had regularly with journalists whilst Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Blick 2004, 237). When she accepted the headship Major gave her his full backing:

“Sarah’s job was tough...I let it be known that I expected her to have cooperation from both Central Office and the civil service, but she often had to cajole or bully to get it. Forceful and effective, she became a lightning conductor for controversy. Dubbed the ‘Deputy Prime Minister’, she took many blows intended for me” (Major 1999, 211).

This did not stop some ministers feeling that Hogg’s presence within Number 10 was at times too high profile (Seldon 1997, 237).

Major also personally appointed Nick True to the Policy Unit staff, having been impressed at his skills at the Department of Social Security when Major was a junior minister and True a special adviser (Hogg and Hill 1995, 27). True’s key task was speech writing, Major impressed at how “[True] distilled my thoughts into artful speeches” (Major 1999, 212)<sup>22</sup>.

The final member of the inner ‘triumvirate,’ whose influence far outweighed any other members of the Policy Unit, was Ken Clarke’s former special adviser at the Department of Health: Jonathan Hill, who Sarah Hogg appointed herself after he had written to her to ask if there were any vacancies (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 219, 221). Hill however denies that they were a ‘triumvirate,’ or anything similar: “Sarah, Nick and I were not, self-consciously, a ‘triumvirate’ [as has been alleged we were]. We did a lot of stuff together. I think we all just got on” (Hill 2017).

Due to these changes at staff level, the Policy Unit came to be a more conciliatory body than it had been under Mrs Thatcher (Blick 2004, 239), and “less a priesthood of true believers”, representing, as it did in the appointments, different views within the Conservative ideological spectrum (Seldon 1997, 141). This is confirmed by Jonathan Hill:

---

<sup>22</sup> See chapter three

“Sarah had a strong character, as did others, but some of us were more by nature like Major in that we’d all get on and not take a massively ideological or abrasive stance. So it was a really happy ship” (Hill 2017).

Some saw Hogg’s influence as particularly malign, Hywel Williams arguing that Hogg, during her time in Number 10:

“[d]eflected the Policy Unit from its long-term strategic functions. Together with other members of the Unit, she briefed the press, and intervened in day-to-day administration. She was an incorrigible meddler and sought to manage news when she should have been raising her sights to the policy peaks” (Williams 1998, 37).

Hogg defended herself when she left Number 10 in 1995, arguing that sometimes a tough approach was needed in order to make the Policy Unit as effective as possible. This she made clear in her own account of the effective functionality of the Unit and how it could be achieved, stating:

“[the function of the Policy Unit] is to keep the Prime Minister in touch with outside thinking, to work on his own ideas and to act as a sounding board for ministers, advising on the flavour of proposals and counter-proposals that pour in continuously from all around Whitehall. [The] Prime Minister can use his unit as storm troops, invading the complacent hinterland of Whitehall; or act as peacemakers, building bridges between warring departments and ministers. In practice, the [Policy] Unit tries to do both: to be both grit and oil in the government machine” (Hogg and Hill 1995, 24).

A number of ministers saw Hogg as an ‘interference’ in their workload, not least in the Treasury. The Chancellor, Norman Lamont, was one minister who “rapidly became suspicious and resentful of Number 10 interference” in the Treasury decision-making process. He particularly resented Sarah Hogg’s attendance at bilateral meetings between himself and the Prime Minister (Seldon 1997, 140).

Hogg, however, was not only allowed to attend bilateral meetings, but also the key economic policy cabinet committee (EDX), established in 1992 to examine public expenditure, which allowed the Chancellor to cross-examine his

colleagues on spending proposals. Hogg would then report back afterwards to the Prime Minister directly, enabling Major to “keep an ear to the ground” as he put it: “Sometimes [the negotiations] went on too long, amid loud complaints from Ken Clarke about endless sandwich lunches as he sat impatiently doodling bald heads on the pad before him” (Major 1999, 666).

Hogg was most of all Major’s eyes and ears through her presence at the committees, but to Lamont this was only further evidence of interference. Hogg was even involved in the decision by Lamont to appoint a new Deputy Governor of the Bank of England in 1992 (Lamont 2000, 322).

Lamont’s resentment only grew towards Hogg whilst Chancellor. The enmity between them remained even after office, as proved years later by their disputed accounts of the 1991 Budget. Hogg claimed in her own account of the 1991 Budget that she was able to intervene as head of the Policy Unit in the Prime Minister’s absence to change its content in order to mitigate the effects of that year’s Poll Tax through a VAT increase of two-and-a-half-percent (Hogg and Hill 1995, 64-65).

Lamont, in his own account of the 1991 Budget preparations, disputes this, claiming instead that “the original idea of John [Major] and Sarah Hogg was that we ought to reduce the Poll Tax by a central government grant, paid for by an increase in income tax, of perhaps two or three pence,” adding for good measure that “I preferred to have a switch from the Poll Tax to VAT,” and thereby ensured he took what he viewed to be his rightful credit for the Budget decision (Lamont 2000, 44).

A lot of Lamont’s resentment can be contextualised around his troubled relationship with Major when in government, and subsequent dismissal in May 1993. Sarah Hogg was present at some of the main flashpoints in both men’s relationship. She was at Maastricht when the opt-out from the single currency and Social Chapter was negotiated in 1991. She was with the Prime Minister on Black Wednesday on September 16 1992, as Major’s closest confidante. She advised Major not to resign, and it was she who was given a role in fashioning a

new anti-inflationary policy following Britain's exit from the ERM (Blick 2004, 237-238).

Lamont may have felt the final straw was reached between the two of them when he had tried to ask to see the Prime Minister, via. Hogg, in the summer of 1992, to ask for membership of the ERM to be suspended, subsequently finding out when he did meet Major he was unable to get the Prime Minister to discuss the matter. Major and Hogg dispute his account of what happened. And, as was subsequently revealed by Hogg, Major had been preparing the ground for just such an eventuality in early 1992 without Lamont's knowledge (Hogg and Hill 1995, 187-188; Lamont 2000, 225-226).

Even if Lamont's possibly understandable annoyance at his treatment by Major can explain his criticism of Sarah Hogg and therefore be contestable, the same cannot be said about loyal Cabinet ministers, who equally express frustration at the head of the Policy Unit's influence, and how it hampered efficiency within government. John Wakeham is one former loyal Cabinet minister who takes this view:

“Sarah Hogg, who is very intelligent, would come to the Cabinet Committees I chaired and express her views, but I never knew whether they were her own views or the Prime Ministers, and that made it difficult for me. And I saw Robin Butler and he said leave it until after the summer recess and I'll sort it, and he did. Then we subsequently had a Monday meeting in which Butler listed all the Cabinet Committees for the following week and the membership and asking the Prime Minister if he was happy with each and he was” (Wakeham 2017).

As a method for policy formulation, Hogg felt entirely justified in her decision to put the Policy Unit, neglected under Thatcher, back at the centre of government decision-making, her presence at meetings “useful [to Hogg] for putting her in the picture about policy and helping her understand Major's thinking and priorities” (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 220).

For John Major unquestionably there was a level of trust between the Prime Minister and the Policy Unit which allowed their discussions on policy to be both

regular and on an ad hoc basis, Major often “wandering informally” up to [the Policy Unit’s] first floor offices whenever he had a spare moment (Major 1999, 212). Such closeness naturally engendered resentment amongst both senior and junior ministers, especially when it was on such obvious display: Hogg and Major were often seen whispering and passing notes during meetings (Seldon 1997, 257).

Jonathan Hill argues that the influence of Hogg both within Number 10 and Whitehall was overstated, and not driven, as alleged, by a desire for domination. Rather, instead, Hogg’s influence in fact occurred naturally from the relationships that existed within Number 10 with the Prime Minister. As he explained:

“It was a bit less clear-cut than that in the sense that the influence you have in a system depends upon your relationship with the principal. It’s probably true that, with the Policy Unit under Mrs T towards the end, you are running out of steam, set in your ways, not generating ideas, getting a bit knackered. But I think the shift of influence was more probably to do with the role that Sarah Hogg played. She was very effective, and people relied on her a lot. She was at the centre of everything. It wasn’t that institutionally the Policy Unit asserted itself, it emanated more from the personal relationships” (Hill 2017).

And the relationship between Policy Unit and Prime Minister was clearly viewed as an effective one in policy formulation terms because Norman Blackwell, Hogg’s successor, “retained [all] existing working arrangements” when he became head of the Policy Unit in 1995, including some of Hogg’s innovations such as the Monday lunchtime meetings for staff reports and the six monthly ‘Away Days’ for MPs and ministers. Blackwell was viewed as “more organised than Mrs Hogg, but less political.” He was also not as close to Major as Hogg had been (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 222).

On the presence of the Prime Minister in meetings related to government policy co-ordination, Blackwell felt the presence of Major was only required if this enabled a “single conversation” on a “whole policy area,” thus ensuring policy co-ordination rather than fragmentation (Blackwell 2000, Q63). To Blackwell, great



significance was attached to Number 10's role in government policy co-ordination (Blick 2004, 241).

Blackwell was also very keen in policy formation on separating ministers from their civil servants to allow for independent thought, and to sending briefing papers only a day before any policy seminars, thereby reducing the opportunity of civil servants to brief ministers. The lack of civil service involvement at such meetings was not acceptable initially to the Cabinet Secretary, Robin Butler, especially as meetings could cross party as well as government concerns. Butler eventually agreed to provide a secretary from the Cabinet Office to take minutes. Such questioning of Blackwell's authority was not unusual once Sarah Hogg had left, with ministers not interested in thinking long-term with an election on the horizon which they expected to lose (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 222).

Major described Blackwell to Gyles Brandreth as "fizzing with ideas" on policy development, with "bite sized chunks of policy" "to sweep us back into power." Brandreth was less than impressed with Blackwell on his arranged trips to Chequers and Number 10 for policy seminars. He was most appalled to find, in a diary entry for March 1995, that when he went to Number 10 for a briefing the thoughts from Blackwell on policy were thin and that:

"The big Ideas ranged from "creating a good news package on information technology" to – wait for it! – "re-launching the Citizen's Charter". I said almost nothing" (Brandreth 2000, 308, 322, 405, 462).

Blackwell was suffering from the collective erosion of authority within the Policy Unit which had begun in late 1992 with Britain's exit from the ERM on Black Wednesday (Blick 2004, 239). From Black Wednesday the Policy Unit was drawn more and more into day-to-day matters and crisis management. Openly criticised at times, the Policy Unit was used as a lightning rod for attacks on Major himself (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 221). This was to have a detrimental effect on the Policy Unit's effectiveness, which explained why the Policy Unit was unable under Blackwell to move beyond the re-launching of previous policy initiatives, such as the Citizen's Charter, instead of new policies for a future Major government (Blick 2004, 240).

Brandreth's exasperation was therefore not unique amongst parliamentarians, who associated the Policy Unit with their own disillusionment with John Major from Black Wednesday onwards and the inevitable electoral consequences that would follow such a political catastrophe. Blackwell therefore was seen, along with his Policy Unit staff, "as merely rearranging the deck chairs of the Titanic" (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 222).

### **4.3 The Cabinet Office**

The Cabinet Office is based at 70 Whitehall: a single corridor provides direct access to Number 10 from Whitehall. The Cabinet Office comprises two elements: the Cabinet Secretariat (sub-divided into four divisions: economic policy, home, defence and European affairs) led by the Cabinet Secretary; and the Office of Public Service and Science (OPSS), established in 1992, which was overseen by a Cabinet minister: the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (after 1995 by the Deputy Prime Minister, when it became the Office of Public Service).

In 1994 the Cabinet Office had a staff of 2200, most of whom worked in the OPSS. Senior administrative staff within the Cabinet Office (Grade 1 to 7) numbered 134, of which twenty-eight were employed in the secretariats (Burch and Holliday 1996, 32). Within the core executive the Cabinet Office is viewed as the 'junior' in the troika with Number 10 and the Treasury in terms of Whitehall influence over the other departmental courts (Rhodes 2011, 210).

The Cabinet Office has two core functions: first, servicing the Cabinet and its committees and coordinating policy across government, and, second, managing the civil service and the machinery of government, through the Cabinet Secretariat and the Office of Public Service respectively (Burch and Holliday 1999, 37).

The lead position within the Cabinet Office is that of the Cabinet Secretary, who, as Secretary to the Cabinet, is formally responsible for the coordination of and smooth flow of government business at a "superdepartmental level" within the cabinet system. The Cabinet Secretary is also Head of the Home Civil Service, thereby requiring their input into management of the civil service at both a junior

and a senior level and as to any changes to the overall civil service structure. By being in effect responsible for the effective flow of business through the Cabinet and its committees, the Cabinet Secretary therefore is potentially hugely influential, made more so if a close relationship exists between Cabinet Secretary and Prime Minister (Burch and Holliday 1996, 33-34).

John Major enjoyed a “productive relationship” with the Cabinet Secretary he inherited from Margaret Thatcher: Sir Robin Butler (Seldon 1997, 208), not least aided by their mutual interest in cricket:

“There was more open-minded discussions of issues; the new Prime Minister was solicitous of Butler’s views and always treated his advice with respect, although he did not always follow it” (Jago 2017, 193).

Major himself described Butler in his memoirs as “easy-going, helpful and efficient – and one of the most competitive men I have ever met” (Major 1999, 101). Butler, for his part, was determined that when the change of Prime Ministers occurred in 1990 that Major had his assurance on the loyalty of the civil service during the transition period (Beesley 2017, 515).

Major was to meet with the Cabinet Secretary weekly to discuss Cabinet business one and three weeks ahead, plus any upcoming political issues (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 224). As with other senior staff in Number 10, after September 1992 Butler was to find his role diverted more and more toward the management of the day-to-day political crises. Yet Butler was able to play a key role in the Northern Ireland peace process, making covert trips to meet the Irish government on two occasions (Blick and Jones 2013, 247-248).

Examples of such crisis management included the Cabinet Secretary needing to give a ruling on whether it was acceptable for the Treasury to fund Norman Lamont’s legal costs to remove a private tenant, to, on another occasion, questioning the former Cabinet minister Jonathan Aitken over the payment of a Paris hotel bill when he was Minister for Defence Procurement. More serious was Butler’s need to defend the civil service as a whole during the Scott Inquiry into arms sales to Iraq (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 226).

It was also Butler who sent a memo to Major in July 1993 to remind him that he had given his word to his European partners on the Maastricht Treaty and that a defeat on the Social Policy Protocol could legitimately be reversed through a vote of confidence if, as it was, the Opposition amendment was carried the next day (Beesley 2017, 539-540).

The need for strategic direction within government was to be a leitmotiv throughout Robin Butler's time as Cabinet Secretary under Major, with ministers complaining at the lack of a clear and consistent lead from Number 10 even before Britain's exit from the ERM in September 1992 (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 227).

This was picked up in the media, in February 1992, *The Economist* running an article critical of Major for failing to deal with "the system with a hole in the middle" of government. It was argued that without the domineering presence of Thatcher over departmental ministers it was feared that policy coherence and delivery of the government's priorities was at risk under Major's leadership (Beesley 2017, 521). The theme of a 'hole at the centre of government' was something Butler would constantly return to as Cabinet Secretary under Major.

Major did seek to address this problem with a number of initiatives in both personnel and institutional reforms<sup>23</sup> during his premiership, some more successful than others. Personnel-wise Major was to suffer strategically from what he was to describe as the lack of 'a bit hitter' at Cabinet level, felt acutely following the departure of Chris Patten to Hong Kong. Patten had been able to manoeuvre recalcitrant ministers towards an agreed line and at Cabinet "his interventions could turn the direction of a discussion" which often was to help the Prime Minister (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 228).

Finding a replacement for Patten was to prove difficult, but most of all the lack of Mrs Thatcher's equivalent to Willie Whitelaw, to provide a troubleshooting function to Major, was to be an ongoing issue when the government's troubles deepened after September 1992. Eventually, after a succession of pretenders in

---

<sup>23</sup> See chapter seven on John Major's Cabinet management

July 1995 Major chose the 'warrior politician' Heseltine as First Secretary of State and Deputy Prime Minister to fill the Patten role, giving him responsibility over an "extraordinary swathe of government territory" (Hennessy 2000, 473).

Following Major's discussions with Heseltine (Heseltine 2000, 478-479), Butler was instrumental in helping to define the new role of Deputy Prime Minister (Blick and Jones 2013, 248). This did not stop Heseltine using the ambiguity surrounding his new position to encroach on the Cabinet Secretary's patch as Head of the Home Civil Service, but even more irksome for Butler, who believed in following strict protocol, the new First Secretary of State was seeking to decide membership of Cabinet committees. This led Butler to point out to Heseltine "that membership of Cabinet Committees was not within the gift of the First Secretary." That right belonged to the Prime Minister alone (Beesley 2017, 549).

Heseltine's appointment did make a difference strategically because, as a former minister recalled:

"He was a force of nature, and he pushed things along. I was in the meeting with Robin Butler where Michael Heseltine wanted to close the Civil Service College at Sunningdale, and Robin said "I need the college" and there was a huge row. It didn't happen in the end. I thought that it was Heseltine at his best. He used to be quite energetic in his chairmanship. He brought a lot more dynamism. He really was a pleasure to work with, and it was worthwhile stuff" (Horam 2017).

The 'hole at the centre of government' and questions over the government's overall strategic direction therefore still remained unaddressed. At a meeting at his house in September 1993 with the Prime Minister, Sarah Hogg, Alex Allan and other members of staff from Number 10, Butler accepted that the Cabinet Office could do more to act as a tripwire for ministers by spotting future problems before they occurred. Roderic Lyne told Butler at the meeting that issues related to the EU arrived too late on Major's desk, and that the Cabinet Office should give a lead as to what long-term approach was needed. The Cabinet Secretary, in his defence, stated that the "Achilles heel" of British government was a lack of strategic thinking, pointing out that collective decision-making at Cabinet and

Cabinet committee level had declined over a long period and that it was not possible to “turn the clock back.” Butler suggested the Prime Minister should use the Cabinet Office more frequently to “sort” issues, using Cabinet Office ministers as chairmen if required. This Major adopted, particularly in the area of policy presentation. Agreement was also reached that a means of conveying Major’s wishes should be found to direct those Cabinet committees of groups that other ministers chaired (Beesley 2017, 522-523, 545).

Of all the initiatives that attempted to resolve the ‘hole at the centre of the government’ issue, reform to the structure of Cabinet committees, both standing and ad hoc (Burch and Holliday 1996, 42-44), whilst John Major was Prime Minister, were perhaps the most innovative, crossing as they did all aspects of government from strategy to presentation. The direction to carry out such reform came from the Prime Minister, who admitted his frustration at the outcomes of Cabinet committee discussions (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 226).

This particularly applied to those committees of ministers that Major did not chair himself. Between 1993 and 1996 Major discussed with his Cabinet Secretary these groups on no less than seventy-six occasions. One of the chief culprits appeared to be the Home and Social Affairs Committee, a standing committee of ministers badged EDH, which appeared most frequently in their informal talks. What is so surprising is that despite this Major at no point suggested he should take over the chairmanship of this seemingly recalcitrant ministerial committee (Beesley 2017, 543).

It was in the choice of chairmen of Cabinet committees where Major most diverged from his predecessor, Mrs Thatcher, in opting for non-departmental ministers such as the Lord Privy Seal, John Wakeham, or the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Hunt, to chair the committees whereas Thatcher had chosen Cabinet ministers with direct departmental responsibility. Major chaired the same seven standing committees that Thatcher had done, including ODP (overseas affairs), EDP (economy) and NI (Northern Ireland). After 1994 he had managed to reduce his chairmanships to four or five. Major chaired fewer ad hoc

ministerial committees than Thatcher, preferring to use sub-committees of Cabinet standing committees instead (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 223).

This allowed Major to reduce his ad hoc committees down to around forty in six years (Hennessy 2000, 457). Combined with the reduction of standing committees from a total of twenty-six in 1992 to nineteen by July 1995, this allowed the Whitehall cabinet committee system to become “more streamlined and regularised” whilst at the same time continuing the decline overall in Cabinet and Cabinet committee meetings since the war (Burch and Holliday 1996, 44-45).

Major did also innovate, introducing ministerial standing committees in three important areas of government with an eye on refining the strategic focus of the government: public expenditure (EDX), economic and domestic policy (EDP) and economic domestic co-ordination and presentation (EDCP). EDX was established in 1992 under the chairmanship of the Chancellor of the Exchequer with the purpose of allowing him, alongside senior ministers, to cross-examine spending proposals from departmental ministers (Blick 2004, 238).

Sarah Hogg, in retrospect, rated EDX as the “most important” of the Prime Minister’s innovations, acting as it did as a “filter of all the Government’s big public spending decisions.” It also acted as balance to Treasury power with a collection of non-or-small-spending departmental ministers whose presence as members of EDX ensured that its decisions held at full Cabinet level (Hennessy 2000, 450).

Lamont, EDX’s first chairman, claimed he agreed to the Cabinet committee “against the advice of my officials” who did not want to see the Treasury losing their monopoly power over public spending decisions. His fears were only confirmed by the presence of Clarke and Heseltine as ministers on the committee. At one especially difficult meeting on October 16 1992 Norman Lamont abruptly walked out, his resignation only avoided due to the intervention of Hogg (Lamont 2000, 304-305).

EDP was an innovation which emerged from proposals by the Heads of the Cabinet Office Secretariats before the 1992 election in order to radically

restructure the Cabinet committee structure within Whitehall. They suggested a need for “greater cohesion in policy” and recommended a single, small committee for each major policy area to be chaired by Major, with other specific committees to be chaired by a non-departmental minister (Beesley 2017, 522). To the Prime Minister, newly elected, this was exactly the type of institutional reform he was looking for to overcome the strategic gap at the centre.

With Major as chair its remit was clear: “To consider strategic issues relating to the Government’s economic and domestic policies,” its underlying purpose being “to raise the strategic consciousness of the Cabinet” by catching and resolving any strategic issues before they reached full Cabinet. But it was not to be, not just because after Black Wednesday the Major government looked more and more towards short-term thinking and crisis management. The Prime Minister had also decided that there was no need for the standing committee to have its own extra information flow, as was given to the ministerial standing committee on defence and overseas defence policy (OPD) through the Joint Intelligence Committee (Hennessy 2000, 458).

As a result, as one minister put it:

“EDP hasn’t really been a strategic committee. It’s just been an ordinary committee. It needed a staff like [the Central Policy Review Staff]. He’s not getting that kind of service from his Policy Unit. And you need someone close to the PM who is not a rival to generate ideas. Michael [Heseltine] doesn’t. He’s not a broad policy man” (Hennessy 2000, 458).

The lack of an extra information flow provided by Number 10 was to prove a costly oversight by Major, meaning in its first six months it missed two crises which had profound consequences for the government: Black Wednesday in September 1992, and the pit closures crisis in October 1992 (Hennessy 2000, 458).

Newly re-elected as leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister in July 1995, Major made his final attempt at trying to bring all the strands of government decision-making together to give strategic direction in the run-up to the next



election in either 1996 or 1997: EDCP, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister Michael Heseltine. In 1995 EDCP met eight times and circulated forty-three papers. By 1996 the new ministerial standing committee had met forty-five times and circulated seventy papers. But to say this was a committee specifically designed to cover both media presentation and co-ordination of overall domestic policy, it was often found wanting whenever a new political crisis blew up to knock the government off course (Beesley 2017, 545).

Heseltine's new committee was mocked regularly by Cabinet colleagues, who ridiculed his crusade against the "media class":

"EDCP is a completely absurd thing. They don't know what's happening when they are sitting. They sit for quite a long time. They are out of date even before they finish, as the first edition of the *Evening Standard* has come out and the news bulletins have moved on. It was part of Michael [Heseltine's] settlement with the Prime Minister" (Hennessy 2000, 473).

Whatever strategic gains that could be discerned from the reforms did not address ministers own fundamental concerns about Major's management of the Cabinet committee system of Whitehall. Namely, the influence of Sarah Hogg of the Policy Unit remained ever-present over policy decisions. This led sometimes to the Prime Minister being pushed too quickly into decisions, resulting in rows, as happened over the publishing of minutes of discussions between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governor of the Bank of England. But more fundamentally ministers were especially angered to find agreed lines with Major overturned when in Cabinet committee, usually by more senior ministers, as occurred for Lamont on the question of privatisation of the Post Office and Clarke on the question of road tolls. As one minister observed: "The problem is that ministers are not frightened of John Major, and this slows up the work of Cabinet committees" (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 227).

The importance of Cabinet Committees in changing the dynamic within government is viewed as overstated by insiders, which partly explains why Major's institutional initiatives failed to make a substantial difference. As one former adviser recalled:

“Mrs Thatcher and John Major both used Cabinet Committees. They were the *locus* [of government decisions]. Major was simply working within the basic premise of government that Cabinet Committees were the appropriate forum for decisions. Major was very traditional in viewing Cabinet Committees as the appropriate place for decisions” (Turnbull 2017).

#### **4.4 Whitehall Reform**

Despite the Major government’s seeming drift between 1992 and 1997, there was still, below the radar, and beyond the media’s fascination with Cabinet infighting over Europe, many institutional reforms to Whitehall and the civil service which were significant and are worth considering alongside the impact of Major’s political leadership on the operations at both Number 10 and the Cabinet Office. The departmental structure of Whitehall itself was also altered under Major, based upon the recommendations from Butler before the 1992 election (Beesley 2017, 520-521).

The Whitehall reforms were designed to make the core executive more effective, competitive, transparent (Hennessy 2000, 450-451), and, as with public service reform in the guise of the Citizen’s Charter, to make Whitehall itself more accountable to the public (Theakston 1999, 30-32; Lewis 1993, 316-326). Robin Butler as the Cabinet Secretary and as Head of the Home Civil Service played a central role – in conjunction with the OPSS – in these Whitehall reforms (Beesley 2017, 506-519, 560-576). But, unlike the other reforms, the case study of the Citizen’s Charter initiative offers the opportunity to combine the question of institutional reform with an insight into the Cabinet Office and Number 10 at work under Major.

The Prime Minister felt himself that the promotion of the Citizen’s Charter and public service reform as a policy in Whitehall was something that “needed the unique influence of Number 10” in order to achieve it (Major 1999, 245). The Prime Minister’s fixation with the Citizen’s Charter was not to everyone’s taste however, Gyles Brandreth exclaiming loudly in his diary after another meeting on the subject less than two weeks after Black Wednesday: “No one gives a toss about the Citizen’s Charter, Prime Minister!” (Brandreth 2000, 120).

Even the civil service itself did not entirely believe Major was serious about public service reform:

“But after the election, the civil service found that the threat [of market testing] had not gone away. Mr Major had been returned to power fired up with determination to see through public service reform. Indeed, he created a special section of the Cabinet Office to give it teeth headed by a full Cabinet minister. The OPSS took over responsibility for the Citizen’s Charter, executive agencies and market-testing. At its head was [the] Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. For the first time civil service reform was considered important enough to be represented at the Cabinet table” (Willman 1994, 66-67).

The creation of the OPSS was therefore one of the most important of the departmental structure changes Major made after the 1992 election, only matched by the decision to create a new department to cater for another of the Prime Minister’s passions: art and culture, rebadged the Department of National Heritage and to be led by David Mellor.

Major wanted its focus to be on getting more money for the arts with the creation of a new National Lottery. Under Mellor it quickly became lampooned as the ‘ministry for fun’ and, as Major dryly points out in his memoirs: “Unfortunately, as it turned out, David’s definition of fun ran rather wider than his departmental responsibilities” (Major 1999, 405-406).

Other recommendations as to departmental changes were accepted in April 1992, such as the abolition of the Department of Energy and the merging of the Departments for Education and Employment, the latter of the two taking place in 1995 following the leadership contest when Major’s headline change was the resurrection of the office of Deputy Prime Minister (Beesley 2017, 520, 549). The message from the departmental reshuffles during the Major premiership was crystal clear therefore: if he felt the issue was important enough he would give it Cabinet ranking.

Public service reform was such an issue, and the results by the time John Major left office in 1997 were both important and significant. Peter Hennessy is

particularly complimentary, explaining how, when looked at as a whole, they result in “the Major premierships tak[ing] on a considerable constitutional importance. For under him the British Constitution began to move from the back of an envelope to the back of a Code” (Hennessy 2000, 451).

One of the most significant reforms was to shed a light on the workings of government by declassifying in 1992 both *Questions of Procedure for Ministers* and the *Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet*. The Prime Minister was skilfully guided by Butler into agreeing to this, following his initial negativity and then only reluctant acceptance of the idea after the 1992 election (Beesley 2017, 524-527). John Wakeham also helped persuade the Prime Minister (Wakeham 2017).

Despite this, reforms to open government, in fact, became a mainstay of Whitehall after 1992, with a White Paper in 1993 entitled *Open Government* being implemented with a new Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which for the first time published information on the factual and analytical background to major policy decisions. Despite Major’s documented negativity, Sarah Hogg believed that the Prime Minister got “too little credit” for such Whitehall reforms at the time. His reluctance may well, however, have been justified when “in a cruel irony” the onset of sleaze meant that the publication of the ministerial rulebook allowed the public to make a direct evaluation of the minister in question’s conduct and whether it was within the rules or not. Major’s position was weakened further by clause one of the rulebook which stated that it was “for individual ministers to judge” whether their conduct had breached standards (Hennessy 2000, 451, 467).

The Citizen’s Charter was the main Whitehall reform which the Prime Minister was most keen to promote (Major 1999, 261). Following the publication of the White Paper: *The Citizen’s Charter: Raising The Standard* (1991), it was also a reform proposal which had, at different times, all the organs of the machinery of government working on it, tied in as it was to the introduction of market reforms

into the public sector and reforms to the civil service as a whole (Beesley 2017, 518-519; 523-524)<sup>24</sup>.

The working up of and the naming of the policy began initially in the Policy Unit with Hogg, Hill and True being the key developers, with Hogg immediately recognising the difficulties of promoting such an initiative throughout Whitehall:

“Both the departments and the Treasury tended to shy away from talk about standards and quality. The departmental view would be that if they were to be asked to do better, they should simply be given more money. And the Treasury did not want them to be asked to do better, for fear that the end result would be them getting money to do it. The Citizen’s Charter, as it came to be called, was an explicit effort to break out of this trap: to stimulate public services to use public money better” (Hogg and Hill 1995, 93).

Once in Whitehall the preparation for the launch of firm policy proposals in the form of a White Paper, which did appear in July 1991 (Citizen’s Charter 1991), did indeed, as Hogg envisaged, prove difficult, coming up against, as it did, a sceptical resistance in Whitehall (Hennessy 2000, 449).

This was despite the Prime Minister’s very personal involvement. Indeed, as well as hosting the seminars and authorising Francis Maude, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, his ministerial choice to lead the initiative, and asking the Policy Unit to “fill in the Charter scorecard” as they went around Whitehall departments, Major also intervened personally to secure the Home Office’s agreement for police-related performance tables and secured from Michael Heseltine his agreement on housing (Hogg and Hill 1995, 95-105). The Prime Minister’s involvement was not enough, however.

As Jonathan Hill recalls:

“There was quite a lot of pushing, and the departments I reported felt that it was irrelevant, or not invented by them, or they didn’t get it, or it was too

---

<sup>24</sup> See chapter six for ideational perspective on the Citizen’s Charter

difficult, so Francis Maude, the Minister [for the Citizen's Charter], did a lot of work pushing. Nick [True] did a huge amount of pushing" (Hill 2017).

But he regards this as a positive display of Whitehall:

"And a classic example of the Policy Unit at work. The PM says I want to do something. You work up an idea, and help drive that idea through Whitehall through the Secretary of State and Permanent Secretary applying pressure, then delivering it. So the Citizen's Charter would be an example of, in the early days, Number 10 working well" (Hill 2017).

This is not the positive recollection offered by John Major himself in his own memoirs, viewing the response across Whitehall to his Citizen's Charter initiative as having graphically exposed the inherent weakness of Number 10 within the core executive. As Major wrote:

"Wilfully or carelessly, the point was being missed. Sarah Hogg and Nick True in the Policy Unit were pushing as hard as they could, but it was soon clear that I needed to reinforce the Unit with strengthened official machinery if they were to be enabled to go as far as I wanted them to go. I raised the problem with...Robin Butler" (Major 1999, 252).

The Cabinet Secretary agreed, sharing the Prime Minister's "acute disappointment I and the Policy Unit felt at the poor quality of commitment seen so far", and "I welcomed the suggestion that we at once set up a special ad hoc committee in the Cabinet Office to work with the Unit and the Treasury in overseeing progress on the Charter" (Major 1999, 252).

Major concludes his remarks by seemingly pinpointing the central flaw in government operations:

"Such minutiae of government organisation may seem obscure, but Number 10 is a small place. I was not the first prime minister, nor will I be the last, to find the Cabinet Office, properly deployed, an effective weapon in asserting authority and calling Whitehall to order" (Major 1999, 252).

It was therefore the intervention of the Cabinet Secretary and the Cabinet Office, not Number 10, which had moved the policy forward within Whitehall the most effectively.

This was not for the first time either. Butler had already recognised the dangers of a policy so closely associated with the Prime Minister being left in the hands of the Treasury to implement. As a result, though Francis Maude was made responsible for implementing the Charter, Butler had ensured that the Machinery of Government division in the Cabinet Office supported him. Implementation throughout Whitehall, however, remained problematic. It occupied the time of three Cabinet meetings. It was the focus of an annual seminar for ministers. Yet Butler still had to 'chivvy' Permanent Secretaries throughout Whitehall who were slow to rise to the challenge of public service reform. He was particularly scathing about the Lord Chancellor's Department's contribution, in July 1991, to the White Paper which he stated "combines the complacent with the inadequate" (Beesley 2017, 518-519).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In seeking to decide whether John Major was organisationally weak or strong as Prime Minister in the management of government it is necessary to return to the two central elements of the Greenstein criteria: first, the quality of advice, gained through personal relationships; second, the 'effectiveness of institutional arrangements,' and the methods used by leaders to achieve this.

Taking the first element of the Greenstein criteria, it is unquestionably the case that both evidentially and through testimony of former official and political advisers within Number 10 and the Cabinet Office, that the relationships within the core executive were harmonious – we all "got on," as Jonathan Hill recalled (Hill 2017). And there was a level of "frankness" within Number 10 (Lyne 2017) which meant the Prime Minister was receiving advice both qualitatively and quantitatively which was, on the whole, reliable.

With regard to advice the testimony of Hill is revealing in that the value of personal relationships over institutional ones was arguably a clear rationale of

government at the centre during the Major premiership, shared by the Prime Minister. As he explained:

“Some people who’ve never worked in government think that it’s all about systems, but in my view I think it is much more about power and how people are getting on at any one time because the same piece of machinery can create a totally different response depending upon whether you are up or down” (Hill 2017).

Hill’s testimony also helps explain why no major internal reforms took place either to Number 10 or the Cabinet Office between 1990 and 1997, personal relationships being more highly valued. This not to say that Major did not contemplate such reform, as he revealed in 2000:

“As far as the Policy Unit was concerned, I think if I had been returned to office in 1997 I might have strengthened the Policy Unit a little more. I think in order to keep abreast with the complex and complicated nature of modern legislation and society’s needs it would have been desirable to have a little more direct advice to the Prime Minister. I have no objection to that and I think I would have done it” (Major 2000, Q12).

Major’s views were similar on the Cabinet Office, the Prime Minister arguing:

“I think I would have strengthened the Cabinet Office a little for exactly the same reason, not because I wished to establish a competing barony to the Treasury and the Foreign Office and the other departments but because it is useful to have a source of independent advice on what is happening in government and the Cabinet Office was best placed to do it and was also very good at fire fighting, so I would have extended that” (Major 2000, Q12).

Major, whilst Prime Minister therefore, as an official recalled, worked within the “orthodoxy of government,” and was “traditional” in his approach (Turnbull 2017), something which entirely fitted with a similar minded Cabinet Secretary in Sir Robin Butler (Jago 2017). This meant the Prime Minister was not an innovator, preserving the Policy Unit, Political Office, Private Office and Press Office. Cabinet government continued, Major using Cabinet Committees similarly to



previous Prime Ministers as a means to not overload Cabinet business (Turnbull 2017).

The first element of the Greenstein criteria therefore arguably has been met with regard to John Major. But what of the second element: did Major, despite his lack of overt innovations to the centre, still manage to design 'effective institutional arrangements,' managing to fulfil the Bose dictum of "the importance of having clearly defined responsibilities and chains of command for policy success," because "attention to organisation can mitigate a president's cognitive shortcomings" (Bose 2006, 33-34).

Before answering this, it is necessary to put on record the effect of one event that had a clear impact institutionally upon the Major government: Black Wednesday, September 1992, almost to the point that there was a clear 'before' and 'after' in Whitehall. As Jonathan Hill explained:

"We used the same system [as Mrs Thatcher], but applied it in our own way. We had the discipline of a general election, which the Policy Unit was heavily involved in preparing for, new PM, new Cabinet, and everything worked. We had a lot of clout in the Policy Unit. The same system was in place post Black Wednesday, through Maastricht, through the 1995 leadership contest, but it became non-functioning because you lose your authority so the PM's writ doesn't run" (Hill 2017).

The shift in Prime Ministerial authority only partly answers the effectiveness element of the Greenstein criteria however. Evidentially and from testimony there was a clear weakness at the centre which meant that Number 10 particularly was not working in an effective way, even before the onset of Black Wednesday.

And John Major's own 'cognitive shortcomings'<sup>25</sup> did have an impact on the smooth running of the government, the Prime Minister's sensitivity to press criticism disrupting the Number 10 Press Office, but equally it did affect Cabinet management as well, not least Major's desire not to offend. This led to what John Wakeham referred to as problems of 'planning' (Wakeham 2017), as truncated

---

<sup>25</sup> See chapter seven

meetings and shortened bilaterals caused misunderstandings at senior levels of government.

There were no 'clearly defined responsibilities' nor 'chains of command' either within Number 10, which equally had a disruptive impact on personal relations between officials and ministers and a concomitant impact on the internal machinery of government. This seeped into the smooth running of the Cabinet Office as well, Sir Robin Butler joining other officials within Number 10 – Private Office, Political Office, Policy Unit, Press Office – in daily 'fire fighting' and ever-more protection of their boss as they crossed – civil servants such as Alex Allan in particular - the unseen line between impartiality and partisan politics. This was possible due to a lack of defined roles within Number 10 in the first place.

This leads directly to the questions surrounding Sarah Hogg, who was widely seen to meet the Hywel Williams (1998) criticism of her as an 'incorrigible meddler,' not least amongst ministers, despite her clear intellect and ability (Hill 2017). This view is supported by loyalists and critics alike of John Major, Wakeham representing the frustration of ministers at her attendance of bilaterals and Cabinet Committees with no clear idea as to whether she was speaking for the Prime Minister or not (Wakeham 2017).

The main charge against Major, organisationally, of their being a 'hole at the centre of government' and lack of strategic direction, does therefore hold some validity. Black Wednesday was a turning point in the life of government, but, as Kavanagh and Seldon observed:

“Few of Major’s staff had any sense of his Number 10 being a powerhouse and it is difficult to think of any staffing or institutional arrangements which could have compensated for the loss of political authority” (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 238).

This was shown early on in the Major premiership, despite Jonathan Hill’s belief that it showed the system working “well” (Hill 2017), in Major’s attempts to introduce the Citizen’s Charter in 1991. The episode displayed not the strength of Number 10 under John Major, the head of a 'baronial court' in Whitehall (Rhodes

2011, 137-149, 210-214), but in fact its inherent weakness, hence the intervention of what Major termed the “official machinery” of the Cabinet Office to ensure its efficient implementation (Major 1999, 252).

Ironically, it was to be Tony Blair and New Labour who reaped the benefits of an evidentially dysfunctional Downing Street under Major, recognising as they did that in order to have a truly effective premiership the internal structure of Whitehall would need to be reformed (Diamond 2011, 146). This would include innovations such as the appointment of Jonathan Powell in an official role as Chief of Staff, unlike Allan’s pseudo role, in order to ensure institutional co-ordination, and the enhancement of all units within Number 10 (Burch and Holliday 2004, 2-19).

## **Chapter Five: Political Skill**

This chapter will seek to focus on five skills – negotiation, persuasion, manipulation, to hide, and finally, discernment (see Table 1) - associated with political leadership from a variety of leadership models in order to explore Major's own political skill whilst Prime Minister. The first skill, negotiation, is provided in Greenstein's *The Presidential Difference* (2000). The second skill, persuasion, is explored in Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (1990). The third skill, manipulation, is provided in William Riker's (1986) work on heresthetics, which looks at the politician's ability to manipulate their political environment to their advantage. The third skill, to hide, is contained within Philip Norton's (1987) typology of prime ministerial power. The fifth and final skill, to discern, is part of Erwin Hargrove's (1998, 2002) 'skill in context' leadership model. Once defined, each skill will be applied to John Major's political leadership during the period of his premiership before a conclusion is drawn overall.

### **5.1 Introduction**

Within the Greenstein model, "[b]roadly defined," political skill refers "to a president's ability to work with Congress and other key actors to pass his political agenda" (Bose 2006, 30). It therefore examines a President's ability as a "political operator" within the American system of government (Greenstein 2000, 5). Political skill is the dimension for which Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (1990) provided the most influence on Greenstein's thinking. As Greenstein stated:

"The question Neustadt addresses is how the chief executive can put his stamp on public policy in the readily stalemated American political system. Neustadt's prescription is for the president to use the powers of his office assertively, build and maintain public support, and establish a reputation among fellow policymakers as a skilled, determined political operator" (Greenstein 2009a, 227).

Political skill also has strong connections to Greenstein's work on political psychology and its relationship to the political environment:

“Skill is of the utmost importance, since the greater the actor’s skill, the less his need for a favourable environment, and the greater likelihood that he himself will contribute making his subsequent position favourable and his environment manipulable. By the same token, a singularly inept politician may reduce the manipulability of his environment” (Greenstein 1987, 45)<sup>26</sup>.

Within the British context, the Greenstein approach to the examination of political skill has been successfully transferred to examine all previous post-war Prime Ministers from Clement Attlee to David Cameron (Theakston 2007, 2011, 2012). Honeyman (2007) looked at the political skill of Harold Wilson.

Furthermore, the Greenstein approach has been used to examine the performance of post-war Leaders of the Opposition, though political skill was amended to skill at “party management”, as this is “more in suiting to the demands of British party political leadership than the US Presidency” (Heppell 2012, 5). Within the British polity, as compared to the American polity, political skill refers to the “[s]uccessful political management” of the Cabinet and parliamentary colleagues within Westminster (Theakston 2011, 88) - a different skill-set therefore in comparison to modern Presidents.

As Theakston argues, this requires Prime Ministers to use “persuasion, conciliation, negotiation, manipulation, brokerage or other methods to handle the problems they face and advance their goals,” of which:

“Some have been guileful and agile masters of the indirect approach; some have shown great tactical skill in balancing the factions and their competing personalities; some have interfered, controlled and constantly pulled things into Number 10, while others have been more detached and above the fray; some have used charm to win people over and avoid conflict while others have used more brutal and bullying methods” (Theakston 2012, 201).

Amongst post-war Prime Ministers, Harold Wilson was seen as an arch manipulator: “To him, any amount of fudging, trimming or deviousness was justified if it served the overriding end of keeping the party together,” whereas

---

<sup>26</sup> See chapter two

Margaret Thatcher, by contrast, was regarded as the ‘Lyndon Johnson’ of modern politics, such was her “hectoring, cajoling and bullying style” with Cabinet and parliamentary colleagues in order to achieve her objectives (Theakston 2007, 237-238).

Gordon Brown was viewed as ‘Stalinist in his ruthlessness’ by a former Cabinet Secretary and was viewed widely as a poor negotiator both in the Treasury and Number 10, yet he was “in his element” in negotiations with world leaders including Barak Obama at the G20 in 2009 amidst the financial crisis (Theakston 2011, 89-90). Each leader therefore brings his own skill-set to the job of Prime Minister.

**Table 1: Political Skill Dimensions**

<b>Overview of framework for analysis:</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Key skills identified to be applied to Major</b>
Political skill:  Skill at negotiation  Well grounded in the ways of American politics  High sensitivity to power relations  Self-confident about his suitability to the Presidency  Should be resolute in his desire to place his stamp in political outcomes	Greenstein 2000	<b><i>Negotiate</i></b>
The art of political manipulation	Riker 1986	<b><i>Manipulate</i></b>

<p>(heresthetics):</p> <p>Agenda control</p> <p>Strategic voting</p> <p>Manipulation of dimensions</p> <p>Binding</p>		
<p>Persuasion through bargaining:</p> <p>Professional reputation</p> <p>Public prestige</p>	<p>Neustadt 1990</p> <p>Ellis 2002</p>	<p><b><i>Persuade</i></b></p>
<p>Prime Ministerial Power (a framework for analysis):</p> <p>General skills:</p> <p>“impression management”</p> <p>“feel for office”</p> <p>Specific skills:</p> <p>Select ----- Command</p> <p>Lead ----- Manipulate</p> <p>Anticipate ---- Persuade</p> <p>React ----- Hide</p>	<p>Barber 1992</p> <p>Norton 1987</p>	<p><b><i>Hide</i></b></p>
<p>Skill in context:</p> <p>Skills:</p>	<p>Hargrove 1998 2002</p>	<p><b><i>Discern</i></b></p>

Bargaining and leadership of coalitions Heresthetics Rhetoric Moral Commitment Personal integrity Discernment Teaching Reality Preaching Demagoguery Cultural Traps  Context: Public opinion Electoral politics Structure of government Policy problems		
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--	--

## 5.2 Greenstein's *The Presidential Difference: Major's ability to negotiate*

The centrepiece of Neustadt's proposition on Presidential leadership in *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* is that Presidential power is achieved by their "power to persuade," – not, as may often be believed, to command, such is the nature of the American Constitution. Furthermore, "the power to persuade is the power to bargain." Bargaining is vital in order for a President to ensure that their legislative programme is passed by Congress. (Neustadt 1990, 29-32).

Greenstein developed Neustadt's proposition for his own leadership model<sup>27</sup>, arguing that for a President to persuade others within the American polity they need to display the following attributes. These include that:

---

<sup>27</sup> See chapter two



“He should be well grounded in the ways of American politics. He should have a high level of sensitivity to power relations. He should be self-confident about his own suitability for the presidency, and he should be resolute in his desire to place his stamp on political outcomes” (Greenstein 2006, 19).

All of these attributes, largely, are associated with those of a successful negotiator. Hence, “Presidents who lack political skill typically dislike the negotiations, and compromise, that inevitably accompany policy making in the United States” (Bose 2006, 30). The same personal onus is not on a British Prime Minister within the British Polity, the British system of government having no separate legislature and executive, meaning a Prime Minister has to use different skills to get their legislation through.

Prime Minister’s also have the benefit of a Whips’ Office to help in the art of less subtle persuasion (Searing 1994), something which is discussed below. The ability to negotiate is still an important skill for a Prime Minister, however, both within government amongst colleagues as well as within the international sphere of politics.

Major displayed his ability to negotiate whilst as a minister in the Department of Social Security, having a “relatively unusual” combination “of mastery of detail and likeable manner” as part of his skill-set which made him so effective. This combination of talents led Nigel Lawson to ask for Major to become his new Chief Secretary at the Treasury in the post-1987 election reshuffle (Lawson 1992, 711).

By the time Major had left the Treasury and had moved to the Foreign Office he had “built up a reputation as a brilliant negotiator,” something Lamont was to experience first-hand when negotiating with the new Foreign Secretary:

“He had left the Treasury only a few weeks previously; to my discomfort I discovered that he remembered the Treasury brief better than I had learnt it, and he ran circles around me” (Lamont 2000, 15).

This skill was confirmed by Treasury officials at the time. Andrew Turnbull, who went on to work for Major in Number 10 as well, recalls:

“I met him when he was Chief Secretary. One of his great skills was negotiating, because he’d done the homework and he was patient and he’d thought ahead about what was the other guy thinking and how far can I take this. He had this empathy [with people]” (Turnbull 2017).

Once he became Prime Minister this ability at negotiation was able to be displayed on a much wider platform: in international diplomacy, not least during the Maastricht Treaty negotiations in December 1991. At the time the negotiations were hailed as a personal triumph for Major: “game, set and match!” was the widely trailed line given by Number 10 following the conclusion of the 1991 IGC (Pryce 1994, 51), though Lamont would later claim that the EMU and Social Chapter opt-outs that Major had achieved were a “sham,” the other member states wanting Britain to sign even if “we did so without being committed to moving to a single currency” (Lamont 2000, 122). Major refutes this in his memoirs, saying that he was “far from confident of success” as Maastricht approached (Major 1999, 275).

Stephen Wall, who worked alongside Major during the Maastricht negotiations and at subsequent European Councils throughout the 1992 Parliament as his Private Secretary, was able to witness the Prime Minister’s style of negotiation first-hand. As Wall states: “he was by temperament someone who believed that, as he put it, “you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.” The substance of the policy would remain robust but the approach and presentation would change” (Wall 2008, 109). Major’s style was therefore conciliatory, but robust in policy terms.

The most obvious effect of such a change of tone and style was felt most of all in the capitals of Europe, most of whom had endured over a decade of Thatcher-style brinkmanship which had worn very thin by the time she had left office. This was not least seen in Berlin, where the personal chemistry between Helmut Kohl and his “friend” John Major (Hogg and Hill 1995, 146-147), and improved relations with Paris and President Francois Mitterrand (Wall 2008, 116), created the conditions at Maastricht in which Britain could have a chance to succeed in its

key negotiation objectives on the vexed issues of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the Social Chapter (Hogg and Hill 1995, 146-147).

As Wall notes, Major “understood the requirements of negotiation: knowledge, patience, tolerance, ingenuity, and – a quality not in huge supply in Her Majesty’s Treasury – judicious compromise.” This meant, at Maastricht for instance, judging the exact moment to introduce the Treasury wording for the EMU opt-out - at a time that was too late for other member states to change the wording, - but equally knowing when to refuse to budge on the Social Chapter, resulting in a protocol being agreed as part of the final agreement (Wall 2008, 136).

Major recalls this in his own memoirs, stating:

“The main problem was transition to the final stage of monetary union. I still held back the release of the draft of our specific opt-out, although in meetings with officials, [senior Treasury official] Nigel Wicks was coming under strong pressure to produce it. He stonewalled: ‘I have no authority to do so yet.’ His European colleagues gritted their teeth and waited, not always patiently” (Major 1999, 279).

The tactic worked, but subsequently it has come to light, contrary to Lamont’s views on the opt-outs, “that Britain made a quid pro quo with Germany, whereby Britain gained opt-outs on the single currency and the social chapter, in return for Germany’s desire to recognise [Slovenia and Croatia during the Bosnia crisis].” This has been flatly denied by Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary, but unquestionably after Maastricht Britain was in Germany’s debt (Stuart 1998, 290).

This does not take away from the Prime Minister his clearly recognised skill at negotiation, Stephen Wall’s view supported by other members of Number 10 staff who worked closely with John Major, in a clear reiteration of former Treasury colleagues as to his skill in this regard.

Roderic Lyne, the Prime Minister’s Private Secretary for Overseas Affairs between 1993 and 1996, is worth quoting in full his written response to the author on ‘Major the negotiator’:

“I’ve seen a lot of negotiators (including [Lord] Carrington, Foreign Secretary 1979 to 1982], at Lancaster House), and he was one of the best. [It was] [o]ne of his greatest skills, deployed at Edinburgh and Maastricht and in the Northern Ireland Peace Process. 1. He was assiduous in his homework. Not content just to be given a ‘line to take’ he always wanted to go into the room knowing the background detail better than the counterpart. 2. He spent time establishing a personal connection/creating the right atmosphere. He would start by discussing family matters, or sport, or telling some anecdote. 3. Before revealing his own hand, he would let the counterpart speak (not a Thatcher characteristic!) and try to work out what really mattered to the other side. 4. Then, instead of laying out all of his position, he would pick up points made across the table, and try to work for agreement on the easier ones. 5. Gradually he would inject elements of his own position, and turn the discussion his way, always trying to keep the atmosphere friendly. He used the rapier, not the bludgeon. 6. Then sum up clearly and fairly” (Lyne 2017).

As far as Stephen Wall is concerned however, in tandem with Lyne, the Maastricht Treaty negotiations were not Major’s sole international negotiating triumph during his premiership. The Edinburgh European Council in December 1992, during the British Presidency of the Council of Ministers, is equally seen as an achievement in this regard, coming, as it did, at a difficult time in the life of the EU.

As a negotiating tactic Major this time saw the value of being in the chair as a means to control the agenda of the conference on the European Budget, and in particular, over Britain’s own rebate. Lamont argued against this approach, believing that deferral was a better option on Britain’s rebate, hoping to build a “powerful coalition” with Germany later without the constraints of being in the chair. But, as he was later to complain, he felt “outmanoeuvred” by Major at the negotiations on the issue (Lamont 2000, 329).

To Wall, with Britain’s budget contribution successfully adopted in the text, this was Britain’s “ace” at the negotiations, holding the chairmanship being “the Presidency’s strongest card: however irritated and querulous your partners

become, however much they may criticise your behaviour, they cannot force the Presidency's hand" (Wall 2008, 151).

A similar hard-headed and, at times, tough negotiating approach was adopted by Major with some success during the Northern Ireland peace process, particularly in his dealings with the Irish Taoiseach Albert Reynolds in the run-up to the announcement of the Downing Street Declaration. This was to bring the huge political and personal dividend of peace when first the IRA in August 1994 and then Loyalist paramilitaries subsequently announced ceasefires in the province. At the time, Major was viewed as "intransigent" and "obstructive," but "evidence available now points to a mixture of flexibility and judicious caution governing Major's actions" (Norton 1999, 114-125).

Such bravery, including the risky decision to open a channel to the IRA when they continued their violent campaign, did not lead to peace in the province whilst John Major was Prime Minister. However, the eventual framework for negotiation developed between the British and Irish governments would enable Tony Blair to fulfil that aim in 1998 in the Good Friday Agreement which ensured violence was to end in Northern Ireland for a generation and beyond.

### **5.3 Neustadt's *Presidential Power: Major's ability to persuade***

Kevin Ellis (2002) transferred Richard E Neustadt's *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (1990) from Presidential studies to the office of Prime Minister, applying it to the political leadership of Harold Macmillan. As has already been seen, Neustadt argued in his own thesis that the power of the President institutionally would be meaningless unless a President could influence policy-makers in order to pass his own agenda through both houses of Congress: "powers are no guarantee of power; clerkship is no guarantee of leadership." Consequently, Presidential power comes from the "power to persuade, the power to bargain." The power to persuade was dependent upon two key elements: the individual's professional reputation (political skill) and public prestige (popularity) (Neustadt 1990, 10, 29-50, 54, 68).

Within the British polity, Ellis notes that Prime Ministers, constitutionally, are even “weaker” than Presidents: “A Prime Minister can achieve even less than an American president through command,” meaning that they are “even more dependent for their influence on persuading others” (Ellis 2002, 28). This is despite a Prime Minister having several clear advantages over a President when it comes to passing legislation, not least that the executive sits in the legislature under the British constitution, unlike in America where there is a clear separation of powers (Heffernan 2005, 55).

However, unlike an American President, the Prime Minister is not subject to a codified constitution – his powers being gradually acquired over centuries through Royal Prerogative, and largely unwritten. This is shown most clearly in Cabinet government, the Prime Minister leading a “collective” Cabinet government, with genuine Cabinet “colleagues,” whereas an American president’s Cabinet are entirely subservient in any decision-making at executive-level (Jones 2011, Para. 4 133-135; Ellis 2002, 28-32)<sup>28</sup>.

So what are the key lessons in terms of persuasion derived from *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, applicable within the British polity? Ellis identifies a number of skills that a Prime Minister can utilise to persuade others, built around the principal elements of reputation and prestige identified by Neustadt. The two most important were: First, a Prime Minister must guard “his own stakes,” by acting as his own intelligence officer. Second, crucially, a Prime Minister must “increase the securities that result from supporting him and the insecurities that result from opposing him.” By following these Neustadt precepts a Prime Minister can only enhance his professional reputation. Ellis uses the example of Macmillan’s failure to follow these precepts during the Profumo Scandal in 1963 as evidence of Macmillan’s lack of skill when Prime Minister. However, Macmillan was able to show skill by sensitivity to both sides over the issue of Central Africa, on the one hand being “highly sensitive to the strong pro-settler sympathies that existed in much of Britain, not least his own party,” whilst “[h]owever, he never gave those opposed to the move away from federation and

---

<sup>28</sup> See chapter two

white control strong enough reasons to believe that their interests could be served by leaving the established negotiating process” (Ellis 2002, 290-294).

In applying the Neustadt precepts to Major to assess his skill at persuasion, the first question is therefore how successful was Major at guarding ‘his own stakes’ in order to protect his own profession reputation by acting as his own intelligence officer? As seen Ellis uses the Profumo Scandal to highlight how Macmillan’s turning a blind eye to the widely known and scandalous affair between John Profumo and Christine Keeler in 1963, and disinclination to entertain such gossip, ensured his reputation was severely damaged when the scandal broke.

John Major equally was wrong footed by the sleaze scandals that were to engulf the government from 1992 to the 1997. As Christopher Meyer recalled in 1994, when the scandals were at their peak:

“Throughout 1994 there were repeated sleaze eruptions. A routine was established. On a Saturday afternoon, between 4 and 4.30, I would take a call from a reporter on one of the Sunday papers. Some poor, bloody Tory politician was going to be exposed *in flagrante* the next day. What did I have to say about it? I would call the Chief Whip, the Party Chairman, and the Prime Minister himself. They would establish whether the allegations were true. If they were, the sinner was expected to fall on his sword – and fast” (Meyer 2005, 16-17).

Meyer’s advice to the Prime Minister was “always to cut his losses as rapidly as possible.” As Meyer explained, “I was criticised for increasing the appetite of the press for sacrificial lambs. But I thought anything was better than a long-drawn-out defence of a hopeless cause” (Meyer 2005, 16-17).

Despite the steady stream of resignations throughout the period (Fowler 2008, 154-165), Major mirrored Macmillan’s poor judgement by not acting over two specific problematic events which did lasting damage to his and the government’s reputation: the government response to the Scott Report into Arms to Iraq in 1996; and, between 1994 and 1997, the Neil Hamilton ‘cash for questions’ affair.

In each case the scandals were only allowed to evolve further due to the Prime Minister's inability to act decisively.

The Scott Report, published in February 1996, concerned the 1992 collapse of the Matrix Churchill trial into illegal arms export. At the heart of the case, and the central focus of Sir Richard Scott, was the government's export guidelines on arms exports, and whether they had been altered without Parliament's knowledge. The focus of the report in this respect was on William Waldegrave and Sir Nick Lyell, and whether they had lied to Parliament over the alteration of the guidelines. During the Scott Report debate, Ian Lang, the President of the Board of Trade, spoke for the government in claiming that both ministers acted with "complete propriety" throughout on the matter (Lang 2002, 284; Waldegrave 2015, 252).

The government was to survive the vote on the Scott Report in Parliament, by one vote, and neither Waldegrave nor Lyell resigned. One former MP, Quentin Davies, who had voted against the government citing the report as confirming that Waldegrave and Lyell had lied, felt that Major's handling of the issue destroyed both the Prime Minister's, and the government's, reputation for honesty. As he explained:

"He meant well. He also wasn't naturally dishonest. He naturally wouldn't want to be the guy who would preside over a government that was lying to parliament, but when it came to the crunch he was weak, and he thought 'oh dear, I can't have a minister resign over a scandal' and so he allowed himself weakly to be party to a cover up which he hadn't engineered. Out of weakness he was culpable" (Davies 2017).

The charge of weakness and secondary culpability by Major can also be made in the case of Neil Hamilton, the former Trade minister, who had resigned in 1994 over the 'cash for questions' scandal. Maintaining his innocence, Hamilton had then remained in the headlines by refusing to follow his fellow ex-minister Tim Smith by stepping down from the Commons, and as a result caused one of the most extraordinary campaigns in political history as Martin Bell – the 'man in the



white suit' – entered Tatton in 1997 as the anti-sleaze candidate and won (Parris and Maguire 2004, 364-367).

Major therefore allowed his reputation, and the Conservative Party's, to be hugely tarnished at a time when it was critical that the government could try to use the six week 1997 campaign to turn the pressure away from themselves and on to Blair and New Labour (Butler and Kavanagh 1997). One former backbencher at the time, Andrew Robathan, was especially critical of Major's handling of the scandal and the resulting harm it caused:

“He handled the Neil Hamilton case very badly. Neil should have been told you cannot stand as the Conservative candidate in Tatton, but if you are cleared we will find a new seat for you. I got berated at a smart house in the constituency over the whole 'sleaze' issue. It probably damaged us in twenty seats” (Robathan 2017).

The examples of the Scott Report and the Neil Hamilton affair therefore highlight how Major, by failing to guard “his own stakes” under the first Neustadt precept severely damaged both his own, and by osmosis, the government's reputation for honesty.

The second Neustadt precept, highlighted by Ellis, is the need for Prime Minister's to retain and enhance their personal reputation and public prestige by “increase[ing] the securities that result from supporting him and the insecurities that result from opposing him” (Ellis 2002, 290-294). Ellis highlights how Macmillan was able to show such a skill during the government's handling of the vexed question of Central Africa and in the subtle field of international diplomacy.

Major however sought to increase the 'insecurities' of those who opposed him in a not subtle approach towards his own backbenchers as he sought to ratify the Maastricht Treaty, and subsequent EU legislation, through the House of Commons during the 1992 Parliament. Indeed, such were the tactics used within the Whips' Office during this period that allegations of intimidation and bullying were frequent (Brandreth 2000, 131). These tactics were combined with the ultimate sanction of, on three specific occasions, – November 1992 (Maastricht

'Paving' Vote), July 1993 (Social Policy Protocol) and November 1994 (European Finance Bill), - making a vote a matter of confidence in the government; July 1993 the one occasion when the motion was formally put. This was to lead in November 1994 to the withdrawal of the whip from eight PCP rebels, plus another voluntarily, following their decision to vote against the government (Baker et al 1993a, Baker et al 1994, Clarke 2016).

The question therefore is, did such tactics by Major's Whips' Office enable the Prime Minister to enhance his prestige and reputation within the PCP, and the public at large, on the issue of Europe, thereby enabling him to persuade? The statistics on this speak for themselves. By 1995 only twelve per cent of the electorate regarded the Conservative Party as 'united,' almost forty per cent behind the Labour Party (Crewe 1996, 431-432).

Yet, as Table 2 and 3 (see below) emphasise, Major's 1992 to 1997 Parliament was not, in comparison to other parliamentary sessions since 1945, the most rebellious. Nor was it rebellious for the whole five year term, the spike being in the 1992 to 1993 session (twenty-three per cent) during the passage of the Maastricht Treaty (Cowley 1999, 22). The rebellions were also from one wing of the PCP only: the Thatcherite faction, which was to be involved in seventy-five per cent of all parliamentary rebellions, seventy-three per cent being on the issue of further integration (Heppell 2002, 316).

Thus, it was arguably Major's tactics that caused the Conservative Party's reputation for unity to be severely damaged as a consequence. Furthermore, the charge can also be made of weakness, not strength, in the tactics the Prime Minister used in his pursuit of EU legislation, meaning that he was left with no other option than to carry out the threat he had made out of seeming desperation. As one former MP aptly observed:

"He screwed up over Europe because he divided the party over Maastricht. If he'd not had that he would have held the party together much better" (Robathan 2017).

**Table 2: Major government parliamentary rebellions by session during 1992 Parliament (Cowley 1999, 22)**

<b>Parliamentary session</b>	<b>Number of rebellions in Division Lobby</b>	<b>As a % overall</b>
1992 – 1993	<i>93 / 401 divisions</i>	23
1993 – 1997	<i>81 / 893 divisions</i>	9

**Table 3: Major government parliamentary rebellions in context, 1945-2012 (Cowley and Stuart 2012,1)**

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Parliamentary session</b>	<b>Rebellions as a % overall</b>
1	<i>2010 - 2012</i>	44
2	<i>2005 - 2010</i>	28
3	<i>2001 - 2005</i>	21
4	<i>1974 - 1979</i>	20
5	<i>1970 - 1974</i>	19
6	<i>1983 - 1987</i>	16
<b>7</b>	<b>1992 - 1997</b>	<b>13</b>
8	<i>1987 - 1992</i>	12
9	<i>1979 - 1983</i>	12
10	<i>1959 - 1964</i>	12

In a similar view a former Cabinet minister<sup>29</sup> argued, on the withdrawal of the whip:

“I do think the withdrawal of the whip was done too late. It should have been done earlier, and he probably only would have had to withdraw the whip from one or two. I don’t know whether he had advice or not, but when he did it was too late and the damage was already done and it made him look weak doing it.”

Others, such as Ann Widdecombe, felt that he could do nothing different at the time, such were the constraints imposed by a small majority:

“The Tory majority [of twenty-one] was a problem as it meant you could not do things by ‘diktat,’ as in the 1987 and 1983 Parliaments. Already the rebels in the PCP were emboldened by [Major’s] small majority” (Widdecombe 2017).

The actual tactics of the Whips’ Office in any parliamentary session remain, to an extent, shrouded in mystery, but at least four forms of persuasion are used by a whip to ensure they go through the right lobby. The first is for a backbencher to “conserve their strength,” a Whip arguing that the MP should “keep their rebellions for special occasions.” The second common form of persuasion used by the Whip is to invoke party interests: “don’t rock the boat,” voting against a Three-line Whip ensuing embarrassment to your own governing party. If this fails, the pressure is increased, a Whip invoking “obligations to party, voters and groups affected by the policy” – “You owe it to your party.” Finally, if this tactic fails a Whip will begin to “insinuate doubts about individual’s fundamental identity” – “Are you on the right side?” (Searing 1994, 253-254).

The Whips Office’ during the 1992 Parliament did appear to overlook the first forms of persuasion identified by Searing, and the second and third, going straight to the fourth with threats to career advancement on EU legislation (Baker et al 1993a, 152-153). Andrew Robathan openly reports such tactics being used when he decided to vote against the Third Reading of the Maastricht Bill in 1993:

---

<sup>29</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

“I’ve never regretted it. David Davis, my Whip, who was hardly a Europhile, told me it would set back my career for two years” (Robathan 2017).

As another former MP recalls<sup>30</sup> intimidation was applied to especially recalcitrant backbenchers:

“One Whip in particular, David Lightbown, was not averse to personal confrontation. There was no actual violence, but he was intimidating.”

Major would have been fully aware of all the tactics the Whips’ Office were using, as Gyles Brandreth revealed:

“The intelligence gathering was superb in the sense that we knew what every MP was thinking and how they were likely to vote, and we knew all their problems. So Major would have known on a daily basis” (Brandreth 2017).

Conversely, to the Maastricht rebels the aim was clear: to ‘kill the bill’ by enabling a ‘ratifiable’ amendment to the Bill which Labour could support but which Major would not, their calculation being that the Prime Minister would abandon the Treaty rather than abandon any of his opt-outs. The main focus of the rebels therefore was working with the Labour Opposition to defeat the government on the Social Chapter. The whips therefore began a cat-and-mouse game with the rebels and Labour on Amendment 27 which culminated in the final July 1993 vote of confidence (Baker et al 1994, 38-39).

However, reflecting that they were up against a hard core of rebels - Bill Cash laid 600 amendments to the three-page Bill, the Whips also sought to differentiate, taking the lead from Major on February 16 1993, between amendments “that render our law incompatible with the treaty and must be defeated, and others which are undesirable but would not prevent us from ratifying,” understanding that they could “no longer secure majorities at will” during the Maastricht ratification process (Baker et al 1994, 38-39).

Accepting amendments to a Bill if it did not scupper the entire piece of legislation as a stratagem noticeably altered during the remainder of the Parliament,

---

<sup>30</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

particularly with an ever dwindling parliamentary majority, the government's business managers often deciding to not introduce a piece of legislation altogether – simple conflict avoidance. In late 1994 this led to the government dropping the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill, and almost dropping the Family Law Bill a year later, much to the chagrin of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay, who felt his reforms were being undermined by ten PCP rebels. The Family Law Bill was eventually introduced in November 1995, but in the House of Lords, which seemed to only emphasise the government's precarious majority on the legislation (Read and Marsh 1997, 269). Of equal controversy was the decision to abandon Post Office privatisation in November 1994, the President of the Board of Trade, Heseltine, accepting he had “no parliamentary majority” on the issue (Heseltine 2000, 450-451).

The ultimate sanction remained making a vote a matter of confidence in the government, which, if not adhered to, would lead to the withdrawal of the whip. To say it was the ‘ultimate sanction’ this tactic quickly became the approach of the Whips’ Office from 1992 on EU legislation, the Whips taking their lead from Major’s meeting with five leading members of the 92 Group who were threatening to vote against the government’s Maastricht ‘Paving’ Debate in November 1992. At the meeting, “Major is reported to have told [the MPs] that defeat would make it impossible for him to remain as Prime Minister.” Although Major’s threat was withdrawn:

“his Whips succeeded in creating the recognition within the party that this was in fact a matter of confidence in the government rather than Maastricht, instilling the fear of his possible resignation and the damage this might do to the Conservatives’ future prospects of power” (Baker et al 1993a, 155-156).

The vote becoming one on the future survival of the government thus locked the Prime Minister and MPs together on EU legislation - a tactic arguably beyond persuasion, and into the realms of manipulation through ‘binding’ (Elster 2000).

And the tactic did succeed in adherence, from an intra-party perspective, Major winning the Maastricht ‘Paving’ Vote in November 1992. This was also the case in July 1993, when the threat became a formal motion of confidence. Indeed, Bill

Cash, a leading rebel, changed his mind on voting against the government on the Social Chapter, albeit combined as it was with a formal motion of confidence, after a quickly arranged breakfast meeting with Hurd on the day of the vote. The 1993 confidence vote was called from a position of weakness not strength however, and did further expose intra-party division, the government defeat the previous day on the Social Policy Protocol motion leaving the Prime Minister with no avenue open to him other than to put the matter to a vote of confidence (Baker et al 1994, 43).

This leads us to the curious case of the withdrawal of the whip of nine MPs after they each voted against the government on the European Finance Bill in November 1994 (Gill 2003, 129). Ken Clarke, as Chancellor, was invited to the 'inner Cabinet' of a few senior ministers with Sarah Hogg, from the Number 10 Policy Unit, also in attendance. At that meeting it was decided, in what Clarke describes as a "bold, decisive and sensible" decision, that the Bill would be a matter of confidence. As Clarke explained:

"John broke the news to us that he was going to make the whole bill a matter of confidence...He believed that, as with the Maastricht Bill, the threat that a defeat for the Bill would bring down the government and cause a general election, was the only way it would get through" (Clarke 2016, 366).

No decision was, however, taken to ratify this at full Cabinet. Major had therefore, once again, left himself with no room for manoeuvre when eight MPs rebelled on the Bill, and only further exposed intra-party division and weakness at the same time.

When the whip was withdrawn the government also gave up its majority, something the rebels gleefully showed the government a week later when the planned second rise in VAT on Fuel in the 1994 Budget was defeated, thereby humiliating the government and only exacerbating an already febrile atmosphere within the PCP (Bale 2010, 50).

#### **5.4 Heresthetics: *Major's ability to manipulate***

Heresthetics, or the art of political manipulation, is the seminal work by William Riker whose theoretical framework seeks to conceptualise the agency of the political actor. Broadly defined, a heresthetic has one chief purpose: “structuring the world so that you can win.” This is achieved by “set[ting] up the situation in such a way that other people will want to join them – or will feel forced by circumstances to join them – even without any persuasion at all.” Originating in economic thinking, the genus of heresthetics emerged from social choice theory, which analysed the ways that the preferences of individual members of a group are amalgamated into a decision of the group as a whole (Riker 1986, ix, xi).

Of the three forms of political manipulation established by Riker – via. agenda control, strategic voting or by manipulation of dimensions, within the British polity agenda control is perhaps the most valuable, mainly because it can be used by parties and party leaders in order to “deny opponents policy or political space” (Bennister 2015, 168). Other tools used by the heresthetician operating within their political environment include the politics of ‘binding.’ Binding, based upon pre-commitment theory, is the ability of the individual to constrain others by the decision that is made, the rationale for this theory being that “in politics, people never try to bind themselves, only to bind others” (Elster 2000, 276-277).

Evidence of the manipulative techniques of agenda control and binding were both displayed by Major as he sought to keep his party together following the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, a period of just under four years until the 1997 election. Manipulation is often the poor brother of persuasion for politicians as they seek to carry out their agendas, but they are the tools leaders often reach for early on instead of later as they seek to persuade others. The cause is often necessitated by weakness, not strength.

First, agenda control. The crux of the dispute between the Europhiles and Eurosceptics within the PCP evolved around the timing of the UK’s entry into the single currency and chiefly whether it would be either in the possible first phase of entry in 1999 or not. Major would not reveal his preference, other than to say that he wished to keep Britain’s options open. This policy became known as



'negotiate and decide', or 'wait and see' (Lamont 2000, 112). It was also current and pressing, the next IGC due in 1996. Both sides of the debate were well aware of this.

The 'wait and see' or 'negotiate and decide' policy therefore enabled Major to meet two short-term objectives. First, the adoption of a compromise position allowed the Prime Minister to neutralise the issue and thereby dampen intra-party dissent (Lynch and Whitaker 2013, 332-333). Second, it gave Major clear agenda control over a toxic issue which could cause huge damage to the government's reputation and to his own leadership survival, not least from his principal pro-European Cabinet colleagues, Clarke and Heseltine. This was because the 'wait and see' policy allowed Major to portray himself, at different times, as in agreement with both wings of the party on Europe – famously at one point claiming himself to be the Cabinet's "greatest Euro-sceptic" (Baker et al 1993a, 157).

To some however, far from the act of a wily operator, to others, it came across instead simply as 'Ur-Major,' Brandreth noting in his *Diaries* as late as January 1997:

"The policy hasn't changed, but he's been able to give it a gloss that makes it much more evidently sceptical, will please the majority in the party but which won't do more than unsettle Ken [Clarke] and [Michael Heseltine]" (Brandreth 2000, 460).

And, in the main, it was successful, even at flashpoints the dissent remaining limited, with few if any resignations at either Cabinet-level or in the lower ministerial ranks, and when they did occur, at a low cost to the government (Lynch and Whitaker 2013). In 1996, for instance, when David Heathcoat-Amory resigned as Paymaster General (Heathcoat-Amory 2012, 78).

The 'Ur-Major' line on a single currency only came under serious threat of unravelling on the question of a referendum on the currency, something which for leading pro-Europeans such as Clarke and Heseltine was a resignation issue. Douglas Hurd had tried to raise the idea in late 1994, without success. The

Chancellor was therefore dismayed when it was raised again, in early 1996 (Clarke 2016, 370).

A showdown then ensued at Cabinet, when Heseltine (passionately) and Clarke spoke against:

“Even our usual allies deserted us but John, realising that his pressure had failed to move us, summed up by saying that we could not decide immediately. I had already told John that I would resign if he committed himself to a referendum” (Clarke 2016, 370).

A new compromise was then agreed, with Clarke free to declare he could foresee the economic circumstances for a single currency, which held until the 1997 election.

Despite Clarke’s ever increasing doubts as to Major’s views on a single currency – those close to him claim he was opposed (Lang 2017) – the Prime Minister’s ability to control the agenda by seemingly being in agreement of Eurosceptics and pro-Europeans alike on the issue at the same time is confirmed by Gyles Brandreth, seeing it favourably, contrary to his Diary entry (above):

“In retrospect, I think that one of his great skills was playing the mood of the moment in the room. I remember Ken Clarke felt he was totally with him on Europe. I also spent some time with Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, who was also convinced that John Major was with him on Europe. That would not have been possible to be with them both, because they both took diametrically opposing views. So clearly John Major was quiet skilled in doing what all politicians do, to an extent, which is listening to the mood around him and replaying it to you” (Brandreth 2017).

Others close to him flatly deny that he ever used such a tactic (Garel-Jones 2017).

The influence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer (from 1993) and Deputy Prime Minister (from 1995) during Major’s time as Prime Minister was also a further tool

in his armoury when it came to manipulating the PCP on the timing of entry into a single currency. It was also further evidence of 'binding' (Elster 2000).

As Hywel Williams explains:

“Politically, it suited Major to be considered a victim of the Clarke-Heseltine axis...for strategic reasons. Major often presented himself as the victim of the two big political mastodons when the going got tough. When he talked, for example, of being the ‘biggest Eurosceptic of them all’...he wished to signal a wealth of inner intentions frustrated by his senior colleagues” (Williams 1998, 33).

Norman Lamont, the former Chancellor and leading Eurosceptic, confirmed this, stating how he felt that Major had become Clarke and Heseltine’s “hostage. At times in conversation he seemed to relish being in that position. He was always telling backbenchers he couldn’t change his policy on Europe because the Chancellor wouldn’t let him” (Lamont 2000, 499).

Redwood also reported that whenever he brought any proposals on Europe to the Prime Minister, “Major just said to me, “I can’t do this because of Ken and I can’t do that because of Douglas [Hurd]” (Williams 1998, 88). A former Cabinet minister<sup>31</sup> confirms this to be the tactic as early as 1991:

“Yes, [he was influenced by pro-European members of his Cabinet]. I was surprised and startled when he said that he wanted to put Britain at the ‘heart of Europe.’ He’d said nothing to that effect in Cabinet and I had the impression he was becoming increasingly more sceptical. I really was rather surprised and dismayed [as someone who felt that they should be given a hard time] that he said that. Don’t forget he had Michael Heseltine, Ken Clarke and Douglas Hurd, they were his three senior ministers, and they were all passionate Europhiles. He recognised that he couldn’t have been anything other than that if he wanted to keep his government together because if any one of his senior ministers had resigned it would have caused a major trauma.”

---

<sup>31</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

John Major, however, by 1995 found the need to satisfy the sceptics and philes on Europe exhausting, which led him to his ultimate act of manipulation:

“For me, the strain and frustration of trying to maintain a balance between the two sides was immense. I was no longer willing to endure the pain, and was prepared to put the leadership to the hazard. I decided to give the parliamentary party the opportunity to replace me, taking from my shoulders the responsibility of keeping the Conservative Party together – or to re-endorse me, in which case I would be in a stronger position to do precisely that” (Major 1999, 616).

It was an act borne out of weakness, not strength however, for two reasons. First, the tactic was used “because all other alternative tactics utilized between autumn 1992 and June 1995 to dampen down the frenzy over European policy, (whether confidence votes, dissolution threats, withdrawal of the whip) had failed” (Heppell 2008a, 100-101). Secondly, it was an admission that his authority and legitimacy was in doubt, Major envisaging “a scenario within which his authority and legitimacy were reclaimed by an unopposed contest: his critics would be silenced and their silence would remain for the duration of the Parliament” (Heppell 2007b, 475).

Major clearly foresaw other advantages in his stance. First, it allowed him to control the ‘rules of the game’ by ‘structuring the world so that you can win’ (Riker 1986, ix), not least because of the element of surprise, which initially caught his opponents off guard. But also because it allowed the Prime Minister to quickly gain agreement from the Chairman of the backbench 1922 Committee, Marcus Fox, that there was to be no further contests during the remainder of the Parliament (Alderman 1996, 321, 327-328). The leadership issue would therefore seemingly be settled, for good.

The Prime Minister had also neutralised the biggest threat to his leadership: Michael Heseltine, by offering him the post of Deputy Prime Minister in early June 1995, in what was clearly seen as a ‘deal’ – something which Heseltine denies in

his own memoirs (Heseltine 2000, 478-483). A member of Major's own campaign team disputes this<sup>32</sup>, however:

"I think there probably was a 'deal' even though I had no evidence of it. I think it was more Michael said to John, un-asked, I'm not going to make life difficult for you, I've had a go at this, and I've got to behave myself now. In a sense Michael Heseltine's ambition was, by then, spent. He knew he was an elder statesman, which he still is, to be listened to."

Major also was able to gain an advantage as the incumbent, meaning that any challenge, particularly from outside the Cabinet by a known dissenter, would result in an overwhelming victory, as arguably occurred in 1989 with Sir Anthony Meyer's unsuccessful challenge to Mrs Thatcher (Cowley 1996, 81). The expectation had been at first that Lamont would be such a sacrificial 'stalking horse' – a view that Lamont was aware of, - but this all changed when Lamont went to see Major's *real* challenger following his resignation from the Cabinet, the former Welsh Secretary, John Redwood (Redwood 2017), noting how his campaign plans looked to have been months in the making (Lamont 2000, 439).

The dynamic of the contest therefore immediately changed. Major had to win, and win convincingly under this new scenario. But as a backbench member of the Major campaign recalled, the contest was never in doubt:

"PCP looked at Redwood support team - the rebels - and just went 'No.' There was always going to be a group who would vote for Redwood because they were unhappy. We had a figure. I think it was 210" (Former Minister A).

The party rules in the first ballot of a contested election also meant that a simple majority was not enough. For victory in this ballot a candidate had to receive an overall majority of those entitled to vote (and not just of those who actually did vote) and must also have a lead over the second candidate that amounts to at least fifteen per cent of those entitled to vote (Punnett 1993, 263; Heppell 2008a, 55).

---

<sup>32</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

In an electorate of 329 MPs, this meant John Major – under the rules – needed to gain the support of 165 MPs plus another fifteen per cent of the PCP, another fifty MPs, giving a total of 215 needed to ensure that there was no need for a repeat of the 1990 outcome for Margaret Thatcher and for a second leadership ballot (Heppell 2007b, 475). This extra hurdle in any contest, the so-called ‘fifteen per cent rule,’ failed to recognize an informal third: that John Major had to win ‘convincingly.’ A win under the rules was not good enough, a point reiterated by Heseltine throughout the contest (Cowley 1996, 80-83).

In order to win on the first ballot the Prime Minister and his team tactically placed him as the unity candidate, manipulating expectations both within the press and in the parliamentary party as to what would happen if the contest led to Major resigning and a second ballot taking place involving a possibly much wider field of candidates. All outcomes aside from a Major victory were characterized in the press and to MPs as ones that would lead to a party split, with the alternative candidates perceived to be from opposing sides within the PCP, particularly on the question of Europe (Alderman 1996; Heppell 2007b).

This was a clever and complex game by the Major campaign and was carried out with great skill, with the added advantage of the Redwood camp appearing to stall when his team could not claim any other senior ministers in support of his candidacy: Peter Lilley and Michael Portillo initially were seen as likely Redwood converts, but neither were prepared to come out into the open until the outcome of the first ballot was known. Michael Portillo and his supporters had the dilemma that they wanted Redwood to do well enough to ensure a second ballot, but not so well that his lead was unstoppable (Williams 1998, 87-90), as happened when Thatcher challenged Edward Heath in 1975 (Wickham-Jones 1997, Cowley and Bailey 2000).

What leading Eurosceptics in the Portillo camp feared more than an unstoppable Redwood was a second ballot victory for Heseltine, a Europhile and arch interventionist who was viewed on the Right with great suspicion following his return to Cabinet five years earlier. Whilst promoting their candidate as unity candidate, the Major camp therefore decided initially to inflate the Heseltine

threat to get Portillo's supporters to vote for the Prime Minister. They then used the fear of a Heseltine victory, later in the first week of the campaign, to put out further misinformation, claiming that Major's position was seriously haemorrhaging and that it was possible now that there were over one hundred anti-Major votes as Redwood was consolidating his position (Williams 1998, 87-120).

A high Redwood poll was equally appalling as a prospect to Heseltine's supporters, who responded to the Major camp's misinformation by leaking out their intention to vote for Major rather than Redwood. Portillo's bungled attempt to keep his own second ballot intentions secret only seemed to confirm the Heseltine camp's worst fears: Redwood was the figure on the Right with clear momentum. By the eve of poll the Major camp was manipulating expectations further, suggesting the Prime Minister was not going to achieve the 220 to 230 votes he needed to survive and that it looked like Redwood could now count upon up to 120 backbenchers (Williams 1998, 87-120).

The final result was a victory for the Major camp: Major 218 votes, Redwood 89 votes with 22 abstentions (Cowley 1996, 81). Major had won under the rules, being three votes over the number needed to meet both the first and second hurdle. Redwood acknowledged this immediately and conceded defeat. Major supporters ensured the "management of expectations" tactic was completed by going out to the waiting press to repeat that Major had won "convincingly" and that the leadership question was now settled (Alderman 1996, 327-328).

The fact remains that Major had won under the rules governing leadership ballots, but the Major camp made it very clear that if the Prime Minister got between 210 and 220 votes he was in a clear 'danger' zone (Williams 1998, 118). Was his victory 'convincing'? Had the informal third hurdle been achieved? Being as how it is informal, the final arbiter of any such decision as to continuation or not is down to the choice of the individual concerned. They ultimately set their own bar as to success or failure (Cowley 1996, 85). Major himself wrote of the 1995 first ballot result:

“It was three votes above the minimum I had set myself – less than I had hoped for, but more than I had feared. It was in the “grey” area...It was not really enough, but it was three votes too many to allow me to walk away” (Major 1999, 645-646).

Looking back, the most noticeable views of participants at the time is their reticence on how they voted, even twenty years on (Robathan 2017, Horam 2017), even if others admit that they did vote for Redwood to get Heseltine. The remainder of the author’s conversations indicated that largely Major retained the support of the PCP on the basis that ‘there was no alternative’ but the Prime Minister. Portillo was “[n]ever s[een]...as a leader [-] more gifted and interesting” (Maitland 2017). And of course apart from Portillo there was Clarke and Heseltine, but neither was acceptable to the PCP either, so maybe Michael Howard? But, as a former MP recalled:

“There was no alternative [to Major in 95].Who was the alternative? Anti-Europe people weren’t going to vote for Heseltine, who was their strongest figure, or Ken Clarke, so who are they going to vote for? Michael Howard was not trusted, rightly or wrongly. He is in fact a decent person” (Brandreth 2017).

### **5.5 Norton’s *Prime Ministerial Power: Major’s ability to hide***

Philip Norton (1987) transferred James David Barber’s four-fold character typology (defining presidents by groupings as either active-positive, active-negative, passive-positive and passive-negative) in his book *The Presidential Character* (Barber 1992, 8-11)<sup>33</sup> to Prime Ministerial studies, using it as a basis for his own analytical framework to examine Prime Ministerial power.

However, unlike Barber’s typology, Norton’s analytical framework can be differentiated in two ways: first, it adopts the orthodox, one-dimensional definition of power; second, it is suggestive rather than definitive and is neither predictive nor prescriptive. There is also the influence of Richard E Neustadt in his own thinking, Norton arguing that an examination of the ‘powers alone’ approach when examining Prime Ministerial power is not enough: the powers conferred by

---

<sup>33</sup> See chapter two



party leadership can enhance the powers of the Prime Minister, but does not guarantee them. To Norton, power in fact emerges from the interaction of three variables (two specific to the office of Prime Minister, one external): purpose, skill and circumstance. The one external variable, circumstance, - the power situation, - can be viewed as recognition of the importance of context by Norton in his analysis. Furthermore, similarly to Barber, Norton does initially seek to group post-war Prime Ministers into different categories in a four-fold typology based upon the purpose characteristics that they showed in office, labelling them as either innovators, reformers, egotists or balancers whilst in office (Norton 1987, 327-329).

The key variable for Norton however is political skill, for it is only through skill that a leader can be judged a success or a failure. This Norton breaks down into two types of skill. The first, the 'general skills' which a Prime Minister needs on an ongoing basis, are twofold: first, impression management – Prime Ministers need to be seen as 'prime ministerial' in the way they project themselves to the public; second, 'a feel for office,' which is the ability to know when and when not to deploy the specific skills available to them. The 'specific skills' a Prime Minister could choose to utilise in any given circumstance are: to select, to lead, to anticipate, or to react. In reacting or leading, a Prime Minister may seek to command, persuade, manipulate or hide. In having an awareness of which of these four strategic options to use in leading or reacting "constitutes a feel for office. Its deployment constitutes a specific skill" (Norton 1987, 332-334).

To command, a Prime Minister must be decisive in his decision-making, a command premiership witnessed in decisions being taken either before a Cabinet met to with Cabinet colleagues overwhelmingly concurring. If decision-making by command is not possible for a Prime Minister, persuasion is the next option, either at Cabinet or parliamentary party level, a Prime Minister needing to resort to a number of different tools at their disposal. These include: "via intellectual argument, the marshalling of superior data, force of oratory, appeals to loyalty or friendship, hectoring, or through what may be termed enchantment or sweet reasonableness." Being able to listen to another's point of view is a key part of persuasion, something some prime ministers were more able at than others. If

command and persuasion are not possible, this leaves the darker arts of persuasion available for a Prime Minister to get their way, through the use of manipulation. Manipulation is the principal use of particular powers or various unofficial 'devices' unique to the office of Prime Minister to achieve their ends. These can include the removing of an item off the agenda at Cabinet to be decided instead by individual ministers; or through the use of various ad hoc groupings to make decisions, such as Inner Cabinets (Norton 1987, 335-338).

The above skills have been discussed in previous sections of this chapter, particularly persuasion and manipulation, to command ruled out by both Neustadt (1990) and Greenstein (2000), largely because a political leader's ability to achieve such a position, in America and in Britain, is so rare<sup>34</sup>. Norton's final device, which has not been discussed previously in this chapter, is that, in certain situations, a Prime Minister may seek to hide. Simply defined, it means a Prime Minister being aware of when to let ministers "get on with their jobs," or, in a crisis, knowing "when to keep one's distance from a particular crisis." This is an important skill because Prime Ministers can do severe damage to their standing by becoming involved in another ministers department's business when things do go wrong. Hiding is therefore an important element in a Prime Minister's armoury (Norton 1987, 338-339).

To 'hide' is also a notable attachment to the skills discussed already, and should not, as may be assumed, be conflated with Major's ability to guard "his own stakes" by acting as his own intelligence officer (Ellis 2002, 290-294), seen over both the 1996 Scott Report and during the Neil Hamilton affair in the persuasion section of this chapter. There is a difference. One is an act of omission, because a political leader acquires knowledge but does not act upon it in order to protect their reputation. The other is an act of commission, because the political leader uses the knowledge gained in order to disassociate themselves from either an unpopular policy or minister.

There is evidence that Major 'hid' on a number of occasions, finding it very useful to let ministers become associated with their own high-profile policies and then let

---

<sup>34</sup> See chapter two.

them take the consequences when that policy failed. Michael Heseltine, Number 10 remaining suspicious about latent leadership ambitions despite his return to Cabinet, was a prime target for such a tactic. Lamont revealed after one discussion on the subject of Post Office privatisation, which eventually had to be dropped due to lack of backbench support in 1994:

“[Major] never remotely gave me that impression [of being in favour]. If anything I thought him against or inclined to give Heseltine just enough rope to hang himself on the issue” (Lamont 2000, 321).

This was not untypical of Major either: “[t]he Prime Minister was always aware of the importance of having winged members of his Cabinet – Ministers as damaged goods upon whose loyalty he could rely.” And there a number of ministers who could be described as such during the Major premiership, each one ‘winged’ as a result of a policy crisis or a governmental scandal. The list included Norman Lamont (Black Wednesday), Jonathan Aitken (Al Fayed), John Patten (education crises), William Waldegrave (Scott Report), Michael Heseltine (pit closures), and Douglas Hogg (BSE-CJD crisis) (Williams 1998, 22, 71, 156).

This desire to ‘hide’ was equally revealed in the resignation and dismissal of ministers, Major clearly wanting to disassociate himself entirely from the individual concerned once it became obvious that their position was untenable. On the matter of resignations however there is also evidence that Major was reluctant to lose Cabinet colleagues he was close to.

David Mellor is the prime example of this weakness in Major’s armoury. Mellor actually managed to keep his job as National Heritage Secretary throughout the summer and autumn of 1992 after it was revealed he was having an affair. It was only after new allegations of the affair emerged in the media before Sir Marcus Fox, the Chairman of the 1922 Committee, - note not the Prime Minister, – had to tell Mellor that his position within the PCP was now untenable (Doig 1993, 177).

The Mellor affair is not the only example of this tactic of procrastination and use of subordinates by Major. Arguably however, when Hamilton resigned as Minister of Trade in 1994, there were other matters in play, not least Hamilton’s continuing

pleadings of innocence. This made the situation much more problematic for Major, who wished to be seen to be acting in the interests of natural justice. Thus resignation only was an acceptable option for Major when it had become clear that the assurances Hamilton had given, to both Heseltine, and the Chief Whip, Richard Ryder, at previous meetings, were not sustainable. It was left to Heseltine and Ryder to tell Hamilton that his position was untenable (Heseltine 2000, 465).

Major's tactic of 'hiding' during a departmental crisis, and thereby attempting to divert attention from his own culpability, was most on display on September 16 1992, Black Wednesday (Sanders 1996). This could also be seen as evidence of 'binding' (Elster 2000), the Prime Minister making a clear attempt to manipulate circumstances to his advantage by the incorporation of other ministers in the decision.

During Black Wednesday Major's strategy was clear: despite being the man who, as Chancellor, had persuaded Thatcher to join the ERM in October 1990 (Kettel 2008), he wished to disassociate himself from the sole responsibility of exiting it<sup>35</sup>. Major was acutely aware that the political consequences of Black Wednesday would be a disastrous, both to his own position and that of the government as a whole. As Lamont revealed in his memoirs, this concerned Major more than the economic consequences (Lamont 2000, 285).

As a result he decided upon a two-pronged strategy which would alleviate his responsibility and negate the need for his resignation. First, he made sure that the decision upon interest rates and eventual withdrawal was made not just by Prime Minister and Chancellor alone, but, collectively, by the most senior ministers in his government, thus ensuring that they were automatically bound by the outcome. They were the Home Secretary (Ken Clarke), Foreign Secretary (Douglas Hurd) and President of the Board of Trade (Michael Heseltine), plus Sarah Hogg of the Policy Unit at Number 10 and Richard Ryder, as Chief Whip (Clarke 2016, 304).

---

<sup>35</sup> See chapter six

Second, aware of how vulnerable and exposed his own position would be following withdrawal, Major passed a note to Lamont during the day of the 16<sup>th</sup> telling him of his intention to not resign and that Lamont should not consider resigning either. Lamont agreed, despite realising later that by not resigning he had been used to deflect attention away from Major at a time of maximum weakness for the Prime Minister. He thus had become, in his own words, Major's "lightning rod" – a further 'hiding' manoeuvre by the Major. Norman Tebbit had warned Lamont he was being used: "I'd find an issue on which to resign if I were you. The two-faced bastard will push you in the end, when he feels safer and it is more convenient for him" (Lamont 2000, 251, 290, 372).

Others don't see Major's treatment of Lamont, nor his use of senior ministers, in such Machiavellian terms, one former Cabinet minister feeling it was much more straightforward on such a crucial, possibly momentous, – politically and economically, – day for the government<sup>36</sup>: "I don't think he had absolute faith in his own Chancellor, [hence Clarke, Heseltine, Hurd]."

Major also did feel a great sense of responsibility for the pound's withdrawal from the ERM, and seriously considered resignation:

"Yet my own instinct was clear: I should resign. I was not sure I could ever recover politically from the devaluation of the currency. The collapse of sterling was a catastrophic defeat, and one which I felt profoundly. It had been a traumatic day that would change the perception of the government: we were never again to enjoy the same confidence as before Black Wednesday" (Major 1999, 334-335).

### **5.6 Hargrove's skill in context: *Major's ability to discern***

Skill in context, Erwin Hargrove's own analytical framework examining political leadership in Presidential studies (Hargrove 1998, 2002), builds upon the work of Stephen Skowronek, who argued in his own fourfold typology of American Presidents that a President is limited in his structure of action (as Presidents of preemption, reconstruction, disjunction or articulation) by the historical political

---

<sup>36</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

context (Skowronek 1997, 4-6, 33-57). Skowronek makes no room in his own typology for either the personal attributes of Presidents, evidenced in the work of Greenstein, nor their skills politically (Hargrove 2002, 214). Hargrove seeks to fill this gap in Skowronek's work, explaining how skill and context are not mutually exclusive and can actually work in conjunction with each other (and other variables) in any analysis of American Presidents (Hargrove 2002, 213)<sup>37</sup>.

In developing his own multi-dimensional analytical framework on political leadership, Hargrove used a number of empirical and normative ideas to look at skill in context, incorporating concepts already recognised in other measures of political leadership - persuasion by bargaining, heresthetics, rhetoric in context, - whilst introducing new concepts that are seen by Hargrove as important to his own framework. These included: character as skill, looking at an individual's moral commitment and integrity, using the ideas of Max Weber; cultural leadership, examining an individual's skill at discernment and their ability to be prudent in their cultural environment; and finally, "teaching reality," not through demagogy but by vision (Hargrove 1998, 36, 41, 47).

To Hargrove a political leader's skills are meaningless without discernment, which he defines as: "the ability to estimate, more or less accurately, the kinds of action that will be successful in a given historical context" – it is the "master skill" in this regard. This argument adds a new layer of thinking to the concept of political skill and, as a result, changes the dynamic in its examination. It is tied to culture because an individual can only discern whether "to temper purpose with prudence so that action is realistic and does not overreach" by an understanding of the culture of the polity "well enough to make reasoned judgements about what is or was possible in a given context" (Hargrove 1998, 36, 41, 47).

Major presided over an exhausted coalition during his premiership, beginning, as it did, after over a decade of the premiership of Thatcher, and with no mandate from the electorate in 1990 (Theakston 2002, 314). Thus Major was a president of 'disjunction' within the Skowronek typology, as were the Carter and Bush Presidencies (Skowronek 1997). And similarly to Carter and Bush, who were to

---

<sup>37</sup> See chapter two

show their strengths in foreign affairs more than domestic policy during their presidencies, this is so also with Major, who was equally credited with his own foreign policy triumphs whilst in office. These included the successful negotiation of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 (Hargrove and Owens 2002, 202), as well as, with Bush, presiding over the successful Gulf War campaign in the same year (Hogg and Hill 1995, 37-48).

The historical political context which Major inherited in 1990 therefore ensured that he was bequeathed an unfavourable leadership environment by Thatcher (Theakston 2002, 300-306), made even more problematic in the 1992 Parliament by the government being returned at the 1992 election with a much reduced majority of only twenty-one seats (Butler and Kavanagh 1992).

Arguably the most poisonous legacy, at an intra-party level, of the Thatcher era was the issue of Europe and further integration into the EU. As a former MP recalled:

“We were seized by a kind of a suicide-mania, with Euroscepticism as the Mission Statement” (Maitland 2017).

It was Europe which ultimately destroyed the Conservative Party’s successful use of statecraft (Bulpitt 1986), which had been deployed by Mrs Thatcher since 1979 and which had contributed to her electoral success in the 1983 and 1987 elections (Stevens 2002, 144). Under Major however Conservative Party statecraft was seemingly now in jeopardy, thus increasing the risk of government defeat at a general election in, which occurred in 1997 (King 1998).

Major was self-aware of his constraints and predicament, even on the night of April 9 1992, accepting that the electoral elastic had been stretched to its limit for the Conservative Party, and victory was unlikely to be repeated at the next election (Seldon 1997, 287). Therefore Major had seemingly correctly deduced the new political environment his victory in 1992 had created, the prospect of facing a small majority, the legacy of his predecessor Thatcher and the divisive issue of Europe soon be added to by the presence of a modernised opposition led by Tony Blair (McAnulla 1999, 193-194). To sympathisers such as Seldon,

Major's response to his difficult political environment, particularly during the 1992 Parliament, was not weak, but instead "exactly what was required for the times" (Seldon 1997, 742-743).

A similar proposition could be argued in respect of the current Conservative Prime Minister, Theresa May, as she seeks to control her party on the issue of Brexit in "today's national psycho-drama" (Patten 2017b). To sympathisers with Major, such as former MP Gyles Brandreth, the travails of Theresa May over Brexit have led him to reflect upon the 'frustrations' with Major he had revealed in his *Diaries* as a Whip during the 1992 Parliament (2000), leading him view the former Prime Minister today in a different way:

"I think his problem, I realise now, and some of what we found frustrating, was inevitable because of the impossible situation that he was in, which was at the end of a long term of the Conservatives being in power. And it was difficult to maintain the troops, because you had people who were disaffected, to whom you could offer nothing, because people knew that they were going to win, or they were going to lose, the 1997 election. You could promise them nothing. They weren't going to get advancement. They were likely to lose their seats. They had got nothing to lose, except that the defeat would have been greater. So, in retrospect, I've come to see his handling of it all as quite skilful" (Brandreth 2017).

Brandreth's view is contradicted by another former MP and Maastricht rebel however, who lays the blame for the travails of the PCP during the 1992 Parliament solely on Major's leadership:

"It was a culmination of things post White Wednesday. There was no leadership, just a sense of chaos, and no plan, and no way forward, and every time he tried to rescue things he fell flat on his face. He wasn't a bad man, far from it, but he wasn't a leader" (Robathan 2017).

Therefore an argument can be made that Major as Prime Minister did correctly discern the political environment he inherited and, as a result, was able to deal with events in a way that was exactly what was required at the time, as Seldon



had argued (Seldon 1997). As Brandreth and Robathan's opinions on Major reveal however over the Prime Minister's approach during the 1992 Parliament however, the question of context and John Major's political leadership can be contested<sup>38</sup>.

## 5.7 Conclusion

Kevin Theakston best summed up the general feeling on 'Major the political operator' when he argued that:

"John Major showed great dexterity in 'micro' politics, one-to-one negotiation, conciliation and man-management, drawing on his skills and experience as a former whip. He excelled at networking, the deployment of charm and cultivating personal relationships. What had been strengths when a desperate party turned to him in 1990 later appeared to be weaknesses, however, during the Tory descent into faction-fighting and virtual civil war on the European issue, when Major seemed to be at the mercy of events and of party rebels rather than being able to impose himself on both" (Theakston 2007, 238).

Some simply dismiss Major's leadership entirely, Theakston's views on Major's effective deployment of 'man-management' regarded instead as ineffective 'niceness' and thus weakness. As another former MP asserted:

"He didn't have any enemies. He was nice to everybody, and that paid great dividends. That's a good formula for being a junior whip, but not a very good formula for being Chief Whip, and it's a hopeless formula for being PM" (Davies 2017).

But is it fair to suggest that Major lacked political skill? In fact, far from the characterisations at the time in the media and amongst Major's PCP colleagues, a contrary position can be argued. That Major, far from being a weak political leader, was in fact a tough, determined, political operator - characteristics only possible for a person who reaches the top of politics (Heffernan 2003, 351).

---

<sup>38</sup> See chapter eight

Major was an effective, tough, negotiator (Lyne 2017, Turnbull 2017). He was equally an effective manipulator, skilled at agenda control and binding (Brandreth 2017). As a consequence Major was able to keep his party cohesive on the most toxic issue to face his government: the UK's possible entry into a single currency, 1999 the earliest date proposed at the 1996 IGC. Major was skilled in another aspect of manipulative politics, 'hiding,' successfully disassociating himself from controversial policies and ministerial personnel during his premiership. Finally, it is arguable that Major also effectively discerned the political environment he faced at the 1992 election, navigating his government through an 'impossible' period with the possibility of heavy election defeat a constant prospect (Brandreth 2017).

It was these four skills that arguably enabled Major to survive as Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party against expectations during one of the most turbulent periods in the Conservative Party's history, comparisons made early in the 1992 Parliament of Major's plight and Robert Peel's Corn Laws crisis of 1846 and Arthur Balfour's travails on tariff reform in 1906 – thus implying the party could split on the issue of Europe (Baker et al 1993a).

Yet Major was able during his premiership to placate the Eurosceptic and Europhile wings of the PCP, win a renewed leadership mandate in 1995, and rebuff challenges from a host of rivals who were regularly seen as Prime Ministers in waiting in the event of Major's expected resignation. Ken Clarke, Michael Heseltine, Michael Portillo, Michael Howard and John Redwood were only a handful of those promoted as such at the time. This was despite the PCP seemingly having no appetite for a change of leader at the time (Maitland 2017, Brandreth 2017).

Major therefore arguably displayed strength, not weakness, during his premiership, achieved through the Prime Minister's use of an acutely alert political antennae. However, reputations in the British polity, once established, are very difficult to shake off, and "[t]he impression that John Major was a weak prime minister for much of his time in office was shared by those he needed to

influence as a whole, not just specific sections of the Whitehall Westminster community” (Ellis 2002, 48).

The reason for the perception of weakness was caused by Major’s failure at the second of the five skills analysed within this chapter: persuasion (Neustadt 1990). In particular Major’s own threats to end the life of the government by making a series of votes on EU legislation a matter of confidence, enforced through the sometimes heavy handed tactics deployed by the Whips’ Office (Baker et al 1994). The threats were arguably effective from an adherence perspective, since Major succeeded in carrying the Maastricht ‘Paving’ Vote in 1992, the Social Chapter protocol motion in 1993 and, finally, the EU budget contribution legislation in 1994.

The price for such success was at a great cost however, destroying the Conservative Party’s reputation for unity (Crewe 1996). Furthermore, such threats destroyed Major’s own reputation and prestige, because once the threats were made the Prime Minister had to carry them out, only exacerbating party tensions and further highlighting division. It also was to cost Major his majority, as occurred in November 1994 when the whip was withdrawn from nine PCP members. Such threats therefore were borne from weakness not strength, a final act of desperation by a Prime Minister facing parliamentary defeat.

Major himself was to lament later in his memoirs upon the issue of Europe and the travails which engulfed him throughout the 1992 Parliament:

“And I, of course, must ask – as I constantly do – how I might have turned the situation around. Was there something I could have said, some policy I could have adopted, someone I should have fired, someone I could have hired, a speech, a broadcast, an argument which might have begun my party’s journey back to sanity? Could a different man have done it? If so, I am no closer in my mind now to answering those questions than I was when they tormented me at the time” (Major 1999, 384).

Problematically for Major, the tactics deployed by the Whips’ Office during the 1992 to 1997 Parliament, of which he was fully aware (Brandreth 2017), did play

a significant role in the perceptions of both his own weakness and intra-party division which would lead to the eventual downfall of the government in 1997. And due to this, despite displaying effectively the attributes recognised in the other skill categories, by Major's failure to persuade he fatally undermined his own political leadership, and that of his government.

## **Chapter Six: Vision**

In order to examine whether Major was able to offer a new vision of Conservatism under the Greenstein criteria this chapter is divided into four sections which each represent an element of vision within the criteria (Greenstein 2009a). The first section will be an examination of Major's "overarching goals" at an ideational level and will seek to locate his brand of Conservatism within the Thatcherite legacy. The second section will look at Major's "preoccupation with policies" and "ability to assess their feasibility," and in so doing will examine the policies of the Major government and seek to establish whether they constituted a distinctive policy agenda. The third section will examine Major's "consistency of viewpoint" and look to examine how much the Prime Minister was able to retain a rigid focus on his policy agenda throughout his time in office without deviating away from it. The final section will be devoted to John Major's "capacity to inspire" at a discursive level, as he sought to galvanise, importantly, both his party base and the nation as a whole towards his policy priorities and principles. Major's ability to inspire, or not, is relevant because it may help to explain why the Majorite agenda may not have had as much impact as Thatcherism on Conservative thought during his time as Prime Minister. The chapter will then conclude by answering the question as to whether Major had or lacked a public policy vision during his time in office as Prime Minister, or qualified for any of its components, under the Greenstein criteria. It will also include an examination of Major's impact on post-Thatcherite Conservatism and the British polity since 1997, which has largely been overlooked within previous studies.

### **6.1 Introduction**

Greenstein defines vision as bearing on "the president as a political operator – his political skill and the extent to which it is harnessed to a vision of public policy" (Greenstein 2000, 5). But Greenstein acknowledges that the meaning of "vision" itself has "a variety of connotations." One is "the capacity to inspire. In this the rhetorically gifted presidents...excelled." However:

"In the narrower meaning employed here, "vision" refers to preoccupation with the content of policies, an ability to assess their feasibility, and the possession

of overarching goals...Vision also encompasses consistency of viewpoint. In effect they serve as anchors for the rest of the political community” (Greenstein 2009a, 228).

As Bose explains regarding these components:

“Greenstein points out that vision involves several characteristics, from inspiration to a clear set of goals and policy content...while [some of the most inspirational presidents] were not unyielding in the specifics of their policy programs, their ability to focus on a few key goals, whether they be rejuvenating the economy, cutting taxes, or increasing the defence budget, illustrates a laser beam attention to their policy agenda” (Bose 2006, 30).

The interconnection between public policy vision and political skill – the only two leadership criteria which are linked in such a way - is significant because it is as a remedy to the final criticism Greenstein highlights in his own critique of Richard E Neustadt’s *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (1990), one of the most important influences on his own analytical framework. As Greenstein argued: “Neustadt’s formulation needs to be amended to take account of the importance of harnessing a president’s political skills to a realistic vision of policy” (Greenstein 2006, 19)<sup>39</sup>.

Bose not only supports Greenstein, but goes further by suggesting that vision should be ranked first out of the six criteria, stating:

“Studies of presidential leadership repeatedly stress the importance of vision...A president who does not have a readily definable agenda risks being guided by events, advisors, or the agenda of other politicians” (Bose 2006, 29).

Greenstein is even blunter on a presidency lacking vision, even if under his own framework he is not prepared to rank each of his own leadership criteria: “The costs of a vision-free leadership include internally contradictory programs, policies that have unintended consequences, and sheer drift (Greenstein 2000, 198).

---

<sup>39</sup> See chapter two

Bose argued that Jimmy Carter was perhaps the least visionary of all modern Presidents, in direct contrast to his successor, Ronald Reagan. Greenstein agrees, arguing very early in the Reagan presidency that, in comparison to Carter, “the general direction is always identifiable, no small advantage for influencing the policy agenda” (Greenstein 1983, 173).

But there were presidents who could still achieve policy success despite lacking vision, as Bose acknowledges, thus seeming to place doubt on her own ranking system:

“A lack of vision may not doom an administration – Clinton, after all, was elected to two terms in office despite a policy agenda that was more reactive to his opposition than effective in setting its own direction. Nevertheless, vision establishes the tone for an administration, shapes the agenda, and marks a president’s clearest legacy” (Bose 2006, 30).

Despite the attention put on ‘the vision-thing’ within presidential studies, Greenstein admits that “the class of presidential pragmatists...includes the bulk of modern chief executives” (Greenstein 2009a, 228). The same could be said within the British polity, where “vision-driven prime ministers have been the exception not the rule. With the traditional model of collective Cabinet and party government it may not have mattered too much that many prime ministers did not provide distinctive policy agendas.” Therefore, in Britain:

“The ‘vision thing’ is not about a leader having an ‘ism’ in a dogmatic ideological sense, but possessing and articulating long-term goals and some overarching ideas and priorities that can provide coherence for the government and give it a sense of direction and purpose” (Theakston 2011, 90).

This is important because it highlights the fact that ideology is not automatically a necessity when looking at a British Prime Minister’s public policy vision: evidence of “goals,” “ideas and priorities” and “direction and purpose” can be just as valid. The emergence of ideology in the connotations associated with visionary leadership arguably emerged only when Major’s predecessor, Margaret Thatcher, became Prime Minister, “an opinionated and crusading “conviction politician”,

with a radical vision and a driving sense of mission, leading from the front and battling to impose her views on party, government and society” (Theakston 2007, 239).

As a consequence of the premiership of Margaret Thatcher, “parties and the mass media expect leaders to come up with a ‘narrative,’ set out clear long-term goals and provide a strong sense of direction for their governments” (Theakston 2012, 204). This narrative must also be “consistent and feasible” (Buller and James 2012, 537). A new benchmark was therefore set for future political leaders by Thatcher in terms of the relationship between vision and leadership. Major was the first British premier to assume office with the unenviable position of having to follow Thatcher and her very striking visionary style of leadership; so striking in fact that her period of government entered the political lexicon under the label ‘Thatcherism’ (Kavanagh 1997, 200).

Comparisons were inevitably made between the two leaders, much to Major’s irritation (Major 1991a), some looking to examine whether Major during his tenure as Prime Minister was able to offer a new direction in Conservative philosophy combined with a distinctive policy agenda: ‘Majorism,’ with all the other components associated with visionary leadership. Or whether, as Clarke felt, the government of John Major was no more than ‘Thatcherism with a human face’ (Clarke 2016, 254), a mere continuation rather than a break with the Thatcherite agenda, Major thereby failing to offer a new vision of post-Thatcherite Conservatism under his leadership. To these two considerations could be added a further one: John Major’s impact on later Conservative thought and the British polity since leaving office, Major self-aware that his efforts to “nudge Conservatism towards its compassionate roots” (Major 1999, 214) were only in their infancy during his premiership.

## **6.2 Direction**

Attempts at offering an alternative vision of Conservatism and a new direction to his government were to prove problematic for Major from the outset. This was in no small part due to the fact that:



“Since the 1980s, the ideational context for both conservatism and the Conservative Party has been defined by Thatcherism. The Thatcherite legacy has shaped and constrained Conservative political thinking, communication, policy-making and statecraft” (Hayton 2012b, 26).

The ideational constraints imposed by the Thatcherite legacy were to be in operation throughout Major’s premiership. This was at a point in time when arguably the need for an alternative vision was becoming ever more apparent in order to reinvigorate Conservatism thinking for the next century, since after a decade of Thatcherism the nation was now seemingly growing tired of this brand of Conservatism as its effects were felt more and more in communities. This was being reflected in social attitude surveys throughout the 1980s. An ideological disjuncture was therefore being created between the Conservative Party and the electorate which would only increase further if the Thatcherite agenda was allowed to continue (Dorey 1999b, 247-248).

What was most troubling of all for the new Prime Minister as he sought to offer an alternate vision was the constant presence of Margaret Thatcher herself, who made her intentions very clear immediately following Major’s victory, announcing: “I shall be a very good back-seat driver” (Major 1999, 200). This was immediately to create tensions between the two of them which were only to grow, as Major explained in his memoirs:

“The comment was not made with malice, but it had a malign effect. It implied that after she left Downing Street she would be making decisions about how things are run – and that was never going to be the case. Her comments ensured that if I continued with policies she had advocated I would simply be regarded as the ‘son of Thatcher’; while if I did not it would be said that I was “wrecking her legacy”. That, of course, is exactly how it turned out. The comment forced a wedge between us that was to grow wider as month succeeded month” (Major 1999, 200).

She could also be deeply hurtful at times. Even in April 1992, when Major had won the general election, Thatcher could not resist reminding the newly re-elected Prime Minister of *her* achievements: “I don’t accept that all of a sudden

Major is his own man,” scathingly pointing out that Major had *only* been Prime Minister “for seventeen months,” and was thus still the beneficiary of “all these great achievements over the past eleven-and-half years which have fundamentally changed Britain” (*Newsweek*, 27 April 1992). Therefore, Thatcher’s legacy became “a frame of reference that only she could define with any authority...[and] became a device by which the deposed prime minister could retain some sense of controlling influence” (Foley 2002, 60).

The cause of Thatcher’s early doubts towards Major may possibly have come from the appointment of Heseltine to the Department of the Environment following the 1990 contest, despite the fact that it “kept the interventionist away from [the Department of] Industry” (Gilmour and Garnett 1998, 352). Nigel Lawson feels her attitude was a state of mind however, already apparent during the 1990 contest: “As for the three candidates [Major, Hurd and Heseltine] who did put their names forward...none of them was a Thatcherite. The fact that Margaret was under the impression that John was one, and backed him accordingly, merely underlined how out of touch she had become” (Lawson 1992, 1002).

Revealingly, John Wakeham confirmed that, once she had resigned, he had told Thatcher:

“My advice to you is to say nothing during the second ballot, and leave it blank [in order to maximise Major’s vote from all wings of the party], and I’ll do the same, but she found it impossible to keep quiet” (Wakeham 2017).

As Teresa Gorman asserts, other members of the Thatcherite contingent within PCP were left feeling equally “self-deluded...into thinking [John Major] was our man...partly because he was Margaret Thatcher’s choice, and partly because we considered him best to beat Michael Heseltine” (Gorman 1993, 21-22). This ‘self-delusion’ is confirmed by Ken Clarke, who felt, when Major and Hurd declared, that “John Major was obviously the most left-wing of the two, slightly shading Douglas Hurd” (Clarke 2016, 250). Clarke’s view thus only confirms the ambiguity surrounding John Major’s true beliefs in 1990.

Thatcher would always appear when Major was appearing to be not adhering to what she saw as her mantras, whether that be around the Thatcherite totems of strong leadership, free market neo-liberal economics or fervent English nationalist Euroscepticism – any evidence in fact of an erosion of her legacy (Dorey 1999b, 223).

Europe and the national sovereignty were particular concerns for her, using her two memoirs to accuse Major of “intellectually...drifting with the tide” (Thatcher 1993, 721) and to argue that her position had been “entirely reversed” on the issue of further European integration in Major’s quest to see Britain “at the heart of Europe” and in agreeing to the Maastricht Treaty (Thatcher 1995, 474-476). Her interventions would often lead to the appearance of one of her supporters on College Green outside Parliament such was her continuing influence amongst members of the PCP (Heseltine 2000, 518).

Though Major could have handled Thatcher with more sensitivity at times, as one mutual friend commented to Seldon:

“She behaved very badly at every level: she gossiped, she put out messages, she withheld support. She used all her political cunning to knife him and stab him and demoralise and weaken him. Above all else she was thinking, “He’s doing my job, how dare he?” (Seldon 1997, 254-255).

But her interventions were equally arguably overstated, as is confirmed by Jonathan Hill:

“[I]t wasn’t a big thing. Was she hanging over us in a big way? No. Was she enormously helpful? No she wasn’t” (Hill 2017).

And Major had in fact, as is confirmed by a former Cabinet colleague, “[N]o view to undermine her”:

“He just had a view to present what she had done and continue it in a more moderate and comprehensible and accessible way. And above all what John Major did in seven years was to enshrine Margaret Thatcher’s changes, and I think that is very important and often overlooked” (Lang 2017).

Yet by the end of the 1992 Parliament, Major also had managed to equally disillusion the One Nation progressive wing of the Conservative Party, who had expected a more 'humane' Conservatism rather than a continuation of the harshness of Thatcherism after the Prime Minister had talked of a 'classless society.' The end result was the defection of three Conservative MPs (Dorey 1999b, 219-222).

One, Emma Nicholson, who defected to the Liberal Democrats in December 1995, recalled in her memoirs how the Major government's direction was particularly "pernicious. Far from desiring the greatest good for the greatest number of people and acting in accordance with that common aim, they wanted to hurt, not to heal; to crush not to be compassionate with the weakest" (Nicholson 1996, 211).

The Thatcher legacy bequeathed to Major was therefore not a golden one, but rather a poisoned chalice, such was the effect of Thatcherite ideology on Conservatism, and personified in the presence of Thatcher herself. The disadvantages were therefore threefold to Major: first, the expectation amongst the party faithful and PCP that political leadership must be radical and purposeful; second, that, despite already beginning to lose its appeal, free market economics and populist [nationalism] were electorally effective; and, finally, a party divided upon the issue of national sovereignty and further integration to Europe with Euroscepticism in the ascendancy (Evans and Taylor 1996, 248).

Clearly however Major had not helped himself as he sought to placate the ideological schism at the heart of Conservatism "by appearing," as has already been seen (Clarke 2016, Gorman 1993), "Janus-faced" during the 1990 contest in which:

"One face looked back to the traditions of progressive Conservatism, claiming ideological influences such as Iain Macleod...But his other face looked forward to continuing the Thatcherite revolution: to making the state more efficient, cutting public expenditure and squeezing inflation out of the economy" (Ludlam and Smith 1996c, 273).

As a consequence, “[e]ven as he was being elected leader, closest colleagues were uncertain of what ideological baggage he carried into the post” (Ludlam and Smith 1996c, 273). Major was therefore a blank canvass at an ideational level to the majority of the PCP, each wing of the party having high expectations as to the future direction of his premiership.

The decision to remain unconstrained ideologically by the Prime Minister was a political calculation on two levels. First, as early as 1987 Major felt his best chance of acquiring the party leadership was to not take sides ideologically and stay above faction, thus ensuring he could obtain the maximum possible support within the PCP (Gilmour and Garnett 1998, 350-351). Second, by having no recognisable ideological underpinnings, Major was able to ensure that, when he did become Prime Minister, he could differentiate himself from his predecessor and thereby promote his premiership as the antidote to Thatcherism, both as a means to obtain party unity and to appeal to the electorate as a whole (Stevens 2002, 134-135).

Therefore there would be no replacement of Thatcherism by ‘Majorism’ (Kavanagh 1997, 200-201), as confirmed by Major himself in his memoirs when some of the Downing Street staff floated the idea of a Majorite agenda in 1991:

“This prompted some talk of ‘Majorism’. I discouraged it. The Conservative Party does not belong to any one individual. The ‘ism’ I wished to promote was a traditional Conservatism tempered with an understanding of and sympathy for life at many levels” (Major 1999, 204).

The Prime Minister’s instinctive suspicion of ideas and anything remotely close to an ideology was genuinely driven by a belief that “they disrupted the natural channel of communication, negotiation and compromise.” And for “a gifted political broker like John Major,” “intellectual intransigence contributed neither to party integration nor to governmental coherence. On the contrary, it represented a danger to both” (Foley 2002, 28). As a consequence, Major was content with the perception that the nation would be “governed by a Conservative Party in which ideology, vision, conviction are no longer to be the principle driving forces” (*Financial Times*, November 30 1990).

This still did not stop the pressure, almost immediately, for Major to produce his own 'big idea' and express the overarching goals for his administration post-Thatcher (Hogg and Hill 1995, 84). This was to prove problematic when Major did not seemingly do so, his detractors within the PCP quickly conflating "a lack of leadership" as arising "from a lack of vision, of any clear picture of where the Conservative Party wished to lead the nation, even of why it was in power at all" (Nicholson 1996, 152). This view was reiterated by others, Lord Young writing: "The trouble with John Major is that he doesn't believe in anything or look more than forty-eight hours ahead" (Gilmour and Garnett 1998, 377).

Major, despite once telling Lamont that they should hold a seminar on "what we believed in" (Lamont 2000, 35), did have a set of beliefs and principles that was recognised by others. As Hurd recalled in his memoirs: "[o]ut of our different backgrounds he and I believed [in]...the same concept of calm, generous-minded Conservatism which could be accepted by a nation at ease with itself" (Hurd 2003, 416).

To Ken Clarke, "in his whole presentation he was 'Thatcherism with a human face' (Clarke 2016, 254). And Major, in his own memoirs agrees, saying how during his premiership he tried to "nudge Conservatism towards its compassionate roots" (Major 1999, 214). Others however detected no such "nudge" or anything like it, Ian Lang claiming by 1994 that Major is "more Thatcherite than the lady herself" (Ludlam and Smith 1996a, 17).

There is evidence to suggest Major, at an ideational level, did indeed try to nudge the direction of Conservatism towards a more progressive, One Nation agenda (Hayton 2012b, 27-28) after Thatcher, but that this was largely at a cosmetic and rhetorical level (Dorey 1999b, 226), the direction of travel for the government being very much with a continuation of the Thatcherite agenda (Gamble 1996). Thus the Major government could best be described as a period of "late Thatcherism" when the radicalism of Mrs Thatcher was to become fully realised (McAnulla 1999, 199).

The One Nation, more progressive Conservatism Major wanted to promote arguably began on the steps of Downing Street on November 28 1990, and were

to percolate his rhetoric throughout his first government, when the new Prime Minister talked about wanting “a country at ease with itself” (Major 1990a).

Major defined what he meant by this in a speech some months later, invoking Iain Macleod:

“We must constantly strive to create a society which, as that great British Conservative the late Iain Macleod used to put it, is more efficient, more tolerant, and more just. We want to engender what you would call the “social solidarity” of a nation – and what I have called “a nation at ease with itself” (Major 1991b, 11).

In his first speech after becoming Prime Minister he elaborated further on his new vision, when he talked of wanting:

“a truly open society. Open because we believe that every man and woman should be able to go as far as their talent, ambition and effort take them. There should be no artificial barrier of background, religion or race...And yes, amidst the inevitable competitive thrust of life, it should be a compassionate society. Genuinely compassionate - because some people do need a special helping hand to help them enjoy a full life of choice and independence...And a classless society: not in the grey sense of drab uniformity - but in the sense that we remove the artificial barriers to choice and achievement” (Major 1990b).

Social mobility, particularly a ‘classless society’ had formed a central plank of Major’s 1990 leadership bid, partly as a means to differentiate himself from his Old Etonian opponent Hurd (Anderson 1991, 341). And Major, when he did become Prime Minister, felt it had been an overlooked area of policy by Thatcher which should be addressed. As he stated:

“A huge amount had been achieved by Margaret Thatcher – low taxes and the sale of council houses being obvious examples – but I was alert to the danger that these advantages might exclude a large minority. I wanted to ensure that they were not left out of the new prosperity” (Major 1999, 204-205).

And such a viewpoint had historic underpinnings:

“I think the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he,” said Lt Colonel Thomas Rainsborough, speaking during the Putney Debates of 1647. I agreed with that three-hundred-year-old sentiment, which explains why I spoke of a “classless society”: not a society without difference, but one without barriers” (Major 1999, 204-205).

This was also a genuine expression of Major’s beliefs, as Hogg states: “John Major was sensitive to misfortune, tolerant of diversity, and a living example of the ‘Britain without barriers,’ the ‘classless society’ and the ‘nation at ease with itself’ he wished to create“ (Hogg and Hill 1995, 83).

Hill confirms this:

“Did I think those phrases and some of those concerns were an emanation of what he was like as a person and what his interests were and where he was situated in the Conservative Party in Britain then, yes, I would, and I think all of that stuff was completely authentic to him. Was there a big intellectual background to it, no there wasn’t” (Hill 2017).

Indeed, his loathing of class distinction came from his time at Rutlish Grammar School in the 1950s, in which he recalls to Seldon how the idea that some were regarded as better than others as a “total anathema” to him. His social liberalism also ran deep as well, others commenting how Major “feels very deeply” about discrimination (Seldon 1997, 12, 215).

As Major recalled in his memoirs, it was “the core of what I cared about.” And as far as Major was concerned, this compassionate agenda was not new: “it has often been a Conservative cry. It was the sort of Conservatism, exemplified by Iain Macleod, that had attracted so many of my generation to the centre-right of politics” (Major 1999, 204).

Others also saw Major as firmly in the MacLeod mould, as a former MP recalls: “Ultimately I would say John Major was the epitome of a One Nation Conservative/Iain MacLeod tradition” (Hawkins 2017). It was also arguably a new and very early strand of post-Thatcherite thinking within Conservatism which was to develop in later years (Hayton 2012b, 31-35, 103).



Whilst however the new softer version of Thatcherism Major was emulating was proving popular in his first months as Prime Minister (Evans and Taylor 1996, 252) it did not greatly inform government policy, at only except a peripheral level (Foley 2000, 82). This was witnessed in the unclear way it provided the overall direction for the first Queen's Speech after the 1992 election when Major talked of "no barriers, no glass ceilings" for the individual, – Riddell describing the speech as coming as close "as he ever does towards offering a vision" (Seldon 1997, 291). And no woman was in Major's first Cabinet, which did not sit well with talk of an 'open' and 'classless society' and was immediately ridiculed (Hogg and Hill 1995, 11).

As a result it was quickly viewed as a mere rhetorical device (Gilmour and Garnett 1998, 357), more cosmetic than real – "an updated product, not a new brand" - designed purely as a strategy to differentiate himself from his predecessor (Butler and Kavanagh 1992, 39). Indeed, as if to prove this, by the 1993 Party Conference Major was to have shifted his rhetoric and policy direction almost full circle, from compassionate social liberalism to a social conservatism which was much more traditional in outlook, telling his party how he wished to return the country 'Back to Basics,' a message that had clear moral undertones in its support for 'traditional family values' (Major 1993b; Evans and Taylor 1996, 266). The two positions were diametrically opposite, both rhetorically and philosophically.

Major in fact remained "a deeply Conservative man" who equally became so due to his early life experience and which shaped his political goals in office, as Hogg states: "The journey from Brixton to Huntingdon had left him with strong convictions about the dignity of personal ownership, and a desire to give people more direct control over bureaucracy" (Hogg and Hill 1995, 7)

And this had an impact on Major's own approach to policy:

"These instincts underlay his hatred of inflation, his commitment to privatisation, to open markets. He shared these with his predecessor. They also led him to develop an approach to public services which did not contradict

what had gone before – but filled a clear gap in 1980s Conservatism” (Hogg and Hill 1995, 7, 83).

A former minister confirms this: “He was economically quite dry, very much in the Thatcher tradition” (Former Minister B).

This Major proved in his Carlton Club lecture in 1993, when the Prime Minister was asked to give his outlook for a lecture entitled: *Conservatism in the 1990s: Our Common Purpose* (Major 1993a). At the Carlton Club Major began by talking about how he had reiterated his compassionate agenda during the 1992 election of “a classless society” and “a nation at ease with itself,” this time invoking Benjamin Disraeli, before firmly placing himself within Thatcherite ideology by saying that his brand of Conservatism was guided by four principles: “choice, ownership, responsibility and opportunity for all” – which amounted to a firm defence of free market neo-liberalism and support for the individual as opposed to the state (Evans and Taylor 1996, 266). As Major stated:

“We believe in fostering tolerance by respecting the individual; by respecting every citizen’s power to choose and right to own. It is on those instincts...of the individual that Conservatism is founded...Look around you. It is not where the free market pervades that ties of community are under threat; it is where the State owns and controls to the greatest extent that you find great difficulties and great threats” (Major 1993a, 11, 14, 16).

Problems therefore in the economy continued to be blamed on market rigidities and the state as being a threat to individual freedom and choice, with growth only possible when these were removed: a clear continuity of direction with the Thatcherite neo-liberal agenda (Gamble 1996, 32).

Indeed, Thatcherite neo-liberalism seemed to have become the centre ground within the Conservative Party after a decade of Thatcherite economics (Ludlam and Smith 1996a, 17). This new found centre ground allowed Major to say a year later how he wished to take Thatcherite economic liberalism even further:

“In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher began to roll back the frontiers of the state, with privatisation, deregulation, and the restoration of personal incentives...But

more is needed...At all levels my ambition is smaller government, efficient government, effective government, responsive government” (Major 1994).

This Major did as he introduced further market reforms to the state, including even further into health and education (Gamble 1996, 33).

At an intra-party level, perhaps the most problematic attempted changes to the direction of the government for John Major was on the issue of further European integration. Less than six months into his premiership, in March 1991, he told a German audience:

“My aims for Britain in the Community can be simply stated. I want us to be where we belong – at the very heart of Europe, working with our partners in building the future” (Major 1991b, 12).

As Hogg states, this speech “spelt out – not in detail, but in outline – his vision of a free market Europe, based upon nation states, open to the new democracies of the east, a bulwark of peace as well as an engine of prosperity” (Hogg and Hill 1995, 78).

The softening of the Thatcherite tone on the issue of Europe by Major was clear, as displayed by its contrast to Mrs Thatcher’s own final speech to the Commons as Prime Minister when in forthright terms she argued that in future Europe would “take all political power away from us” in a single currency and EMU (Thatcher 1990, 13).

When looking at the content of the speech Major, in seeking a “Europe...of nation states,” and wishing to “reserve judgement” on EMU, the difference between Thatcher and Major was arguably only in tone since “there was nothing of substance in the speech that could not have been said by Margaret Thatcher.” It was never a code for a federalist agenda, as was reaffirmed by John Major at the 1991 Party Conference later the same year (Hogg and Hill 1995, 78; Major 1991c). Indeed, some even detected by the qualifications within the Major vision on Europe, “a markedly Thatcherite tone” (Ludlam and Smith 1996c, 279).

Wakeham confirms that on the whole there was very little difference between Thatcher and Major on Europe:

“Margaret [Thatcher] would probably have done Maastricht, but afterwards of course she would indicate that she would never have done it in the first place” (Wakeham 2017).

Others didn't see Major's approach as a 'softening' at all, a former adviser<sup>40</sup> stating:

“Yes, he wanted to soften some of the harshness of the Thatcher presentation, for example talking about 'at the heart of Europe,' but he didn't do that. He developed instead something called 'British exceptionalism' with an opt-out from the euro, which was a logical thing to do after we'd joined late and wanted a sort of an *`a la carte* menu. Other people said he should repudiate the treaty and veto it and bring the whole thing crashing down.”

Major's softening of the Thatcherite tone on Europe lasted only temporarily however (Evans and Taylor 1996, 255). Having gained a much reduced majority at the 1992 election and following the traumatic ratification of the Maastricht Treaty through Parliament (McAnulla 1999, 194)<sup>41</sup>, the Prime Minister's tone became noticeably more pessimistic (Dorey 1999b, 232). This was displayed by Major's 1994 Leiden speech, where he talked of a two-speed Europe with an “inner core” moving towards closer union with Britain on the outside (Wincott et al 1999, 105). Major's talk of a two-speed Europe was therefore in marked contrast to his “heart of Europe” speech only three years before. Thus Major's position had clearly become more Eurosceptic in outlook during the 1992 Parliament.

Ideologically there always remained an inherent conflict in Major's stance in wishing to position the Conservatives as the “party of national sovereignty” whilst at the same time still wishing to be at the “[heart] of Europe,” a conflict he never fully addressed during the 1992 Parliament. By contrast, Thatcher was incredibly

---

<sup>40</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

<sup>41</sup> See chapter five

forthright and was “uncompromising” in her defence of national sovereignty (Gamble 1996, 34) and continued to articulate this view after leaving office in her memoirs and on public platforms (Thatcher 1993; Thatcher 1995).

Major did by contrast have support from the Thatcherite right in his defence of the Union with Scotland, a strand of Conservatism that goes back to its founding principles (Evans and Taylor 1996, 257). This was another issue to which Major already had a “close interest” (Lang 2002, 182), even before it became a campaign issue during the 1992 election.

During the election Major affirmed his commitment to the Union and opposition to Labour’s policy of Scottish devolution, seeing:

“the United Kingdom untied as ending bonds that generation after generation of our enemies have sought to break...Our vision for Scotland will be realised best if Scotland, by her own free choice, remains a full partner in the Union...That is central to the Conservative ideal” (Major 1992a).

However, despite reaffirming his commitment to the Union immediately following the election (HC Deb May 6 1992 Col. 66-67), Major’s position did appear to some, from an ideational perspective, “ambiguous” due to his support for devolution in Northern Ireland as part of the peace process. Indeed, in light of his contradictory policy on another nation in the United Kingdom, Major’s support for the Union with Scotland could arguably be seen as for mere tactical purposes only and that “[his] Unionism does not run deep” in fact at all (Gamble 1996, 34). Close colleagues refute this notion: “Major was very much [a unionist]. I really had to fight for it [as Scottish Secretary], but once he’d made his mind up that was it” (Lang 2017).

### **6.3 Policy**

At the policy detail level Major’s attempt to mould a distinctive agenda had as its centrepiece the Citizen’s Charter (1991)<sup>42</sup>, which sought to raise standards in the public sector. Public service reform was one of four main policy priorities that

---

<sup>42</sup> See chapter four for Charter’s institutional development within Whitehall.

Major had set himself when he arrived at Number 10, the others being: unemployment, inflation and Northern Ireland. As Major stated:

“I wished to improve the performance of public services. Where they could best be done in the private sector, I would privatise. Where not, I would devolve decision-making so as to cut bureaucracy and improve the image of the service and morale of public servants. There should be no excuse for poor performance” (Major 1999, 203).

The Charter also formed a key part of his compassionate agenda and attempts to offer a softer version of Thatcherite ideology to the public. As William Waldegrave argued in 1997, when discussing the Major government’s public sector reforms, Major had: “sensed that the electorate now wanted to find a way of humanizing the irreversible Thatcherite revolution” (Hennessy 2000, 449-450).

This Major had recognised in the 1980s, when “the public face of the Conservative Party carelessly, sometimes tactlessly, still allowed itself to be seen as not caring about improving the public sector.” The new policy was also based upon his own personal experience, underpinned by the Prime Minister’s memory of the degree to which his family “depended on public services. I have never forgotten – and never will – what the NHS meant to my parents” (Major 1999, 246). John Major therefore took a great personal and political interest in public service reform.

The genus of the idea came from a speech Major had given in 1989 as Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Hogg and Hill 1995, 94), when he talked of how public services could be improved. Major argued that if full privatisation was not possible, “the market principles of choice, competition and high quality service” should be applied instead “whenever possible” because:

“We insist on excellence in the private sector, so we must achieve the best possible value for money in the public sector too” (Major 1989).

This policy, arguably, by coming from a 1989 speech as Chief Secretary to the Treasury was therefore, at its core, a mere continuation of the Thatcherite agenda.

But when the Prime Minister did launch the Citizen's Charter, in the spring of 1991, it was clear a philosophical shift had taken place in comparison to Thatcherism. This was due to the new policy initiative enabling the empowerment of the "citizen" to seek redress for grievances over poor standards of service. Thus it was "a visible orientation towards customer satisfaction (this is the visible face of the Charter) and a concept of citizenship based on rights and duties" - a radical departure from the Thatcherite approach to the public sector (Lewis 1993, 316-317). As Major declared in Southport in March 1991:

"Quality in service is our aim for the 1990s. Second-class services cannot be excused by third-class treatment to those who complain" (Major 1991c).

Mrs Thatcher's own notions of empowerment had not extended beyond her "Right to Buy" scheme. She had shown little interest in the redress of grievances, except in the facilitation of opt-outs to public services (Kavanagh 1994, 9-10). The Charter therefore appeared to "offer an agenda for action which neatly points up the differences between Thatcherism and the policies the Prime Minister intends to make his own" (Evans and Taylor 1996, 254).

The Charter, when it was launched in 1991, did not resonate with the public however, which it failed to excite, and was regarded by some as no more than a "mainly cosmetic" form of gesture politics (Evans and Taylor 1996), or a PR stunt (CRD 1995, 133). This Waldegrave lamented after the Major government had left office, feeling that despite Major's best efforts he "never found the language" to capture fully his Thatcherism-humanized philosophy throughout his premiership, of which the Citizen's Charter formed a central part (Hennessy 2000, 450).

One reason for its failure may be due to the Major government's concept of citizenship being too narrow and limited, focusing as it was only on individual consumers of services (Theakston 1999, 31). But it may just have been that people noticed no immediate change in their public services, it seemingly having little impact (Richards 2017).

When the Charter was launched it was derided by the far left as an attack on public sector unions; by the Thatcherite right as a retreat from privatisation. The

Labour Party claimed that, far from being the Prime Minister's 'big idea' it was actually "their idea" and merely a piece of gimmickry (Hogg and Hill 1995, 103). When it continued into the 1992 Parliament and Number 10 sought new ways to promote the Charter, one MP exclaimed in his diary after another discussion: "No one gives a toss about the Citizen's Charter Prime Minister!" (Brandreth 2000, 120). Much worse, when the 'Cones Hotline' initiative was introduced the Charter went from being uninspiring to becoming a national joke (Theakston 1999, 30-32).

Gyles Brandreth has however subsequently changed his view (above):

"I think it was William Hood who said, 'He who would do good would do it by minute particulars.' People mocked him for the 'Cones Hotline,' the small things, but his idea was that in small ways you can improve the society in which we live. It wasn't a time for Thatcher-like reforms" (Brandreth 2017).

Major himself remains bitter about its reception during his time as Prime Minister in his memoirs, writing:

"It is easy to be cynical about this – as some on the left and the right of politics were about the Charter – and to say, from the comfort of privilege and the cushion of an expense account, that these were somehow trivial issues or somehow evidence that I had a chip on my shoulder. I totally reject that...My view was blunt: taxpayers paid for the public sector. They deserved a personal, prompt and quality service" (Major 1999, 247).

But his despondency was misplaced, some arguing after Major left office:

"Yet the Citizen's Charter did matter to the premiership both at the time and subsequently. It was a useful development in terms of transparency and accountability across the whole Civil Service and public sector, including the NHS and Transport. The concept of customer care was infiltrated into the state services" (Hennessy 2000, 450).

Jonathan Hill concurs with this:



“This was another case in which, *in parenthesis*, the origins of a huge number of things, which have changed the landscape quite considerably in terms of public services, came through the Citizen’s Charter and which subsequently got caught up in Thatcherite attacks...But if you look back over the last twenty-five years, the origins of league tables for example, which transformed the education system, came out of the old Citizen’s Charter. And a whole load of bits like putting public services out for competitive tendering” (Hill 2017).

Major’s apparent differentiation strategy from Thatcher in policy terms in his first government was continued in local government finance, where the issue was the future of the deeply unpopular Poll Tax (Hogg and Hill 1995, 55-57)<sup>43</sup>. By late 1990 its replacement had become an electoral imperative with a general election possible in 1991 or 1992, such was its unpopularity in the country (Evans 1999, 153-154). It was also widely viewed as a major contributing factor in Thatcher’s fall, Heseltine making it a central plank of his leadership campaign to abolish the hated tax through a fundamental review. This Major, albeit as a means to ‘kill’ the issue during the 1990 contest, agreed to match (Anderson 1991, 340). Major had in fact already decided that it was “unfair, unworkable and unacceptable” and must go (Major 1999, 215).

Ideationally, to many Thatcherites within the PCP this decision was viewed as an early, somewhat discouraging, sign that John Major may not be their man after all, and could jeopardise the whole Thatcher project if he was not prepared to continue it with the radicalism of his predecessor (Evans 1999, 154). Thatcher remained personally wedded to the Poll Tax, now from the backbenches, claiming in her memoirs how “[i]ts benefits had just started to become apparent when it was abandoned” (Thatcher 1993, 667). Major’s decision to replace it contributed to her turning against him for failing to be sufficiently Thatcherite enough “in substance or style” as early as March 1991 (Foley 2002, 35). Other prominent Thatcherite former ministers supported her, including Norman Tebbit, Nicholas Ridley and Cecil Parkinson (Evans and Taylor 1996, 256).

---

<sup>43</sup> See chapter seven on 1991 Poll Tax replacement as a case study on Major’s collective decision-making ability

John Major records in his own memoirs how the arguments over local government finance with Thatcherite PCP members were sometimes “ideological, some personal,” because: “Starry-eyed devotees of Margaret Thatcher saw her legacy as a holy relic, and to them the abolition of the tax she insisted would work was a sacrilege” (Major 1999, 215). The Poll Tax therefore had become symbolic of the Thatcherite legacy and John Major’s wish to replace it quickly came to be viewed as a betrayal on the Thatcherite right (Kavanagh 1997, 202).

By contrast, to those on the more One Nation progressive wing of the party the replacement of the Poll Tax with the less regressive Council Tax was welcome, in the hope, conversely to their Thatcherite colleagues, that it represented Major’s determination to temper the radicalism of the past (Gilmour and Garnett 1998, 357).

Some have argued since that the creation of the Citizen’s Charter, combined with replacement of the Poll Tax, was the “single most important act of modernisation until that of the Cameron-Osborne era” (Richards 2017), such was the clear differentiation it emphasised between the Thatcher era and Major’s premiership – and in real policy, not just in appealing sound bites.

The seemingly only other distinctive policy of note during John Major’s two governments was the introduction of a National Lottery, which Mrs Thatcher had rejected on the grounds of her “residual Methodism,” and was a means by which money could be given to good causes whilst not impacting upon public spending (Hewison 1994, 422). Major was persuaded to introduce the Lottery by Tim Renton during a night at Glyndebourne (Renton 2017).

This was something Major already had a keen personal interest in however, not just from the vantage point of a love of sport and the arts, but also in feeling that arts, heritage and sport “have been regarded as an optional extra, rather than an integral part of life” (Major 1999, 402-403):

“This always seemed wrong to me...I wished to encourage all these activities, because where interest and access to them is absent, the quality of life is diminished” (Major 1999, 402-403).

Major therefore very much saw access to sport and the arts as within his vision to see a 'classless society.'

When the Lottery was launched in November 1994 it was judged an initial success, but this soon turned sour when the first significant use of lottery money was used to buy Sir Winston Churchill's papers from his descendants, which was expressly against Major's instructions for the money to be for good causes in the arts or sport only (Seldon 1997, 507, 549-550). The error caused immediate derision.

The National Lottery also came under attack from a number of quarters, not least by the gambling industry, who felt misled, as well as by the pools lobby and private charities, all of whom saw their revenues erased or curtailed by the new state monopoly. They were joined by the Labour opposition and even the Treasury, who were quickly unhappy that additional public spending was being diverted away from them in this way. Yet in its first year it raised a billion pounds for good causes (Jenkins 1995, 214-220).

The National Lottery arguably remains one of Major's overlooked achievements whilst Prime Minister, as one former Cabinet minister asserts:

"The Lottery is an example of one of those policy issues that didn't light up the headlines at the time, but everyone who benefits from it thinks afterwards 'what a good idea,' and I don't think John gets the credit for it and people think it just emerged, but he did push it pretty hard" (MacGregor 2017).

However, neither the creation of the Citizen's Charter, nor the replacement of the Poll Tax, nor the establishment of a National Lottery, could be evinced as a clear break away from Thatcherism in policy terms by Major when Prime Minister. In fact, during his premiership: "in policy area after policy area, Major has maintained the Thatcherite agenda" (Ludlam and Smith 1996c, 279).

This was to prove somewhat of a surprise to many, particularly those in the public sector who had already endured over a decade of Thatcherism. Their expectation had been based largely upon Major's seemingly more outwardly conciliatory manner and One Nation progressive outlook which he had formed during early

life: he was the antithesis of Margaret Thatcher in their minds (Dorey 1999c, 226-230).

They were very quickly to be disabused in their notions. Indeed, it is arguable that Major went much further than Thatcher, not merely consolidating her legacy but expanding upon it. Indeed, “It has been in precisely those areas where Thatcherism was incomplete that Major has remained most faithful to the Thatcher project” (Ludlam and Smith 1996c, 278).

This ability to out-Thatcher Thatcher had already been displayed by Major even when a minister, coining the phrase ‘if it isn’t hurting, it isn’t working’ whilst Chancellor of the Exchequer in his defence of government counter-inflation policy (Stephens 1996, 142). As Major explained in his memoirs, bringing down inflation was “pivotal, my constant objective and not an optional extra – and later this was our primary reason for our entry into the ERM” (Major 1999, 138).

The government’s counter-inflationary policy became much harder to defend by Major once Prime Minister, framed as it was now around the UK’s membership of the ERM, a policy which curtailed the new government’s freedom of manoeuvre at a time of deep recession, particularly in its ability to alter interest rates (Evans 1999, 150-151).

Thatcherites had become deeply hostile to the ERM following Thatcher’s departure. Thatcher herself had only reluctantly agreed to Chancellor Major’s wish to join the ERM on her terms in October 1990 and had continued to protest against a policy which, in her view, attempted to “buck the market” (Stephens 1996, 168-169). This was confirmed by a former aide:

“I was there when [Major] persuaded [Thatcher] to join the ERM, which she wouldn’t have done, and she regretted it. She wasn’t politically strong enough to do what she did in 1985. And she was right” (Turnbull 2017).

Thatcher was joined by Tebbit and other Eurosceptics within the PCP in their opposition, seeing the ERM “as a stepping stone to the single currency,” thereby conflating it with their opposition to the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty and further European integration (Lamont 2000, 385).

This left Major a lonely and isolated figure within the PCP during the summer of 1992, forced to stake his own personal reputation in defence of sterling within the DM 2.95 band within the ERM. His isolation was highlighted by his combative rhetoric to the Scottish CBI, in which the Prime Minister called talk of devaluation “the soft option, the inflationary option,” which “would be a betrayal of our future” (Seldon 1997, 295)<sup>44</sup>.

Following Black Wednesday in September 1992, when sterling crashed out of the ERM, such was the animosity generated around this policy between Thatcherites and the government, that this led to one of the most bitter Conservative party conferences in decades, in 1992 (Holmes 1998, 135). There Tebbit directly challenged Major personally on the floor of the conference, reminding him of *his* decision to take Britain into the ERM, disassociating Mrs Thatcher from the policy, whilst Thatcher outside disassociated herself entirely from her own legacy, describing the ERM as a “vision of yesterday” (Evans and Taylor 1996, 254, 262).

Yet despite this inflation was largely dissipated out of the economy as a result of Britain’s membership of the ERM. As Major asserted in his memoirs:

“After we left the ERM, what Norman Lamont called our ‘overperformance’ on inflation enabled us to cut interest rates speedily, and we were to enjoy seven years of growth without wage or price inflation difficulties. This was unprecedented in recent years, and the ERM deserves much of the credit” (Major 1999, 341).

Another inheritance from the Thatcher government was a ballooning PSBR of £30 billion, which led to further division at ideational level within the PCP. Thatcher even went so far as to accuse Major of “spending like a socialist” (Gilmour and Garnett 1998, 358), such was her anger at the rise in public spending as a proportion of GDP. She was supported by a fellow Thatcherite loyalist, Parkinson, who similarly urged “belt-tightening” by the government to reduce the deficit. Conversely, the One Nation, more progressive wing of the

---

<sup>44</sup> See chapter three

PCP, in the form of Clarke, was arguing that the PSBR must rise during a recession to protect spending programmes (Evans and Taylor 1996, 255).

Yet, despite this, the direction of travel for the government evinced a continuation of Thatcherism by remaining focused upon restraint in public spending and on “sound finance,” the 1994 budget seeking to reduce public spending as a proportion of GDP by the end of the 1996-7 to 41 per cent from the 44 per cent it had reached in 1993-4 (CRD 1994, 422).

It was Clarke himself who, as Chancellor, carried out a public spending review which was “far more radical” than the one which Thatcher had herself disowned in 1983 when leaked before the general election (Ludlam and Smith 1996a, 17). And, as a former Cabinet minister<sup>45</sup> confirmed: “John [Major] was very hand-in-glove with Ken [Clarke]. Ken did nothing without John’s agreement.”

The same recession-led constraints were operating as well in the Major government’s taxation policy, Major sharing “the [Thatcher] vision of a low tax economy” (Kavanagh 1997, 204). The PSBR which the Prime Minister inherited however ensured that this goal was not possible, leading to both the 1993 and 1994 budgets raising taxes, albeit in indirect rather than direct form on VAT on fuel. But the government’s goal remained to lower “(direct) taxes whenever they could” (Gamble 1996, 32).

Indeed, Norman Lamont, in introducing of a 20p tax band in his 1992 Budget for the lowest paid, set as his goal to expand the 20p band further, thereby setting a goal for the Major government which had been the aim of Conservative governments since the 1980s. A goal shared by John Major (Hogg and Hill 1995, 195-196).

Outside of monetary and fiscal policy the Major government evinced a further continuation of the Thatcherite agenda in other areas of economic policy, this time in a policy area which was perhaps most closely associated with Thatcher: privatisation. Major was a firm supporter of the policy: “Privatisation is a great aid

---

<sup>45</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

to efficiency. It has transformed many loss leaders into world leaders – dead weight to heavy weight” (HC Deb May 6 1992 Col. 71).

Most of the public utilities had been sold off by 1990 (Kavanagh 1997, 204), but some remained – those that the Thatcher government had “specifically avoided” (Jenkins 1995, 15). These were: British Rail, British Coal and the Post Office. Each of these Major’s government tackled with, if anything, “more inflexibility and with less political skill than under Thatcher” (Gamble 1996, 33). As Jenkins points out: “The Major government remained true to the faith but with less instinctive caution, as if seeking to prove itself more Catholic than the Pope” (Jenkins 1995, 202).

Each one of these sell-offs was to prove deeply controversial. The closure of twenty-one pits by British Coal, as a direct consequence of the selling off of the electricity industry, led to huge public outrage. This did not however dampen the government’s belief in the rightness of their policy, merely seeing it as a lesson in poor presentation (Evans and Taylor 1996, 262).

Mrs Thatcher’s own doubts about the sell-off of British Rail were equally proved correct in light of the disbelief within the industry at the Major government’s proposed franchising of the railways, a policy decision which when implemented quickly became dubbed a ‘poll tax on wheels’ such was its unpopularity (Jenkins 1995, 202-212). The Transport Secretary who introduced rail privatisation defends the policy however:

“Privatisation was a huge issue. It was an election commitment but many of the complex details had to be worked out very quickly after the election amid strident criticism from the unions and the Labour Party. In fact before long the amount of traffic in passenger and freight shot up - the huge increase in freight is very little talked about. We had to make some very quick and radical decisions - John Major was very supportive throughout” (MacGregor 2017).

The Post Office was the one public utility left by 1997 that had not been sold off to the market. It was aborted in 1994 due to fear of a Commons defeat, but it may have been due to Major’s own ambivalence over the idea, being “instinctively”

“modestly in favour” whilst “intellectually” “strongly in favour,” of introducing completion into an area of the public sector which Mrs Thatcher had shied away from (Seldon 1997, 502-503)<sup>46</sup>.

Under Major other policy areas closely associated with Margaret Thatcher evinced a further continuation of the Thatcherite agenda. Trade unions for instance had hoped for a more constructive approach under John Major, but the contrary was to be the case: Lamont wound up the NEDC and the Wages Council, and under the guise of a call for “labour market flexibility” encouraged the diminution of collective bargaining towards individual or local-level bargaining (Dorey 1999b, 228). The 1993 Trade Union and Employment Rights Act merely consolidated all of the 1980s Thatcherite legislation curbing union legal immunities (Kavanagh 1997, 204).

Local government, an area of some of Mrs Thatcher’s greatest battles, had hoped that Mr Major, with a background in local government as a Lambeth councillor, would equally lead to a more conciliatory style towards them and further differentiation away from Thatcherism following the replacement of the Poll Tax (Dorey 1999b, 227).

However, despite being incorporated into the Citizen’s Charter reforms, the Prime Minister having insisted local government had its own Charter, Major’s local government management reforms largely “converged with, and took forward the Thatcher legacy,” particularly in the area of local service delivery. The emphasis remained firmly on strengthening users against providers in housing, education and social services, and further requirements to submit to compulsory competitive tendering (Young 1994, 94-96).

The civil service, another area of the of the public sector that had been subject to market reforms under Mrs Thatcher in the form of Next Steps and which had hoped for a calmer, more conciliatory approach under Major, were to be thoroughly disabused when the “scope and pace” of marketisation reforms actually “increased” under Major (Dorey 1999b, 227). Indeed, through the

---

<sup>46</sup> See chapter five



*Competing for Quality* White Paper in 1991, which introduced market testing into the civil service for the first time through Executive Agencies, it is arguable that “Major out-Thatchered Thatcher by shifting Civil Service activity almost permanently from the public into the private sector” (Hennessy 2000, 450).

Due to such continuity in local and central government and the public sector in general it was clearly therefore arguably useful for John Major to promote the new, distinctive Citizen’s Charter initiative in order to outwardly appear to be different from his predecessor. The attempt to present something as new and distinctive whilst continuing the Thatcherite agenda was illustrated by John Major’s unfortunate ‘Back to Basics’ initiative at the 1993 Party Conference (Major 1993b)<sup>47</sup>, even if it was quickly disregarded once it had become conflated with the private lives of politicians (Evans and Taylor 1996, 266).

But ‘Back to Basics,’ despite going down like a “lead balloon” in Brandreth’s words, did generate a policy programme, even if it was all about “core values, [and] it isn’t a moral crusade” (Brandreth 2000, 230). And Whitehall was expected to respond to the latest new policy initiative since the Citizen’s Charter, which it did with the same cynicism as in 1991, one Cabinet minister asking: “Why should I change what I’m doing to respond to some stupid re-launch?” Despite it being a new initiative, the end result was, however, very much more of the same, the 1993 Queen’s Speech focusing on traditional Conservatism, the headlines coming from the Crime and Education Bills (Seldon 1997, 401-409).

The Criminal Justice Bill, which incorporated the twenty-seven points for reform called for by the Home Secretary Michael Howard at the same 1993 Conference, was very much in line with past Conservative Governments who have “pursued tough, practical policies to uphold law and order.” The Bill also went much further however, being an attack on “liberal theories,” including a crackdown on squatters, ravers and new age travellers (CRD 1993, 385). The Home Secretary’s twenty-seven points thus was very much playing “to the right-wing gallery” (Evans and Taylor 1996, 266), and was also spotted by some

---

<sup>47</sup> See chapter three

commentators as a move away – and not consistent with - Major's seeming social liberal agenda in his first government (Seldon 1997, 402).

The same was true in education, where through the 'Back to Basics' focus on the traditional 3 Rs, revision of the National Curriculum and testing pupils at key stages the aim of the Major government was very much to satisfy a right-wing audience and emphasise how Major was truly carrying forward the Thatcherite agenda – indeed, “enthusiastically” (Dorey 1999c, 227).

#### **6.4 Consistency**

It is arguable to say that in viewing the personality of Mrs Thatcher and her influence on government, “[n]o British Prime Minister has stated so forcefully or so frequently his or her fundamental beliefs about morality, life, economics, education, the scope of public and private spheres, or indeed about any subject” (Kavanagh 1997, 22). By complete contrast Major was, in essence, “a pragmatist” and “like many of his Tory predecessors, a “balancer”...concerned with the here and now of British politics” (Norton 1996, 64-65).

In this spirit, the Prime Minister felt it was “more important to engage in incremental problem-solving, with a view above all to making life better for ordinary people. Major was therefore, in his own words, “a practical politician” (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 208). This view is confirmed by Jonathan Hill, his former Political Secretary at Number 10:

“He was not ideological, he was a sort of practical, sensible, pragmatic person who had a set of views that I would describe as deeply Tory” (Hill 2017).

Another former MP agrees with this viewpoint:

“John [Major] doesn't really do philosophy. I don't think he's someone who has a deep, systematic, historical view of politics. I don't think he starts from first principles, he's always been more pragmatic, but his instincts are nice, decent, 'a nation at ease with itself,' etc. And he didn't have any nasties or hang ups or prejudices. He was nice to people” (Davies 2017).

Major therefore felt it was more important to navigate between issues to find common solutions rather than stridently drive forward his own. This ambiguity at the heart of his decision making left many unsure as to whether he was a Thatcherite or not, his time as Prime Minister seen “a curious mix of collectivism, authority, free economy and order” (Ludlam and Smith 1996a, 18), none of which combined mark a coherent philosophy.

To some degree, in the post-Thatcher era, Major’s philosophical ambiguity arguably served as a helpful tool in party management, not least because the Prime Minister had been bequeathed a legacy of ideological division by Thatcher at the heart of Conservatism which necessitated careful navigation. In the economic sphere this divisive legacy left one faction, the neo-liberal, free market right, against another faction, the socially compassionate One Nation left. But, equally, it also left a schism at the heart of Conservatism on the issue of further European integration “and over the fundamental principles of British identity within an increasingly European context,” an issue which was potentially even more toxic (Foley 2002, 26). Others argue a contrary position, feeling that Major’s pragmatism “permit[ted] the re-emergence of ideological factions...whereas Thatcher left no time for ideological disputation” (Evans and Taylor 1996, 249).

This balanced approach did prove largely successful in Major’s first government however:

“The Major administration balanced the political need for public spending with the Thatcherite impulse to reduce the sphere of the state by targeting tax cuts to the lowest paid. In another field, Major sought to broaden the party’s appeal by a commitment to raise government support for health and education, and to show a greater awareness of minorities” (Foley 2002, 32-33).

This was whilst, “[a]t the same time”:

“[H]e remained firmly in favour of privatisation and reasserted a tough attitude towards law and order. The Citizen’s Charter provided another example of this balanced approach...His immediate successes may have been deceptive in

that they were achieved during extraordinary circumstances” (Foley 2002, 32-33).

During his first government this balanced approach also managed to keep the party united on Europe, certainly during the early Maastricht negotiations: “Mr Major’s wish to see Britain ‘at the very heart of Europe’ was balanced by a dismissal of federalism” (Butler and Kavanagh 1992, 39), which was largely accepted by Thatcherite Eurosceptics.

Major saw the problematic state the Conservative Party was witnessing ideationally, particularly over Europe, and argues his approach was the correct one to prevent a party split:

“The danger to the Conservative Party lay in the fervour with which both sides believed they were in tune with the party’s history and instincts. Both believed they had the national interest at heart; both felt compromise would be a betrayal. Moreover, both had leaders able to convince them that theirs was the true faith. Edward Heath was a European; Margaret Thatcher was not...Amongst so much conviction I remained a pragmatist” (Major 1999, 585).

Major’s pragmatic approach to decision-making however went from being seen as an asset to a liability as the inherent ideological contradictions and conflicts at the heart of post-Thatcherite Conservatism became magnified, albeit combined, as it was, with a much reduced majority. As Norton asserts, during the 1992 Parliament:

“Major’s pragmatism meant he was not able to offer a clear and decisive lead. To many critics, this was the problem. They complained that he offered no leadership, or, rather, that he offered leadership from the rear, following those who were setting the agenda and then taking action to meet their demands” (Norton 1996b, 96-97).

This was no more graphically illustrated than over the conflict between factions over the issue of national sovereignty and further European integration at the heart of post-Thatcherite Conservatism. Major continued to attempt to steer a

middle course, which allowed him the maximum flexibility for tactical manoeuvring (Seldon 1994, 42-43)<sup>48</sup>.

This was enabled by opting for the ultimate compromise position on EMU and membership of a single European currency resulting from his opt-out: 'negotiate and decide' ('wait and see'). This position of "procrastination on principle" by the Prime Minister was not sustainable however. Indeed, 'wait and see' quickly came to be seen as weak to dissenters, allowing them to push further for policy change. Crucially, by Major adopting a compromise position or non-decision as default positions the policy itself came to be seen as inconsistent as new positions did not lead to changes of policy direction. Major's threat to grind the EU to a halt on the beef ban through the government's use of its veto in 1996 for instance, did not sit well with the Prime Minister's 'wait and see' policy (Lynch and Whittaker 2013, 332-333). Major's pragmatism on the question of further European integration therefore left him presiding over a bitterly divided party, held together artificially.

Yet, despite Major's ambiguity over Europe the clearest signals he arguably expressed was in the choice of personnel at ministerial level, his reshuffles widely interpreted as an ideological shift to the One Nation progressive left of the party rather than the Thatcherite right. John Carlisle, a Thatcherite backbench MP, claimed a Thatcherite PCP had a Tory 'left' government imposed upon it during the 1992 Parliament (Baker et al 1993a, 160).

This was seen to be particularly apparent with the clear occupation by the left of the party in economic (Ken Clarke), foreign (Douglas Hurd) and industrial policy (Michael Heseltine) after 1992 (Ludlam and Smith 1996a, 16), the Thatcherite right further aggrieved after the 1995 leadership contest when Michael Heseltine, the arch Europhile interventionist, became Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 229). The Thatcherite right were "significantly underrepresented" at ministerial level under Major, whilst the progressive left wing of the party had a level of ministerial representation

---

<sup>48</sup> See chapter five

“disproportionate” to its numerical strength within the PCP (Heppell 2005, 149-151).

This interpretation of Major’s reshuffles is disputed by Jonathan Hill, who recalls:

“It didn’t feel like that at the time. I don’t think he was making decisions on the basis of, ‘I want to be close to him because he’s more positive [on Europe,]’ it was more to do with their status and standing and experience” (Hill 2017).

There remained a perception however amongst the PCP and the grassroots that Major was not a true Thatcherite in the areas of economic and social policy during his premiership; high public borrowing, token tax cuts and use of the word ‘community’ leaving the grassroots deeply suspicious of his true beliefs. The fact that Major’s approach was borne from a change of the political environment in which many of Thatcher’s enemies had been defeated, seemed to have escaped much of the Thatcherite right’s notice (Evans and Taylor 1996, 267).

Yet, at the same time, as has already been seen, despite the doubts amongst the PCP, in policy area after policy area Major not merely consolidated the Thatcher legacy, but took it even further, which included also a reliance far more on Thatcherite think tanks than progressive ones in policy development, and, in the public sector, largely avoiding consultation and conflict resolution with those areas which had been similarly overlooked by Mrs Thatcher. Furthermore, it was the One Nation progressive wing within the PCP who defected, not Thatcherites, during the 1992 Parliament, due to Major’s perceived failure in their eyes to move policy more in their direction (Dorey 1999b, 219-227).

Some argue the defectors were not motivated by policy at all<sup>49</sup>:

“Emma Nicholson’s defection was a personal grudge. She had an enormously high opinion of herself who thought she should have been in the Cabinet.”

This charge of personal ambition, also alleged by Heseltine, Nicholson denies (Nicholson 1996, 218).

---

<sup>49</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

Even Major has recognised that his mixed messages left him exposed to charges of betrayal by Thatcherites, as he stated in his memoirs:

“Nevertheless, the charge that I was somehow betraying her legacy was untrue. In economic policy, in further privatisation, in law and order, I was no counter-revolutionary. In these policies I led the Thatcherite march onwards with conviction – for I believed in it” (Major 1999, 215).

But, as Major laments, this still was not enough:

“Yet for Margaret my rebalancing of social policy [with the Citizen’s Charter] seemed to obscure all this, above all because of the abolition of one her treasured policies: the Poll Tax” (Major 1999, 215).

Therefore Major was not going to be allowed to set out a cohesive consistent agenda during his time as Prime Minister, such was the degree to which he was circumscribed by his Thatcher inheritance (Ludlam and Smith 1996a, 5).

## **6.5 Inspiration**

This component alludes to the question as to whether Major as Prime Minister was able to use what is termed the “bully pulpit” in the American polity to inspire others to support his public policy vision through public discourse (McAnulla 1999, 196-197). This was something Margaret Thatcher had recognised the importance of in making the nation aware of her own vision, the “[u]se of the bully-pulpit to lecture and elevate the nation was regarded by Mrs Thatcher as an important duty of political leadership” (Kavanagh 1997, 24).

It is indeed arguable that a lot of the Thatcherite radicalism was evinced through Thatcher’s speeches, such was her ability to use the presence of ideational ‘others’ – trade unions, the post-war consensus, nationalised industries, Communism – to define her distinctive agenda in order to win the ideological ‘battle of ideas’ (McAnulla 1999, 194-196). Mrs Thatcher therefore was able to inspire the nation to her strong ideological vision, but equally the party faithful, which, as a consequence, “expected a continuation of the excitement which had inspired it in the 1980s” in John Major’s leadership (Evans and Taylor 1996, 247).

This left Major with a problematic legacy therefore, not helped by his acquiring the premiership at a time of ideational disjuncture, Thatcherism seen to be less and less in tune with the nation's outlook (Dorey 1999b, 247-248). His style of public speaking was not regarded as inspiring in the traditional sense either, John Major "resemble[ing] Clement Attlee and Alec Douglas Home" in his "anti-rhetorical style," best most of all "off-the-cuff" rather than set-piece settings (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 236-237)<sup>50</sup>.

Initially, however, such a contrast to Thatcher in style proved successful, particularly in his first government, offering a presentation which was seen as a more caring face of Thatcherism, sporadically, as he did, "infecting 'One Nation' epithets into a generally Thatcherite discourse" (McAnulla 1999, 196). This rhetorically qualified Thatcherism fitted in with the anti-Thatcher mood of the 1990s, particularly his talk of 'a nation at ease with itself' on the steps of Number 10 (Major 1990a), and subsequently with his talk of 'a classless society' (Major 1990b). It led many to believe that the harsh divisive Thatcherite rhetoric and concomitant policies were to be carried out in a much more conciliatory style under John Major, if not possibly reversed (Gilmour and Garnett 1998, 357).

Gyles Brandreth, who was involved in the Prime Minister's speeches, supports this notion:

"The 'a nation at ease with itself' phrase was what he totally genuinely believed in and still does. Funnily enough I found that very attractive. For people who remembered Thatcher and the raw meat of Thatcherism it was warm and comforting" (Brandreth 2017).

But because the rhetoric of Major remained clearly Thatcherite in tone overall, despite Major's softening of some of the rhetoric with use of words like 'community' (Gamble 1996, 33), his speeches failed project an image which "resonated with the public" in the same way as was achieved by Margaret Thatcher (McAnulla 1999, 196).

---

<sup>50</sup> See chapter three



Yet, at the same time, the more Thatcherite in tone Major's rhetoric, particularly during the 1992 Parliament, the more he managed to inspire the party faithful, Major's 'Back to Basics' speech in particular being well received at the 1993 Party Conference in Blackpool (Evans and Taylor 1996, 266-267). This was useful for party management purposes to the Prime Minister, but the failure to inspire the nation towards his own vision of post-Thatcherite Conservatism represented an obvious failure at discursive level by Major, emphasising as it did how he "was unable to engage in the types of symbolic politics which sustained the Thatcher governments appearance of radicalism," a clear break with Thatcherite onward progress (McAnulla 1999, 197).

The main cause of Major's problems at a discursive level was the loss of the ideational 'others' from the 1980s through which Thatcher was able to frame her visionary radical agenda. Indeed, with the enemies such as trade unions and the post war consensus largely defeated in the 1980s, the problems facing John Major in the 1990s were by contrast far more complex to tackle, requiring "multi-faceted and multi-agency solutions," and therefore much harder to articulate rhetorically (Kavanagh 1997, 206). One former Cabinet colleague sums this up best, using a footballing metaphor: "[Thatcher] had scored all the easy goals" (Lang 2017). The tougher game was left for Major to compete in.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it would be correct to see John Major's leadership as lacking in public policy vision under the Greenstein components that constitute it. There is no evidence to posit such a thing as 'Majorism' (Evans and Taylor 1996, 247). Major equally failed to offer a clear and coherent vision of Conservatism necessary for the 1990s and the post-Thatcher era of British politics, such were the ideational constraints inherited from the Thatcherite legacy (Hayton 2012b, 26). This was personified by Mrs Thatcher herself, who was to act as the gatekeeper to her own legacy, particularly over the issue of further European integration, which all but destroyed Major's abilities to continue to map out his own vision after 1992 (McAnulla 1999, 193).

This was a missed opportunity however, a point of ideological disjuncture having been reached between Thatcherism and the people, seen in the Major's government's own return with a much reduced majority at the 1992 election. Major could have used his personal mandate to begin to renew post-Thatcherite Conservative thought for the 1990s and thereby forge a new vision for the future of the Conservative Party. This opportunity, however, was missed (Dorey 1999b, 247).

In ideational terms Major, whilst, in his own words, seeking to "nudge" post-Thatcherite Conservative thought towards "compassionate conservatism" (Major 1999, 214), as witnessed by his talk of 'a nation at ease with itself' and 'a classless society' (Major 1990a, Major 1990b, Major 1991b), remained a dedicated follower and defender of Thatcherite neo-liberalism and free market economics. Indeed, Major was to argue for the market to develop much further into the public sector (Major 1993a).

He was also a true Thatcherite believer in other policy areas. In foreign affairs, despite his talk of wishing to see Britain "at the heart of Europe" (Major 1991b) he continued the Thatcherite opposition to federalism and in defence of national sovereignty, the inconsistency of his own position gradually leading him down a Eurosceptic path in his second government. He was also a firm defender of the Union, despite the contradictions within his own devolution agenda, particularly in relation to the Northern Ireland peace process (Gamble 1996, 31-34). Therefore, ideationally, it can be argued, as Dorey states: "'Majorism' was merely Thatcherism without Thatcher, and with a slightly less abrasive and strident rhetoric" (Dorey 1999b, 226).

This is evinced in policy terms as well as ideational terms, where though Major had a number of personal beliefs which influenced some elements of policy, most notably his concern for public services through the Citizen's Charter in his first government (Hogg and Hill 1995, 95-105), and his concern for arts and sport in his second government through the National Lottery (Jenkins 1995, 214-220), the remainder of his policy agenda very much evinced a continuation of Thatcherism. Indeed, as Ludlam and Smith point out:

“what is most noticeable about Major’s leadership is that it has been precisely in those areas where Thatcherism was incomplete that Major has remained most faithful to the Thatcher project: commercialisation of public services, civil service reform, the formal limitations of the United Kingdom’s commitment to European integration through opt-outs, and the trickiest privatisations of rail, coal, and, though now stalled, of postal services” (Ludlam and Smith 1996c, 278).

And arguably the one clear break with the Thatcherite agenda, the replacement of the Poll Tax, was done more for electoral purposes than any other deeper ideological reasons (Evans 1999, 153-156). Hence the Major era could be referred to as “late Thatcherism,” the ambitions of “radical” Thatcherism seen, ironically, as only to be fully realised post-1992 (McAnulla 1999, 199).

And John Major in personal outlook was not inclined towards offering a consistent vision, either in his first government or his second, preferring to make decisions pragmatically, not on the basis of ideology. This meant that Major was very much guided by practical, short-term considerations, particularly in his second government, where he was constrained largely by party management considerations and a desire to keep his party united on the issue of Europe. This very quickly came to be seen as problematic and weak however. As Norton states:

“He was derided for being too responsive, for being driven by his in-tray and for being too accident-prone...The Prime Minister stood accused of lacking the skills of governance and a sense of purpose. It proved a combination that was near fatal” (Norton 1996, 65).

It also, rather than allaying the fears of the left and the right of the party, only increased suspicions amongst both wings of the party as to where he stood in relation to the Thatcherite agenda. Indeed, by the end of his government both One Nation progressives and those on the Thatcherite right were disillusioned with Major’s leadership (Dorey 1999b, 219-226).

But some feel Major's approach was the very epitome of Conservatism, as a former MP observed:

"The reason why the Conservatives have been so successful over two hundred years is because of pragmatism, pragmatic politicians. And John Major is in a tradition that would include Baldwin, Macmillan, and Cameron. These are people whose basic instincts are Conservative, wanting smaller government, a free market economy and social improvement. All pretty mainstream stuff" (Brandreth 2017).

Finally, such were the constraints of the Thatcherite legacy that Major was unable at a discursive level to offer an inspirational vision for post-Thatcherite Conservatism in the 1990s. This was despite an awareness by Major that a renewal of the Conservative brand was needed for the 1990s, as proved by his early rhetoric in which he talked of 'a nation at ease with itself' and other attempts to insert more progressive epithets into Thatcherite discourse (McAnulla 1999, 196-199), such as by using the word 'community' (Gamble 1996, 33).

These insertions of more progressive rhetoric were initially successful in presenting a new image of Conservatism as more caring and compassionate after the harsh rhetoric of the Thatcher years. However Major failed to engender the same level of excitement in the nation, and only sporadically to the party faithful (Evans and Taylor 1996, 247-267), being unable to offer the same kind of "symbolic politics" that Thatcher was able to do during his time as Prime Minister (McAnulla 1999, 197).

This was because a lot of the enemies that Thatcher had defined herself against, and which had spurred her radical agenda, had gone, whether that be the trade unions, nationalised industries or the post-war consensus. Major was left therefore with problems which were far more complex and therefore far harder to articulate at a discursive level (Kavanagh 1997, 206).

Despite John Major's leadership lacking in vision he did still achieve a lasting impression on post-Thatcherite Conservative thought, incorporating into it, as he himself recognises, the very early ideas of a compassionate conservative agenda

based around societal needs and social liberalism (Major 1999, 214). This compassionate agenda was utilised by his successors as leader of the Conservative Party whilst in opposition, beginning with William Hague (Hayton 2012b, 117) but arguably reaching fruition under David Cameron, who combined support for the public services with social liberalism as part of his 'Big Society' agenda (Peele 2016, 30-38).

Cameron was arguably taking forward in opposition the very agenda that Major had sought to in those early months of his premiership. Sadly some of the compassionate conservatism Cameron sought was lost following the 2008 financial crash, particularly in the area of public service reform when he became Prime Minister in 2010 (Dorey 2016, 58-69), but it did continue in other areas of social reform (Peele and Francis 2016b, 35). Thus, the compassionate agenda is arguably Major's lasting legacy on post-Thatcherite Conservatism, even if this has been largely overlooked since he left office.

## **Chapter Seven: Cognitive Style and Emotional Intelligence**

This chapter seeks to apply two of the Greenstein criteria for political leadership to the premiership of John Major. This combination can be justified because cognitive style and emotional intelligence are the two psychology-orientated criteria within the Greenstein analytical framework and therefore it is appropriate for them to be assessed together. The structure of this chapter is thus as follows. First, an examination of Major's cognitive style, both personally and collectively, with especial reference to the Prime Minister's decision-making ability at collective Cabinet level and how it compares to his predecessor, Mrs Thatcher. Second, an examination of Major's emotional intelligence, with especial reference to his childhood and upbringing and its effect on his psychopathology in later life, revealed during his premiership including: sensitivity to criticism, pride, toughness and resilience. Thus a thorough examination of the psychology of Major between 1990 and 1997 can be achieved in this chapter.

### **7.1 Introduction**

It was Harold Lasswell who first recognised the benefit of using techniques more associated with clinical psychology (in particular the work of Sigmund Freud) to examine the behaviour of various 'types' of political man (agitator, administrator, etc.) as opposed to more structuralist, society-based formulas. To Lasswell, an individual's behaviour is overdetermined by a variety of psychological factors (conscious and unconscious), meaning that there is a "rich unconscious life" that exists to be exposed and explored through psychopathology studies in politics (Lasswell 1977, 17, 74-75, 232-253).

Greenstein developed Lasswell's theories on psychopathology and politics further in his own seminal work, *Personality and Politics*, building on the notion that the unconscious as well as the conscious mind and the inner conflict that ensues between them (through ego defensive needs) can be applied to the study of politics (Greenstein 1987, 57-61). Greenstein recognised that of all three psychological processes, those based upon cognitive needs would be more likely to be the most open to other thoughts and opinions, whereas those based upon

ego-defensive needs are likely to be the most intransigent, thus differentiating between the two.

Within leadership studies, the ego was recognized by political scientists as “the agency in personality that mediates among elements of personality and searches for congruence among them...The ego also mediates between elements of personality and the external environment.” Thus, Hargrove argued, through “ego strength” a leader is able to “test reality” as presented by the political environment which they occupy, adding:

“In my judgement ego psychology, as one variant of psychoanalytic theory, helps the biographer to see individual patterns and relations in the life course of an individual that one might not otherwise see” (Hargrove 1993, 74, 81).

Barber in *The Presidential Character* was the first to develop a typology to assess Presidential leadership based upon psychodynamics and the inner conflict created by the ego: active-positive, active-negative, passive-positive and passive-negative (Barber 1992, 3-4, 9-10). Significantly, this incorporated an examination of an individual’s childhood alongside their world view in order to analyse their character (Barber 1992, 3-4, 9-10).

To Greenstein, the crucial difference in their approaches comes from that fact that: “Barber’s types are defined by externals, but people who differ on the surface may be similar under the skin, and those with similar appearances may have different underpinnings” (Greenstein 2006, 21-22)<sup>51</sup>. The Barber typology was used to judge prime ministerial performance by Philip Norton (1987), Norton subsequently coming to the conclusion that Major was a ‘balancer,’ concerned more to retain harmony than create conflict (Norton 1996, 64)<sup>52</sup>.

Greenstein was criticised by Bose for his alleged overemphasis on the psychology-orientated leadership criteria. Bose argued that, as with the Barber typology, “[p]erhaps character, like cognitive style and emotional intelligence, is

---

<sup>51</sup> See chapter two

<sup>52</sup> See chapter five

one of those variables that merit consideration in evaluating a presidency but should not be the decisive factor” (Bose 2006, 28, 35-36).

Greenstein disagreed, stating:

“The importance of cognitive strength in the presidency should be self-evident. Still, Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Carter, and Clinton had impressive intellects and defective temperaments. All four presidential experiences point to the following moral: Beware the presidential contender who lacks emotional intelligence. In its absence all else may turn to ashes” (Greenstein 2009a, 230-231).

Major’s own psychopathology and inner conflicts (related both to ego- defensive needs and cognition) arguably had a corrosive effect on his political leadership whilst Prime Minister, in decision-making, policy making, and personal relationships, both before and after the 1992 General Election (Foley 2002, 62). They led to charges of ‘dither,’ ‘avoidance’ and ‘indecisiveness’ in top-level decision-making (Lamont 2000, 250, 318).

But unquestionably Major’s psychopathology brought benefits as well, not least the inner steel he acquired as he grew up in Brixton, which led to displays of “remarkable courage” (Fookes 2017) – the calling of the 1995 leadership contest against cautious advice being the lead example of this, as was the Prime Ministers ‘brave’ decision to use a soapbox in the 1992 election in similar circumstances (Hogg and Hill 1995, 225, 268).

Major also had a first-class intellect displayed in his ability to retain facts and figures, which proved how, as one of his former advisers recalled:

“You can’t get on in our system if you’re thick, and I’ve seen the way his brain works, memorising briefs. He had phenomenal memory retention for facts and figures, like an encyclopaedia” (Hill 2017).

The constant dilemma for Major, with his own psychopathology and distinctive style of premiership, was how he managed the climate of expectations in following a Prime Minister with a persona of her own: Margaret Thatcher (Foley



2000, 81-82), whose own distinctive style became a constant reference to his own leadership. This became more problematic as time went on as the differences became more defined and noticed, as Seldon stated: “The personality make-up of Thatcher and Major helps explain why there was so little continuity from one court to the other” (Seldon 1997, 203).

## **7.2 Cognitive Style**

Greenstein defined cognitive style as that “with which the president processes the Niagara of advice and information that comes his way” (Greenstein 2000, 5). By this Greenstein means “to identify the variety of ways in which a president’s cerebral qualities may affect his role performance.” This included “his capacity to master information and comprehend arguments, the extent to which his thinking is concrete or abstract, and his ability to get to the nub of the problem and arrive at an analytical or strategic conclusion” (Greenstein 2006, 24).

In essence, Greenstein is seeking to analyse a President’s ability at reaching decisions, once the relevant advice from both acolytes and fellow policy makers has been given. President Carter was able to show his cognitive ability, for instance, by reducing complex matters to what he perceived to be their component parts, something which proved to be effective during the 1978 Camp David negotiations (Greenstein 2009a, 228-229).

Cognitive style has close proximity to another of the Greenstein leadership criteria: organisational capacity, since how a President utilises his advice will be used in the eventual coordination of policy-making decisions with their advisory team in the White House. For this reason, Bose argues, it is questionable as to why the two criteria are separate in Greenstein’s analytical framework when they are so “interdependent.” To Bose, organisational capacity has more impact on policy making of the two criteria, largely because each individual’s cognitive ability is different:

“A president who overburdens his schedule risks micro-management, while a president who balances his schedule may be better prepared to focus on the issues that most clearly demand his attention. Therefore, attention to

organisation can mitigate a president's cognitive shortcomings, and cognitive strengths alone are no guarantee of effective leadership" (Bose 2006, 33-34)<sup>53</sup>.

Within the British polity, "British Prime Ministers – like US Presidents – vary widely in their cognitive styles, or in the way in which they process and deal with advice and information and approach decision-making" (Theakston 2011, 92). It does not relate to the individual's intellectual ability or formal educational background (Honeyman 2007, 22). James Callaghan, Winston Churchill and Major all had no formal university education. In terms of cognitive style, Major was regarded as a "balancer, political manager," "not a conceptual or strategic thinker, but a reactive problem-solver, able to soak up and exploit his command of details" (Theakston 2007, 241). The essence of cognitive ability therefore is the capability to 'process' large quantities of advice and information before reaching a decision.

In order to examine Major's cognitive ability it is necessary to look at his premiership from two vantage points. First, at Major's *personal* decision-making ability, which will look at Major's ability to absorb and react to the daily red boxes that formed part of the daily grind of Prime Ministerial life. Second, at Major's *collective* decision-making ability. This will seek to look at Major's approach to Cabinet decision-making and his ability to reach decisions at an interpersonal elite level. It will also include a comparison with Major's immediate predecessor, Thatcher, whose style of decision-making was a constant reference point throughout his premiership.

Major's personal decision-making ability was recognised very early on by parliamentary colleagues. As John Wakeham, a former Chief Whip, recalled:

"He was outstanding when he was in my Whips' Office and was easily the most the most brilliant whip. At meetings Major was by a mile the best informed on the details of policies, like the rate support grant for instance" (Wakeham 2017).

---

<sup>53</sup> See chapter four

Ian Lang concurs with Wakeham on this, recalling:

“The first time I realised that he was more than just a nice guy, who had got in at the same time as me, was when I heard him do a Saturday morning interview on social security, which none of us could understand, and he was clear and lucid and articulate. He had one of the most forensic brains in the whips’ office. John could tear a piece of policy up until he understood it, and then remembered it. He and I sat at desks opposite each other in the whips’ office from time to time, and mine was covered with bits of paper reminding me about this and that policy, and his desk was always clear because he carried it all in his head. He really was a brain” (Lang 2017).

This ability led Major to be promoted first to the Department of Social Security and then the Treasury, the Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, picking Major as his new Chief Secretary because he had the “relatively unusual combination of attention to detail and likeable manner” in the way he approached complex decisions (Lawson 1992, 711). Major admits in his memoirs that at the Treasury: “I was easily able to absorb and recall at will a huge amount of detail about public spending” (Major 1999, 101). This also helped make Major a brilliant negotiator<sup>54</sup>.

This was twinned with a huge capacity for hard work, which made up for his lack of formal education. Andrew Tyrie, who worked with Major when Chief Secretary during the 1987 public spending round, summed up the opinions of most of his colleagues in this regard, when he said: “Major was not naturally an intellectual, but he was brilliant at the human side of politics” (Junor 1996, 137).

Major’s cognitive ability did indeed enable him to remember not just facts and figures, but also names and faces, as a former minister recalled:

“John Major had a gift for remembering your name. We once went to an event at Covent Garden, and the Public Relations guy complained afterwards that he had remembered his name, saying ‘PMs shouldn’t do that.’ But to complain that he was doing it too much was ludicrous” (Horam 2017).

---

<sup>54</sup> See chapter five

Major famously made final decisions by writing the 'pros' and 'cons' on a single sheet of A4 (Theakston 2007, 241). This was verified by Stephen Wall, the Prime Minister's overseas affairs advisor, who recognised his boss as a "calm, rational and methodical" decision-maker, having "weigh[ed] systematically the pros and cons of a course of action" – not a 'ditherer' in Wall's view (Wall 2008, 108-109).

The key question therefore flowing from this is, what type of cognitive facilities did Major have in order to enable him to absorb large amounts of complex material? One former colleague describes Major as "[a] deep thinker with a contemplative manner. He would mull over for a long time before coming to a decision" (Former Minister A 2017).

This 'contemplative manner' was displayed by Major in June 1995, when he voluntarily resigned the leadership of the Conservative Party, a closely guarded secret at the time (Hogg and Hill 1995, 268). Testimonies reveal the decision was clearly on his mind up until the very last moment. As a former MP stated:

"I recall one incident where I was attending a dinner party for all MPs who had entered the House in 1970 and John was the guest of honour. I spoke to him quietly during the course of the dinner to say how sorry I was that he had such tremendous difficulties on his plate and he smiled at me and said something along the lines of "I have something up my sleeve that will surprise people". He gave no clue whatsoever that he was going to resign as Party Leader. I was doing my turn in the Speaker's Chair when the news became public. Innumerable questions about this arose while I was in the Chair and it was at that point the penny dropped and I realised what he had meant at the dinner to which I have referred" (Fookes 2017).

At a personal level therefore Major's cognitive style was seemingly effective at leading to informed rational decision-making, his attention to detail and retentive memory, combined with a 'capacity for hard work' and 'likeable manner,' (including name recognition) reaping dividends, and admirers, including senior ministers such as Wakeham and Lawson.

Once Prime Minister, and taking decisions *collectively*, the personal cognitive abilities he possessed were also displayed as chairman of the Cabinet, which seemingly could be equally effective, as a former Cabinet colleague recalled:

“His charm, his patience, his grasp of detail, his capacity to weave threads of an argument together, to bring harmony out of disharmony. I saw it at Cabinet, often...People saying all different things, and he would remember who said what. All he was doing was weaving the thread of an argument into a strong rope, and very successfully” (Lang 2017).

And this style of collective decision-making, as a ‘balancer’ (Norton 1996, Theakston 2007) within Cabinet was seen as a breath of fresh air by Cabinet colleagues after the Thatcher era. As Clarke recalled,

“The most noticeable change that [Major] introduced was a reversion to a quite spectacularly co-operative and collective form of government. Margaret’s government had always had a collective nature but this had steadily been weakened in her last two or three years as she had quarrelled with more and more of her colleagues and became more determinedly authoritarian” (Clarke 2016, 254).

Thatcher’s style of decision making at Cabinet was an anathema to Major, who felt her “warrior characteristics were profoundly un-Conservative.” As Major went on to argue:

“There were occasions when arguments were put to her which were extremely good, but which ran into the slammed door of a closed mind. Too often she conducted government by gut instinct; conviction, some said admiringly, but at any rate without mature, detailed examination of the issues. She lost her political agility...” (Major 1999, 169).

Major therefore himself felt that his own ‘consultative, consensus building’ style was more effective, happy to not emulate Thatcher’s forceful style (Foley 2002, 27).

But other Cabinet colleagues feel that the difference in style of collective decision-making at Cabinet was overstated:

“I wouldn’t want to exaggerate [the difference between Thatcher and Major] actually, in terms of managing Cabinet business. Margaret was radical in policy, and was of course often tough and abrasive in public. John was really quite radical as well, persistent in terms of carrying things through, impressive at making decisions but had a gentler style. But he was impressive at making decisions” (MacGregor 2017).

And John MacGregor’s view is confirmed evidentially. This is because whilst it is true that some Cabinet ministers were to find her style to be domineering and overbearing at times (Heseltine 2000, 488), she actually used the Cabinet itself for its main purpose - as a decision-making body at the centre of Whitehall – no differently to John Major. As Seldon asserts, “[t]he fundamental truth is that both sought to avoid conflict in Cabinet,” and in fact, contrary to popular belief, the “[o]ccasions when both Prime Ministers had very troublesome Cabinets, and controversial, divisive discussions, were in fact remarkably few” (Seldon 1997, 207).

The key question therefore, if both Prime Ministers operated their Cabinets in a similar way, and ‘early’ Major’s style of decision-making was seen as effective in comparison to his predecessor (Heseltine 2000, Clarke 2016), how did these positives become negatives, ‘late’ John Major acquiring a reputation for ‘dither,’ ‘avoidance’ and concomitantly weakness and indecision.

And, as Foley asserts, the negatives resulted largely from comparisons between Major and Thatcher:

“Although the consultative style of Major’s cabinet chairmanship had initially been welcomed as an attractive counterpoint to the methods of Margaret Thatcher, it generated a succession of problems. It inevitably produced what were seen to be delays in decision-making” (Foley 2002, 54).

And, importantly, as Foley explained further:

“In comparison to Margaret Thatcher’s period in office, important decisions appeared to emerge more slowly than before. Connected to this change was the perception that decisions lacked conviction because they were seen as representing an outcome of prolonged accommodation” (Foley 2002, 54).

This was the essence of the charge against Major made publicly by Norman Lamont in the House of Commons in 1993 with the phrase “we give the impression of being in office, but not in power” (HC Deb June 9 1993 Col. 285). Lamont claims in his memoirs that he was not alone in his opinion either, openly using the phrase ‘in office but not in power’ in front of other Cabinet ministers after a frustrating meeting with the Prime Minister when no clear decision had been made on an internal policy question (Lamont 2000, 321).

It was Lamont as well, on BBC’s *The Major Years* in 1999, who felt the day that symbolised Major’s poor decision-making ability was Black Wednesday, September 1992, concluding:

“I rather came to the conclusion that he [Major] just couldn’t face it. He could not bring himself to make a decision, and more and more people had to be involved...We needed a decision. He was able to concentrate on the details but he did not seem able to concentrate on the big decision that had to be made” (Foley 2002, 55).

Hennessy sees Black Wednesday as a watershed moment in “Major’s consensual, consultative style in the Cabinet room”:

“After that [trauma in September 1992] he would bring less and less to full Cabinet for fear of leaks and would skip through the regular business of European affairs...for fear of the party’s civil war on Europe erupting and poisoning the entire proceedings” (Hennessy 2000, 444).

Major did seek Butler’s advice on leaks. The Prime Minister was particularly keen to know why so many were taking place in such a confidential arena. Butler, revealingly, offered three reasons: political jockeying for position as a result of ministerial insecurity; rival camps created by the strain in government ranks over

the Maastricht Bill; and finally, public opinion not being sufficiently prepared for government policies (Beesley 2017, 544) – all symptoms of a febrile party.

Hennessy is supported by Kavanagh and Seldon, agreeing that after 1992 Major more and more simply sought to bypass Cabinet altogether, deciding that if he was unable to 'square' opponents beforehand, and trouble was likely, to simply postpone taking the business to full Cabinet until a consensus could be found. 'Too sensitive for Cabinet' was a phrase often heard in Number 10 (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 225).

Major also found it possible to circumvent normal Cabinet procedure through more use of 'Political Cabinets' with no civil servants present and only the Political Secretary taking the minutes. At these Robin Butler was asked to leave. This initiative by the Prime Minister was problematic however, with decisions being taken by ministers which belonged to the 'real' Cabinet in the 'political' one, and then the ministers would question why the civil service had taken no action (Hennessy 2000, 445). Jonathan Hill, the Prime Minister's Political Secretary, regarded such political Cabinets as a complete waste of time: "far worse than an ordinary Cabinet, a place for show-offs and creeps" (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999, 226).

Major also sought to refer disputes at Cabinet and in bilaterals between ministers to a Cabinet sub-committee chaired by John Wakeham, the Leader of the House of Lords. This occurred on a number of occasions, one example being over a dispute between Peter Lilley, Social Security Secretary, and Norman Lamont, the Chancellor, on the issue of pension payments. This, to Lamont, only reinforced his view of John Major as a man who was incapable of making a decision. But, most of all, it was "unfair to expect [Wakeham] to solve every problem of Government, and inevitably he couldn't" (Lamont 2000, 318-320). Wakeham confirms this, admitting:

"Yes, I did do a bit of troubleshooting for John Major, one-to-one. I did it for Margaret as well" (Wakeham 2017).



Major therefore evidentially was seeking conflict – and thereby decision – avoidance at Cabinet and elite decision-making level following the ‘trauma’ of late 1992. But what of Major’s own cognition in collective decision-making, of which, there are, arguably two theories. The first is the proposition that, as Foley asserts, “Major’s striving for a post-Thatcher consensus was in effect predicated upon the existence of internal tensions and divisions” (Foley 2002, 55), which concurs with Hennessy (2000) and Kavanagh and Seldon (1999). The second proposition, as is equally arguable, was that Major’s collective decision-making style, put simply, was pathological in nature and character-based, not exposed merely by moments of trauma. Two case studies can explore this. The first, in 1991, is in relation to decisions at elite level on the replacement of the Poll Tax<sup>55</sup>. The second, the *casus belie* of Lamont, is Black Wednesday itself, in September 1992.

Major had pledged during the 1990 leadership contest to replace the Poll Tax, matching the pledge of Heseltine (Heppell 2008b, 86). Once he had become Prime Minister one of his first decisions in the formation of the new Cabinet was to appoint Heseltine Environment Secretary, with the specific duty of implementing the leadership campaign pledge (Heseltine 2000, 378).

Whilst initially this was viewed as a politically shrewd move by Major it very quickly became apparent that Heseltine himself had not thought of an alternative solution to the Poll Tax beyond a return to the former rates and that the new Prime Minister had no clear alternative either beyond a review of local government finance (Crick 1997, 362-366). Heseltine therefore was merely instructed to say that “nothing was ruled in, nothing was ruled out” until a final decision had been taken (Heseltine 2000, 378, 389).

The Poll Tax review, which began in December 1990, was in fact to last five months before the government was able to announce its proposed replacement with the Council Tax in the spring of 1991. The Prime Minister throughout chaired the main cabinet committee, GEN8, set up to oversee the process, at one point intervening on Chancellor Norman Lamont’s March 1991 Budget to ensure a

---

<sup>55</sup> See chapter six on the ideational underpinnings of the Poll Tax

means could be found to enable the reduction of Poll Tax bills in the interim. By referring the Poll Tax question to a Cabinet sub-committee this allowed Major to be able to avoid taking an immediate decision, happy to let the argument run and run and give everyone a chance to air their opinions. It immediately frustrated many Cabinet colleagues however and led to early charges of 'dither' (Hogg and Hill 1995, 55, 59-65).

When the question of the replacement for the Poll Tax dragged into March 1991, with no clear direction or concrete proposals, the press and the PCP turned on the new Prime Minister, as well as Cabinet colleagues behind the scenes. Newspapers were particularly scathing, regarding Major as being "dithering and indecisive" on the Poll Tax (Seldon 1997, 179). This was despite the Poll Tax itself taking years to develop (Lawson 1992).

And Major received criticism from his former boss, Nigel Lawson, who attacked the government over its inability to make its mind up, telling the House of Commons:

"I think it was Pierre Mendez-France who said that to govern was to choose. I agree with that. To appear to be unable to choose is to appear to be unable to govern" (HC Deb March 25 1991 Col. 637).

Later Lawson assured Major that "he did not mean it is an attack on me, but with Labour's 'dithering' charges in vogue, it was interpreted as a ringing critique of my leadership" (Major 1999, 218).

When agreement was finally reached to replace the Poll Tax with the Council Tax in the Queen's Speech in November 1991 Major's effectiveness as a decision maker was being openly questioned and divided opinion:

"critics saw his prevarication as providing fertile ground for divisions to grow; allies say it allowed harmonious resolution to an issue which in totemic and substantive terms had cleft the party" (Seldon 1997, 174-179).

Hogg and Hill argue Major's collective decision-making had been displayed as a success in the replacing of the Poll Tax. He had kept the Cabinet together, and

had successfully brought back Heseltine from the political wilderness, enabling John Major to unite the party in the process (Hogg and Hill 1995, 13).

This view is supported by those who witnessed Major's collective decision-making close hand, a former advisor recalled:

“He took his time replacing the Poll Tax. He didn't immediately say 'we're going to replace the Poll Tax,' because he knew that would fall into the trap of raising the hostility of the Thatcher diehards, and he appointed Heseltine of course, and he worked through all the options. I thought the accusation that he was a 'ditherer' was unfair because what I thought he was doing was trying to get to a solution which was a development of the old ratings system, and I thought it was skilfully done in the end” (Turnbull 2017).

Heseltine also came to respect Major in the way he conducted himself as a chairman, commenting later that it was a principal factor in his thinking as to whether he should oppose the Prime Minister in the 1995 leadership contest: “I would not stand against him. It never occurred to me to do so. He had treated me well. I had been party to every serious discussion...that he had undertaken as Prime Minister” (Heseltine 2000, 480). Douglas Hurd supports Heseltine in this viewpoint, telling of how he recalled John Major always “took trouble to ensure that all significant voices around the table had been heard” (Hurd 2003, 413).

But if the replacing of the Poll Tax was regarded as a success in Major's style of collective decision-making, the polar opposite was argued, principally by the former Chancellor, Norman Lamont, on the events of the day that Britain left the ERM, September 16 1992: Black Wednesday, when the pound sterling was ejected from the ERM (Stephens 1996). Lamont simply regarded Major's conduct on September 16 as emblematic of all that was wrong with his collective style of decision-making (Foley 2002, 55).

Black Wednesday was an acutely difficult moment for the Prime Minister politically through which he had to navigate successfully, particularly as his own survival was at stake, having originally persuaded Mrs Thatcher to join the

ERM<sup>56</sup>. Hence the decision to seemingly 'bind' possible leadership rivals at this moment of crisis (Heseltine 2000, 431)<sup>57</sup>. Hennessy describes Major's personnel choices on the day as "improvised collegiality" (Hennessy 2000, 462). Lamont saw it differently, recalling how "astonished" he was at the time, regarding it as a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister alone to decide, becoming first frustrated and then angry at Major's decision to invite other significant non-Treasury ministers (Heseltine, Clarke and Hurd) to partake in any decisions regarding the fate of the pound. Lamont thus viewed Major's use of collective decision making on September 16 1992 as nothing more than a delaying tactic on a decision that could have been taken hours before, feeling that "he was far too calm, and slow to take the difficult decisions. He seemed unwilling to face up to the issue" (Lamont 2000, 250).

It could however be argued that, in light of more recent evidence, that Norman Lamont was in fact merely reiterating Treasury frustration at non-Treasury ministers involvement in the decision to withdraw the pound from the ERM. Ken Clarke has indeed subsequently revealed that the collective decision to have a second rise in interest rates to fifteen per cent at 12.30pm was particularly frowned upon:

"The Chancellor and the governor [Robin Leigh-Pemberton] were extremely unenthusiastic about a further rise in rates, which they regarded as unlikely to work, while Treasury officials were furious that we were being allowed to interfere" (Clarke 2016, 204-205).

Lamont equally resisted all attempts by non-Treasury ministers to have the second rise cancelled once it was clear that the pound was destined to leave the ERM. Throughout Clarke however does concur with Lamont in saying that the atmosphere was 'generally quite calm,' 'clear' and 'amicable' (Clarke 2016, 204-205).

---

<sup>56</sup> See chapter six

<sup>57</sup> See chapter five

But in both the replacement of the Poll Tax in 1991, and in events surrounding the day Britain withdrew from the ERM in September 1992, each did show evidence of prolonged decision-making by Major, recognised not only by Norman Lamont but other Cabinet colleagues as well. Indeed, Chris Patten felt “he almost overdid his wish to carry people along.” A view which Major concurred with: “I went to a great deal of trouble to listen and respond to whatever people had to say...If I can soothe wounds, I would do so” (Seldon 1997, 207-208).

Ken Clarke equally agrees, feeling that Major’s underlying pathology was allowing perceptions of dither and indecision to seep into the media. As he explained in his memoirs:

“We all found the new style of Cabinet debate enjoyable and stimulating. But there was a downside to this approach, mainly the fact that John was most reluctant to make a decision that overruled the opinion of any minority within the Cabinet. Throughout his premiership he always retained an optimistic belief that with enough time for discussion it would be possible to reach a consensus with which everyone would be truly pleased...This was indeed a very desirable objective but it sometimes involved a very long discussion. It became seriously problematic that Cabinet could not reach a conclusion in one meeting on any one subject” (Clarke 2016, 254).

And perceptions were allowed to grow:

“Also, Cabinet discussions were always in danger of extending beyond the morning allocated to them...This would not have been a serious matter except that it had the side effect of suggesting to political journalists the existence of some internal crisis. Even John’s closest colleagues, like Chris Patten..., tried to persuade him to curtail the discussion to a modest extent” (Clarke 2016, 254).

The perception of ‘dither’ and ‘indecision’ and ‘avoidance’ was therefore provided by Major himself in his style of collective decision-making, such was Major’s determination to reach a consensus. And such behaviour cannot be entirely laid at the door of the traumatic events of Black Wednesday. Even in 1991, when the

political climate was seemingly good for Major, the five months it took to replace the Poll Tax was regarded as overlong, and not just by the media (Seldon 1997).

'Prime Ministerial override' was indeed rare under John Major, Hennessy recalling one of only a few examples of "Mr Major's solo-policy-making" - the decision to replace the Royal Yacht at public expense. As one insider put it:

"Ken Clarke would have blocked it forever if the PM hadn't taken the view that we had to do it. [Major] decided that we would have to wind this [discussion] up because it has to be done. He does that very seldom" (Hennessy 2000, 458).

Because Major was so restrained in his use of prime ministerial override, his Cabinet colleagues did not seem to mind.

### **7.3 Emotional Intelligence**

Greenstein defined emotional intelligence as:

"what the German sociologist, Max Weber called "the firm taming of the soul"...the president's ability to manage his emotions and turn them to constructive purposes, rather than being dominated by them and allowing them to diminish his leadership" (Greenstein 2000, 5).

The final leadership criteria in Greenstein's analytical framework is perhaps the most psychologically orientated as compared to the other five, continuing as it does on his earlier work on the inner conflict and ego-defensive needs, but in the context of political leadership (Greenstein 1987, 57; Greenstein 1992, 113). Out of all six leadership criteria, Greenstein rates emotional intelligence as the most important for effective leadership: "Beware the presidential contender who lacks emotional intelligence. In its absence all else may turn to ashes" (Greenstein 2009a, 230-231).

Barber, in his own typology of Presidential leadership, also recognised that effectiveness in political leadership was dependent upon emotional stability,

which Greenstein acknowledged influenced his own thinking despite his criticisms<sup>58</sup>:

“The term ‘emotional intelligence’ and its opposite, which might be dubbed ‘emotional obtuseness,’ provide convenient rubrics for addressing Barber’s concern with the emotional underpinnings of presidential leadership” (Greenstein 2006, 24-25).

Greenstein then goes on to explain his thinking further:

“The first of these notions provides a useful way of referring to presidents who are able to channel their emotions into productive leadership – the ability Barber associates with the active-positive type. The second serves to identify presidents who lack emotional self-control and whose emotions sabotage their leadership. This is the vulnerability Barber ties to the active-negative type” (Greenstein 2006, 24-25).

Greenstein, however, despite the high importance he placed upon the emotional stability of Presidents and effective leadership, has only been able to categorise three occupants of the modern White House out of twelve as with emotional intelligence, a larger proportion falling into the undefined mixed category. For these Presidents, Greenstein admits that emotional intelligence “did not significantly impair their leadership” (Greenstein 2004, 221).

To Bose, this reinforces her view that Greenstein should be concentrating on “more definable qualities” in his analytical framework, it being clear that “many presidents who have some “emotional undercurrents” may still be able to govern successfully, particularly if they have close advisers who can mitigate the effect of those undercurrents” (Bose 2006, 34). Therefore if Greenstein ranks emotional intelligence as the most important criteria in assessing leadership, Bose ranks it as the least: a clear difference in opinion.

Within the British polity the emotional intelligence of Prime Ministers is equally open to debate as to “how far there is a correlation between an equitable

---

<sup>58</sup> See chapter two

temperament...and statesmanship or political achievement” (Theakston 2011, 94). Winston Churchill was famous for his mood swings and for suffering bouts of deep depression or ‘black dog,’ yet he still managed to lead Britain through to victory in the Second World War. Anthony Eden, on the other hand, was emotionally volatile, highly-strung, bad-tempered and petulant and easily upset and annoyed. Eden’s temperament, combined with a serious illness, were important contributory factors in one of Britain’s biggest foreign policy blunders when the decision was made by Britain to invade the Suez Canal in 1956. Indeed, looking back at that time, Eden’s “weaknesses in terms of emotional intelligence are still striking” (Theakston 2007, 244-247).

Of post war premiers, perhaps the most comparable Prime Minister to John Major, with similar emotional characteristics, was Harold Wilson. Like Major, Wilson was by nature thin skinned and took criticism to heart, particularly by the media. Like Major, Wilson was also keen to build personal relationships with people, being a great lover of tea room gossip, and would always try to avoid confrontation as much as possible to ensure party unity (Honeyman 2007, 24-25).

Before examining Major’s emotional intelligence as Prime Minister it is first necessary to briefly study his early childhood up to age sixteen as this will provide a pathway to understand the emotional undercurrents underlying his premiership. Major’s view of the world and outlook on life was profoundly shaped by his first sixteen years. As Seldon points out, by his sixteenth birthday:

“[T]he feeling of being passed over, dismissed, is powerful within him, and owes much to these years. So too does the feeling of insecurity, which was to haunt him all of his life” (Seldon 1997, 17).

These were indeed to be “the worst days of his life” and a time of deep unhappiness for the Prime Minister and which were to have a lasting effect on him (Junor 1996, 28).

This was because, whilst at first Major had a “comfortable but well off” upbringing in the outskirts of Surrey in Sutton, by school age his family had fallen on hard



times and had been forced to move from their home in Worcester Park to Coldharbour Lane, inner-city Brixton. His father Tom, elderly and going blind, who had been as a younger man a touring trapeze artist with his wife Gwen, had been forced to close down the family's garden ornaments business. Major, now at Rutlish Grammar School, having passed the eleven-plus, was acutely aware of his diminished circumstances as compared to the other boys, feeling especially sensitive about having to go to school in an inferior uniform to the other boys (Taylor 2006, 5-8).

This traumatic period in his life contributed to Major's lack of drive and low self-esteem at this time and somewhat explain his decision to leave school at sixteen. But there is a "strong reason to believe that, with elderly and frail parents and financial worries, he had neither a particularly loving nor secure upbringing" (Seldon 1997, 12, 17). As a consequence:

"His potential was also grossly under-estimated by his school, which...must have further nurtured in him inner feelings of resentment and possibly engendered a conviction that no one understood him or knew what he was actually like" (Seldon 1997, 12, 17).

Others have a much simpler explanation for Major's indifference at school:

"There is no mystery about the reasons why this highly intelligent person, widely credited ever since with a photographic recall and flip-wristed mastery of a brief, did not stay for A Levels, university entrance and the manifest destiny of Oxbridge. The Majors were poor, very poor" (Pearce 1991. 7).

In other words, there was no option: with elderly parents he had to work, as did his older siblings. His education, as he was to admit himself, was therefore at 'The University of Life' (Lamont 2000, 15).

The trauma of childhood did leave a lasting effect, as former MP for Sutton and Cheam, Lady Olga Maitland confirms, recalling when she tried to discuss this period in John Major's life with the Prime Minister:

“He was born in my constituency, Sutton. His parent’s house was in Worcester Park, which was desperately dark, a bit pokey and depressing, and he went to the local Cheam primary school. But it was a depressing, sad, place. Then he moved to Brixton, but he never referred in his public statements to his early years in Sutton, always Brixton, even though I tried to remind him to when we met” (Maitland 2017).

But more than anything this period in his life left him with a strong desire for affirmation, and sensitivity to criticism:

“When his career was flourishing...he would be expansive and self-confident. But when the running was difficult, his confidence suffered, and he became peculiarly vulnerable to criticism. Major would worry – far too much, Norma [Major] thought, – about what people were saying about him, especially in the press” (Seldon 1997, 204).

But behind the somewhat vulnerable and likeable exterior there was also another side to his character, engendered within him through the traumas: that of a tough, Brixton street fighter who had a burning ambition “to come first” – an attitude that took him all the way from Brixton to Downing Street (Junor 1996, 1).

Lady Olga Maitland again:

“But the steel was there. By time he reached Westminster he had weathered more battles than many people had experienced in a lifetime. Social deprivation. Financial deprivation. He had to find things out for himself. So by the time he reached Westminster he was a pretty seasoned individual, having lived two lifetimes to other people’s one. But when you saw him he was always a charming man” (Maitland 2017).

This drive was partly driven by a deep resentment at the class snobbery and intellectual prejudice he had suffered since childhood. The treatment of his father in particular had a profound influence upon him, as the Prime Minister confirmed when he told the 1995 Party Conference in Blackpool:

“When I was a small boy, my bread and butter was paid for by my father’s small business. He made garden ornaments forty years ago and some people have always found that very funny. I don’t. I see a proud, stubborn, independent old man who ran that firm and taught me to love my country, fight for my own and spit in the eye of malign fate. I know the knockers and the sneerers who may never have taken a risk in their comfortable lives aren’t fit to wipe the boots of the risk-takers of Britain” (Major 1995b).

In the description of his father John Major could almost be describing himself: proud, stubborn, independent. The speech was thus a clear display of Major’s own tenacity and determination. This did not stop Major however still being prone to self-doubt at times about his own ability or the rightness of his cause, but some of his colleagues took this, at times, exposure of the Prime Minister’s vulnerabilities to simply be a technique: “a mechanism of management by means of overflow,” rather than necessarily a mainstay of his character (Hurd 2003, 414).

Some however see Major’s focus on his background as overstated:

“He had a chip on his shoulder. I remember all that stuff about his O Levels. But he hadn’t done badly had he? Who cared?” (Robathan 2017).

Major’s childhood and adolescence therefore shines a spotlight on what were to be the emotional characteristics that would continue into adulthood and be displayed during his premiership. These were: first, sensitivity to criticism, based upon an innate vulnerability since childhood; second, pride, in family and in his personal achievements; third, mental toughness, bravery and resilience, learned growing up in Brixton. And finally, an attractive and engaging persona which captivated most people who met the Prime Minister, but who could equally still go from great highs to great lows in mood, as documented by Gyles Brandreth in his *Diaries* (Brandreth 2000). Thus, this section of the chapter should reveal the psychology underlying John Major’s political leadership.

The level of viciousness in the media and the print press against Major during his premiership was unprecedented in modern politics (Seymour-Ure 1994, 416).

And it was personal, as Foley asserts: “It was not simply that Major had become identified with as an abstracted centre of accountability for an unpopular government.” It was also that:

“[H]e was being continually subjected to the proposition that there was something about him and his personal make-up that was undermining the government. As a consequence, he did not merely characterise decline, he was made to embody it through personal flaws and deficiencies” (Foley 2000, 251).

For Major this was all part of a regular pattern:

“Fantasies all too often took the place of facts. Under the heading “Can Major take the strain?” the *Times* reported in October 1992 that I was losing weight, giving up alcohol and turning my hair grey – all of which was as false as it was silly. “If I really were tinting my hair”, I said to Alex Allan, “would I have chosen this colour?” (Major 1999, 360).

The stories were to prove deeply damaging however:

“Such daily opposition ripped into my premiership, damaged the Conservative Party and came close to destroying the government” (Major 1999, 360).

Friends and former colleagues still resent the level of abuse Major received as Prime Minister, one saying how Major should be viewed as a statesman who helped bring peace to Northern Ireland, “rather than the *Spitting Image* character depiction” (Hawkins 2017). Others are more forthright:

“I did resent at the time and continue to feel strongly that the media attempt to depict him as a grey man was wholly inaccurate and grossly unfair” (Fookes 2017).

The media’s attacks seemed largely to come from three angles: social background; caricature and lampooning; and from an ideological vantage point, particularly in the Conservative-inclined press. They all had the implied, if not explicit, message: “Is he up to the job?” (*Independent*, April 3 1993). The main aim equally with each form of attack was to ridicule and mock, aided by the fact

that Major had chosen to, at least initially, be ‘Mr Nice’ towards the media<sup>59</sup>. Once the Prime Minister had realised that he had been ‘stitched up’ he was often left “inconsolable because of press coverage. He could be too sensitive” (Bale and Sanders 2001, 99).

Some journalists and media outlets were out to attack or ridicule Major at every opportunity, with seemingly no other purpose, as a former aide confirmed:

“Sitting in No 10, I saw distortion and direct lies in the media almost daily. One example. [Major] made a notably successful visit to South Africa. Afterwards two senior journalists for a (Murdoch) paper told me that their articles had been spiked because it was the paper’s policy not to carry anything favourable about [Major]” (Lyne 2017).

One of the most vicious attacks came from Alastair Campbell, a journalist from the *Daily Mirror*. Campbell exploited Major’s social vulnerability and clubbable good nature mercilessly, quickly regarding him as no more than a “ridiculous figure of no consequence” and refused to give Major any of the respect that a Prime Minister had been accustomed to expect in the past (Osborne and Walters 2004, 87-90)<sup>60</sup>. Kelvin MacKenzie, editor of the Sun, was another journalist who showed no respect to the new Prime Minister (Seldon 1997, 326; Major 2012, P11 5-7)<sup>61</sup>.

The implication by Campbell, MacKenzie and others was that Major was too ‘ordinary’ to be Prime Minister and therefore did not deserve respect:

“Smart writers have sneered at him for being ordinary saying that what is needed in a leader is somebody extraordinary. They are right, the Prime Minister does need to be extraordinary...It takes a character of enormous strength to prevent the power, the pressure, the lack of privacy, and the constant attentions of the media destroying them...But John Major is no ordinary man” (Junor 1996, 5-6).

---

<sup>59</sup> See chapter three

<sup>60</sup> Ditto

<sup>61</sup> Ditto

And such a condescending, mocking attitude was meant to hurt, and it did, as a former Cabinet colleague recalls:

“He got very fed up if they tried to patronise him. He had been interviewed by a right-wing newspaper editor and afterwards he said, ‘God, it is people like that that make you want to vote Socialist.’ And he was difficult. His reaction was that he had risen from pretty humble background and they ought not to try to humiliate me” (Wakeham 2017).

Major clearly couldn’t entirely rise above it either, as revealed by his 1995 Party Conference speech in which he explicitly refers to the “knockers and the sneerers” who found his upbringing “funny” (Major 1995b) – a clear reference to the journalists in the hall. But by the Prime Minister rising to it, the journalists simply felt able to go even further:

“Being seen to be affected vexed his aides, and emboldened those in the media who, scenting blood, wanted to go even further in ridicule and criticism. Internalising his anger and resentment at what he saw as injustice and gratuitous unpleasantness further churned him up and did not aid his equilibrium” (Seldon 1997, 206).

Seldon could not however definitively answer why Major could not rise above the critics:

“One can only speculate why he could not brush off the criticism from his detractors, but his lack of personal security and positive self-image from childhood and adolescence clearly figured large” (Seldon 1997, 206).

The lampooning was particularly vicious as well, alongside the TV *Spitting Image* caricature of a ‘grey man,’ Steve Bell in the *Guardian* famously associating the Prime Minister with underpants, depicting Major as a naff Superman who, instead of having shiny red briefs, would sport spotty Y-fronts outside his trousers: “a metaphor for uselessness and awkwardness” (Baker 1995, 186).

And as with all journalism, sometimes the attacks seemed to slip into the deeply personal which seemed even to go beyond what was ethical. This was recalled

by Gyles Brandreth in his diaries, being shocked to read a vicious personal assault on John Major by the *Times* in late October 1992 at the height of the pit closure crisis, which reported:

“Mr Major leads a surprisingly solitary life...Mrs Major spends much of her time in Huntingdon with the children and when her husband first arrived at Downing Street he could find no one to iron his shirts. He would go for days eating little or nothing...He is frequently lonely and unsure of his real friends” (Brandreth 2000, 128).

Even considering the revelations of 2002 (Parris and Maguire 2004, 266-272), this is a deeply scurrilous and ethically questionable piece of journalism, as it reports that on Black Wednesday, Major was “depressed”, “occasionally disturbed” and widely reported to have been “under severe strain” – all implying that the Prime Minister had had some form of nervous breakdown (Foley 2002, 62). This rumour was allegedly spread by Norman Lamont, which the former Chancellor has subsequently denied in his memoirs (Lamont 2000, 249).

In the right-wing media this kind of story, whether true or not, was all playing into a narrative that John Major, essentially, was not ‘up to the job’ of being Prime Minister. Some journalists, such as Paul Johnson in the *Telegraph*, turned such stories towards ideational concerns about the direction of the government, in this case juxtaposing Major’s alleged “depression” on Black Wednesday with Mrs Thatcher’s “sparkling form” at the time – even suggesting a possible return of the former Prime Minister, and the “strong leadership” that would accompany her (Foley 2002, 63). Thatcher herself was happy to play this ‘lady over the water’ portrayal in order to reinforce her legacy<sup>62</sup>.

The fact that such stories came from the ‘usual suspects’ in the right-wing press such as Paul Johnson, William Rees-Mogg or Simon Heffer arguably meant that they could be explained to some extent and not totally unexpected. This could not be said of Roy Jenkins, a centrist and former founder of the SDP. Jenkins wrote a stinging piece in the *Observer* in 1992, arguing that the contrast between the

---

<sup>62</sup> See chapter six

Prime Minister and Margaret Thatcher as leaders led to the “steadily mounting impression that neither in breadth of personality, nor in depth of knowledge and experience [was] the prime minister up to the job” (Foley 2002, 62).

Heseltine suggested that Major simply not read the papers, but, as Heseltine was to admit: “But such advice ran counter to his character. He was a man who had to know” (Heseltine 2000, 472). Douglas Hurd equally recalled in his memoirs: “John Major felt the whole media owed him a fair hearing,” and would often “telephone me at seven in the morning about some tawdry piece in a tabloid, which I had not read and would probably never had read had he not rung” (Hurd 2003, 415).

Also the Number 10 Private Office tried desperately hard to stop newspapers being left lying around from the day before, just in case the Prime Minister had not spotted them (Seldon 1997, 198-197). This is confirmed by Jonathan Hill (Hill 2017). Therefore it is hard not to conclude, as a former Cabinet colleague<sup>63</sup> admits, that: “Yes, his sensitivity to criticism was a weakness.”

The last word on this should go to John Major himself, who told the 2012 Leveson Inquiry:

“I think I can explain it in human terms. If you pick up the papers each day and read a caricature of what you believe you are doing, and what you believe you are, then I suppose it is a basic human emotion to get a bit ratty about it, and from time to time in private I did...but did I read them too much? Yes, I did. Was it hurtful sometimes? Yes, it was. Did I think it was malicious? I think that is for others to make a judgment about” (Major 2012, P8 1-8 P9 13-16).

But, as is the case in any examination of the emotional perturbations underlying Major, there is an essential paradox, as Seldon recognised:

“Major had a great, almost unnatural, determination and courage, but also at his core a vulnerability which no amount of success after his teens could ever

---

<sup>63</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity



remove, and which remained with him until the end of his premiership” (Seldon 1997, 206).

Toughness therefore can be seen as another facet of the Major character, alongside sensitivity.

To some close to Major this toughness was displayed through resilience, as Jonathan Hill recalled in the 1992 election:

“I’ll give you an example: the 1992 election campaign. Everyone had already written us off and were preparing their excuses. I’d taken over the day the election was called. We were cobbling it together, and it was threadbare. We were out every day, from 6am to one o’clock in the morning. I can’t even remember a tetchy word, certainly not even a cross word. It was huge fun. He was remarkable. He was completely rock solid and steady. No complaint about bloody time or the bloody programme. You may get a bit of a good feeling, and then you’d return to Central Office at midnight and then be told that we’re losing, all doom and gloom. But he was very steady, though it was probably only in the final week that he thought we were going to win” (Hill 2017).

This was recognised by former Cabinet colleagues, daily, combined, as it was, also with stamina: “He was physically tough. He could work a long day without losing his temper, or his way” (Lang 2017). A former adviser confirms this, feeling the main priority for Number 10 staff, due to the work he put in, was: “This whole issue of getting the guy fed and keeping his blood sugars up” (Turnbull 2017).

Gyles Brandreth feels he even saw resilience in Major’s handling of the media, despite the oversensitivity, recalling:

“But then I think he realised that if you can stay standing everything blows over inside a week. Mrs May has been keeping going every week since October [2017] and is still there, and he managed to keep going all the way until the end” (Brandreth 2017).

But there were equally flashes of the back streets of Brixton, displayed at moments of frustration and anger, his remarks in July 1993, accusing ministers of

being ‘bastards’<sup>64</sup>, was not the only moment he showed his true feelings, media ‘gaffe’ or not. At Gus O’Donnell’s leaving party at Number 10 for instance the Prime Minister was reported to have said that he was “going to fucking crucify the right for what they have done. And this time I will have the party behind me” (Lamont 2000, 408). These sentiments were also displayed in private, as a former MP recalled:

“When we met his decency was the number one issue, but then the bitterness. I remember when we met in his room in the House of Commons, about six of us, and it was at the height the Eurosceptic row, and he said that for his next meeting he would probably need a “couple of cricket bats on his back,” sort of bitterly said. But he didn’t go out to antagonise” (Maitland 2017).

And Major could display un-parliamentary etiquette in the House of Commons. Nigel Lawson was one of the first to experience Major’s happiness to forget parliamentary etiquette and respond in kind, even if it appeared petulant and undignified. This was shown on the occasion when the former Chancellor questioned the delay in the replacement of the Poll Tax and quoted Pierre Mendes-France in the House of Commons in March 1991. Tartyly the Prime Minister replied the next day at the despatch box, saying of Lawson that “in the past few weeks a number of decisions have been taken that he would have wished to take in recent years, but neglected to take” (Seldon 1997, 176). The fact that Lawson and Major had worked so closely together at the Treasury did not stop the Prime Minister responding in kind if slighted.

Norman Tebbit was also to suffer the same treatment when he criticised Major following Black Wednesday after he had claimed that Major had forced Mrs Thatcher into joining the ERM in October 1990. During the Commons debate on Britain’s withdrawal from the ERM in September 1992 the Prime Minister once again showed that he was only too happy to publicly respond in kind however un-prime ministerial it might appear. As Major reminded the Commons:

---

<sup>64</sup> See chapter three

“Yet even my Right Honourable Friend Lord Tebbit lost many battles with my formidable predecessor. Despite this, according to Lord Tebbit, even my formidable predecessor, whose convictions and firmness of purpose are everywhere admired, was somehow dragged into the Exchange Rate Mechanism by her new chancellor. Ah, yes, I remember it well” (H C Deb September 24 1992 Col. 4)

As Teresa Gorman exclaimed: “Wow! Was the Prime Minister going to blame Lord Tebbit for the problem?” (Gorman 1993, 73-74).

The ERM was of course one of Major’s personal achievements in which he had great pride, a further characteristic he had carried with him since childhood. This led the Prime Minister to valiantly defend sterling at the Scottish CBI in the weeks leading up to Black Wednesday<sup>65</sup>:

“The soft option, the devaluer’s option, the inflationary option, in my judgement that would be a betrayal of our future at this moment, and I tell you categorically that is not the Government’s policy” (Major 1992b).

As Stephens recognised, due to the nature of the language used, Major’s speech to the Scottish CBI in 1992, “carried him too deeply into those perilous waters where personal pride displaces political pragmatism” (Stephens 1996, 236-237).

Norman Lamont was to confirm that John Major’s pride at his achievement stopped all discussion when, in a bizarre set of circumstances, he was unable to get the Prime Minister to discuss a possible suspension during the summer of 1992. Lamont’s accounts of the weeks before Black Wednesday are disputed, even to the point of a record of a meeting at Number 10, but the former Chancellor is clear:

“I can categorically say that the Prime Minister never at any time in my presence made any such remark implying any sympathy with the idea of leaving the ERM. If he had made such a remark I would certainly have seized on it and remembered it” (Lamont 2000, 220-242).

---

<sup>65</sup> See chapter three

Others disputed that pride was the driving force behind Major's efforts to defend sterling:

"No, it wasn't pride alone to defend sterling. He came and told me there was a big problem looming, and he told the Scottish CBI too. He knew damn well that it was a big problem" (Lang 2017).

Major also had the opportunity following the Danish rejection of the Maastricht Treaty in June 1992 to shelve the Treaty entirely. This was because the Danish referendum result effectively made the Treaty "null and void" (Clark 1998, 504-505). Pride, however, at his achievement in reaching an agreement at Maastricht in 1991<sup>66</sup> can explain his decision to continue its ratification process through Parliament.

As Hurd recorded, Major had no intention of dropping the Treaty:

"The Prime Minister...took a straightforward line. He and the rest of us, with the consent of a properly consulted Parliament, had committed ourselves to a treaty...It would be deeply damaging, indeed unthinkable, to go back on our word. I agreed with him" (Hurd 2003, 432).

Major then, unusually, being a believer in collective Cabinet government, did not even bring the Danish vote to full Cabinet before going to the House of Commons to tell MPs that, while the Committee Stage of the Maastricht Bill would be temporarily suspended, he had no intention of abandoning the treaty. To Seldon:

"Major's refusal to countenance abandonment, or to accept a referendum (he thought he might lose) was due more to proprietorial feelings towards a treaty of which he was proud. He had negotiated in good faith...[and] he wanted to be, and seen to be, a trustworthy and good European, rather than backsliding in the face of...fickle parliamentary pressure" (Seldon 1997, 294-295).

This good faith is actually now questionable, especially when it was revealed subsequently by Lamont in his memoirs that Major was "desperately hoping for a French 'Non'" in their referendum on September 20 1992 (Lamont 2000, 280).

---

<sup>66</sup> See chapter five

But for the Prime Minister the constant intra-party war over Europe, more than anything, particularly at its height in the mid-1990s, did lead to the display of emotional perturbations which worried close parliamentary colleagues. These perturbations would often manifest themselves in displays of low mood.

And such low moods are recorded in various memoirs. Douglas Hurd records how Major looked “haggard” in November 1992, “agonising on Maastricht”. Over the question of Qualified Majority Voting in early 1994, when the government wasn’t getting its way, Hurd records Major as being “weary and sour” (Hurd 2003, 429, 432).

Ian Lang, who described Major as a person whose “moral strength shone through, reinforced by adversity,” noted how in June 1995, after the *Fresh Start* Group meeting where he was treated in a disrespectful manner by leading rebels, including Bernard Jenkin (Lamont 2000, 434), he had seemed “so depressed” and “visibly low in spirits” (Lang 2002, 143, 213).

A former Cabinet minister<sup>67</sup> expanded on this further, explaining the concern of colleagues as the internal warfare sapped at the Prime Minister’s emotions:

“One saw him becoming very defensive, almost agoraphobic, latterly, and a number of us talked about it and went to see him of an evening in Number 10. This hasn’t received much publicity, and I wouldn’t wish to name names. Three or four of us would, not on a sort of a strict rota or anything, just ring up from time to time if we had an evening when our boxes were finished and we had time and we’d pop round to Number 10. We did that, and I’m sure it helped, but not very much...But by then I think he had been so hammered over the years.”

The Prime Minister’s moods were low, another former minister recalling meeting John Major in Parliament one day in January 1993:

---

<sup>67</sup> Quote given on condition of anonymity

“I wished John a ‘Happy New Year,’ to which he responded, “Let’s hope this year is better than last year.” I responded, “John, last year we won the election.”“One good day in the whole year” he replied” (Widdecombe 2017).

Arguably this simply comes with high office, as Jonathan Hill explained:

“Those jobs make you go mad. They are terrible, terrible jobs. I mean you do a deal with the Devil” (Hill 2017).

It is Gyles Brandreth however, the MP for Chester in the 1992 Parliament, who most documents the emotional perturbations of the Prime Minister in his *Diaries*, with the impression given of a person who did suffer highs and lows of emotion on a daily basis. But he reveals also further evidence of John Major’s own character, revealing how “incredibly disarming” he could be in company, plus how “attractive to women” he was. But when Brandreth refers to Major’s low moods in his *Diaries*, of which he has many, – looking “quite ghastly” after the *Fresh Start* meeting and then, a few weeks later, “almost monosyllabic” the night before the 1995 leadership contest, – he makes the suggestion on one occasion that such displays were contrived:

“He’s down: feels it, shows it. There’s no bounce. He may be letting us see this deliberately, to remind us that he’s human, to take us into his confidence, to make us realise he’s just like us. But we don’t want to be led by someone who’s just like us. We don’t want a leader who is ordinary. We want a leader who is extraordinary – and decent, determined, disciplined, convincing as he is, JM isn’t” (Brandreth 2000, 122, 337, 342).

In retrospect Gyles Brandreth is much more sympathetic to the Prime Minister:

“I always found him to be very human. Was any of it contrived? I was sympathetic to him. At the time I remember that there were frustrations that he was giving way to allowing us to let him see his vulnerabilities and difficulties, certainly about which way to move forward. There were moments when, at the time, I felt frustrated by that, because we were wanting the smack of firm government and we were wanting leadership and all sorts of things, and you

would go over there and he'd be pleasant and sighing and letting you see the dark side, and that was frustrating" (Brandreth 2017).

#### 7.4 Conclusion

Through combining the two Greenstein criteria of cognitive style and emotional intelligence (Greenstein 2000), and applying each one to Major in one chapter, it has been possible to delve into what Junor described as the 'Major enigma' (Junor 1996, 1-2) and thus investigate the psychology of John Major during his premiership.

Even Major admitted "to having little understanding himself of his motives and personality" (Seldon 1997, 16). But by taking the Barber (1992) rubric, adopted by Greenstein, and looking to an individual's childhood, it is from there that early signposts can be seen in adulthood. In Major's upbringing that appears to have left a complicated amalgam of different characteristics, from oversensitivity to pride to resilience, but which meant that "[w]hen he is firing on all cylinders he is possibly one of the most formidable politicians in this country" (Junor 1996, 305).

To take *cognitive style* first, it is clear that Major's *personal* collective style was effective: his mastery of his civil service briefs and memory recognition was recognised by colleagues and aides alike – "he was a brain" (Lang 2017), as Ian Lang recalls. The same could not be said of his *collective* cognitive style however, which could best be described as 'dither' and 'indecision,' – a view supported by former Cabinet colleagues (Clarke 2016, Lamont 2000). This was in contrast to his immediate predecessor Thatcher, Prime Ministerial 'override' under Major a rare occurrence (Hennessy 2000).

And the argument that this was merely for party management purposes alone does not hold: the pathology of decision-making was there when Major was a newly elected Prime Minister in 1991 when he sought to replace the Poll Tax and thus some time before Black Wednesday (Clarke 2016). Chris Patten was therefore correct in his view, which was a long-standing concern, that "[Major] almost overdid his wish to carry people along" (Seldon 1997, 208).

Secondly, John Major's *emotional intelligence*. Having looked at each of the core characteristics of the Prime Minister and his emotional perturbations, - sensitivity to criticism, pride, toughness and resilience, plus a cacophony of emotions, - all a consequence of a vulnerability since childhood, which left Major seeking 'affirmation' throughout his career, it is difficult to conclude that the Prime Minister could be emotionally intelligent under the Greenstein criteria. Instead it would be fairer to put Major in either of the other two categories Greenstein suggested: either entirely lacking emotional intelligence, due to being emotionally handicapped; or, a leader possessing a mixed emotions which were not powerful enough to affect the office holder enough to stop them functioning (Greenstein 2009a, 229-230).

The final category arguably would be most appropriate, not just because of the extraordinary set of circumstances that Major had to endure, particularly during the 1992 Parliament – the autumn of 1992 arguably being as traumatic a period for a Prime Minister since the final days of the Heath premiership in 1974 (Widdecombe 2017), - but also because, as a former aide recalled, he was:

“Tough, in the sense of being quite stubborn and determined, who could be easily wounded, but not to the point that it incapacitated him, and he wouldn't give up and keep battling through” (Turnbull 2017).

This therefore appears the most appropriate description of Major's psychological character makeup at this time.



## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first looks at the critiques of John Major's political leadership and whether they were justified or not. The second section examines the bearing of context and the political environment on the Major premiership, seeking to analyse its importance in any assessment of Major's political leadership. The final section discusses the value of the Greenstein model as a tool for leadership assessment and the lessons that can be discerned about the model itself and Major's political leadership.

### **8.1 Introduction**

Some twenty years since he ceased to be Prime Minister, it is an appropriate moment to re-assess the political leadership of Major. It is the proposition of this thesis that the best mechanism for such an approach analytically is not a tool devised from Prime Ministerial studies of leadership, but, instead, one devised from Presidential studies of leadership, the seminal work of Professor Fred Greenstein: *The Presidential Difference* (Greenstein 2000, Greenstein 2004, Greenstein 2009a). However, as has already been discussed, the origins of the Greenstein model does not negate its value in examining and assessing British political leaders, having already been utilised to assess prime ministerial performance for all Prime Ministers from Clement Attlee to David Cameron (Honeyman 2007, Theakston 2007, Theakston 2011, Theakston 2012), and Leaders of the Opposition from Winston Churchill to David Cameron (Heppell 2012).

The model's chief utility is that it "helps us better understand the tasks and demands political leaders face and the skills they have, and provides a set of benchmarks for assessing, evaluating and comparing them" (Theakston 2011, 96). This is achieved by six criteria for leadership, each one representing a different aspect of leadership: *public communicator*, *organisational capacity*, *political skill*, *public policy vision*; and, the two combined psychological elements, *cognitive style* and *emotional intelligence* (Greenstein 2000, 5). Therefore it is through these six criteria for political leadership that Major's political leadership can be re-assessed effectively.

## 8.2 Justifiable Critiques of John Major's leadership

The grounds for a re-assessment of Major are more than the fact that the Major premiership is overlooked and undervalued within the current academic literature. It also stems from the fact that the main critique of the political leadership of Major was that of weakness – an accusation that was first made in March 1991, only four months into his premiership (Seldon 1997, 176). Such an accusation was to dog him for the rest of his time as Prime Minister. The key question therefore is, was the main critique of Major justified, once his political leadership is viewed through the prism of the Greenstein model and its six criteria for leadership?

Though the results within each criteria are not uniform, it is the argument of this thesis that rather than the Greenstein model exonerating the leadership of Major of such an accusation it has, in fact, achieved the opposite, largely re-enforcing the opinions of detractors. Due to the lack of uniformity within each of the Greenstein criteria when applied to Major however, the final outcomes could be argued as mixed, and open to further research.

### Public Communicator

Using the evidence resulting from this thesis, the justified critique for this, the first of the six Greenstein criteria, is that John Major, in terms of prime ministerial performance, was a *weak* public communicator during his premiership, both *rhetorically* and *institutionally*. And the net result of these communication failures was that the Major premiership was largely to be defined by others, especially the Prime Minister's critics, not least Tony Blair and New Labour, who were able to control the 'narrative' on his years in office.

Thus, Major was *rhetorically* weak under the Greenstein criteria, displaying the following characteristics associated with weakness:

- *Justified critique - 'boomerang' rhetoric*: This rhetoric rebounded on Major throughout the 1992 Parliament, such self-inflicted wounds caused principally by party management concerns. Examples include the 1993 Party Conference 'Back to Basics' speech (Major 1993b), and the 'don't

bind my hands' press conference during the 1997 election (Major 1997) (McMeeking and Heppell 2015).

- *Justified critique - 'anti-rhetorical' in style of speaking* (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999): Major was unsuited to deliberative forums such as the House of Commons chamber and Party Conferences, which was dominated instead by intra-party and inter-party opponents (Tony Blair, Norman Lamont), and rivals (Michael Heseltine, Michael Portillo).
- *Acknowledged strength - intimate forums*: This was especially the case with more intimate or informal forums associated with political campaigning, where Major could display both *ethos* and *pathos* effectively. These included intimate gatherings of party grassroots, on television and, perhaps most effectively, through Major's use of a soapbox during the 1992 election (Major 1999).

John Major was also *institutionally* weak under the Greenstein criteria:

- *Justified critique - Prime Minister's personal discomfort with modern media methods*: Major was uncomfortable personally with modern media methods, including media 'packaging' (Seymour-Ure 1994), and the need to build relationships with both editors and political journalists (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999). This was despite the Prime Minister's attempts to engender a more 'clubbable' atmosphere at the start of his premiership, which initially appeared to be successful after Thatcher's aloofness (Bale and Sanders 2001).
- *Justified critique - Number 10 Press Office institutionally failing to adopt modern media methods under any of John Major's non-political Press Secretaries (Gus O'Donnell, Christopher Meyer, and Jonathan Haslam)* (Seymour-Ure 1994): Thus the Number 10 Press Office was unable to formulate a coherent media strategy (Horam 2017). By complete contrast Blair and his Press Secretary, Campbell, were entirely cognisant in modern media methods and 'spin' (Rentoul 2001).

## Organisational Capacity

Using the evidence resulting from this thesis, the justified critique for this, the second of the Greenstein criteria, is of organisational *weakness* in prime ministerial performance under John Major's political leadership within both Number 10 and its principal advisory units. This was despite Major seemingly meeting at least one of the two elements within the Greenstein criteria, namely as to the '*quality of advice*' he received: Number 10 and the Cabinet Office under Major meeting the Greenstein requirement of good inter-personal relationships between political and government advisers and premier. Arguably however, the quality of the advice Major received during his premiership was not able to make up for failure in the second element of Greenstein's criteria, namely as to '*effectiveness at institutional arrangements*' using the Bose definition (Bose 2006, 31).

Thus, Major lacked '*effective institutional arrangements*' due to weakness at the following:

- *Justified critique - a weak chain of command structure within Number 10 and the Cabinet Office*: The cause: too roving a brief of senior advisers within Number 10, especially Sarah Hogg (Policy Unit), Alex Allan (Private Office), plus other key staff (Hennessy 2000), and the Cabinet Secretary Sir Robin Butler (Cabinet Office), much to the resentment of Major's Cabinet colleagues (Wakeham 2017, Lamont 2000). The weak command structure also led to the so-called 'battle of the memos' between the Private Office and the Policy Unit. This meant that it became problematic for Major in terms of getting a single stream of advice from Number 10 staff (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999). This is contested by former advisers (Turnbull 2017, Lyne 2017).
- *Justified critique - Number 10 unable to operate efficiently due to John Major's own 'cognitive shortcomings'*: These included: Major's seemingly over-concern for others resulting in bilaterals between ministers overrunning, which impacted upon wider government business (Wakeham 2017); over-preparation for PMQs in a manner that staff regarded as

entirely disproportionate to the time required (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999); and, finally, delays in decision-making at Cabinet level (Clarke 2016).

- *Justified critique - the lack of an overall coherent government strategy, the so-called 'hole at the centre of government,' recognised by the Economist in 1992* (Beesley 2017): This was not resolved throughout Major's premiership, despite attempts to make innovations in the following areas of government: First, at Cabinet Committee level, including the introduction of three new committees: on public expenditure (EDX), economic and domestic policy (EDP) and, finally, economic and domestic policy co-ordination and presentation (EDCP) (Blick 2004). Second, the creation the position of Deputy Prime Minister in 1995 in order to secure a 'big-hitter' at Cabinet level (Heseltine 2000).
- *Acknowledged strength - advisory structure*: Major did however meet the second of the two criteria for organisational capacity: a strong and reliable *advisory structure* around him, both within Number 10 and the Cabinet Office, seen in testimonials and other sources throughout this thesis (Lyne 2017, Hill 2017). However, the authority and openness of advisers was, to an extent, conditional upon Prime Ministerial authority, which declined markedly within Whitehall after Black Wednesday in September 1992 (Beesley 2017). Once that authority was gone, so is the influence of the adviser in Whitehall. This was made more problematic by an already weak command structure. Thus the centre remained weak overall organisationally during the Major premiership.

### **Political Skill**

Using the evidence resulting from this thesis, the critiques associated with this, the third of Greenstein's leadership criteria, are not uniform, since John Major as leader did display a degree of political skill in a majority of the group of specifically selected 'skills' from five analytical frameworks – *negotiation, manipulation, persuasion, hiding, discernment*, - thus ensuring his survival as Prime Minister and as leader of the Conservative Party for six-and-a-half-years.

Due to the Prime Minister's failure to *persuade* however, such is its importance - the ability 'to command' as unavailable to a political leader in the British polity as it is in America (Neustadt 1990, Greenstein 2000), - Major should arguably be adjudged overall as displaying a lack of political skill whilst Prime Minister.

- *Acknowledged strength - skilled negotiator*: Major's technique, based upon his belief that 'you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar' proved effective at both domestic (the Northern Ireland peace process) (Norton 1999) and international level (Maastricht 1991, Edinburgh 1992) (Wall 2008).
- *Acknowledged strength - skilled manipulator*: Major achieved the two central elements of manipulation (Riker 1986) on the question of Britain's entry to a single currency: First, agenda control, through the 'wait and see' or 'negotiate and decide' policy (Lynch and Whitaker 2013); second, binding (Elster 2000), in stating to the PCP how he was constrained by key pro-European members of his Cabinet (Ken Clarke, Michael Heseltine). The ultimate triumph of Major's manipulative approach was the 1995 leadership campaign (Williams 1998).
- *Acknowledged strength - skilled at 'hiding'*: Major successfully disassociated himself from policies, thus allowing his ministers to take the burden of risk (Heseltine, Post Office privatisation 1994) (Lamont 2000); and also disassociated himself from so-called 'winged' ministers, until it was convenient to dispose of them (Williams 1998). Seen for example in the dismissal of Norman Lamont in 1993 (Lamont 2000).
- *Acknowledged strength - skilled at discerning his political environment*: Major was self-aware of the constraints he had to operate in following his victory at the 1992 election: a small majority; the presence of his predecessor, Thatcher, and her legacy; Europe and the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty; and, latterly, a strengthened opposition under Tony Blair (Theakston 2002). Therefore Major's response to his political environment could be seen as 'skilful' (Brandreth 2017), even if it can be contested (Robathan 2017).

- *Justified critique - maladroitness at persuasion:* John Major failed at both of the Neustadt 'precepts' associated with persuasion (Ellis 2002). First, Major failed to guard 'his own stakes' over sleaze, particularly during the Hamilton affair between 1994 and 1997 and the 1996 Scott Report, which damaged his own reputation for honesty and integrity (Davies 2017). Second, Major equally failed to 'increase the insecurities that result in opposing him' during the 1992 Parliament. By making motions on EU legislation a matter of confidence on three occasions – the Maastricht 'Paving' Vote (1992), the Social Policy Protocol motion (1993), and EU Finance Bill (1994) – Major and his Parliamentary Whips' Office (Searing 1994) achieved PCP adherence but at the price of intra-party unity. Therefore, far from enhancing Major's reputation, the decision exposed further intra-party division and damaged his own leadership - a self-inflicted wound by a Prime Minister who had left himself with no room for manoeuvre. It also cost Major his majority, as occurred in November 1994 when the whip was withdrawn from nine backbench rebels MPs (Baker et al 1994, Clarke 2016).

### **Public Policy Vision**

Using the evidence resulting from this thesis, the justified critique for this, the fourth of the Greenstein leadership criteria, is that John Major was not a leader with a platform associated with visionary leadership, failing, as he did, to meet the four elements required under the Greenstein definition – *direction, policy, consistency, inspiration* (Greenstein 2009a, 228):

- *Justified critique - Major a practical, pragmatic politician:* Not a visionary leader, Major was as a pragmatist more in the mould of traditional Conservative leaders such as Baldwin, Macmillan and Cameron (Brandreth 2017). This allowed Major to placate both the One Nation and Thatcherite wings of his party during the 1992 Parliament, and keep the party together on the question of Europe (Lynch and Whitaker 2013). This still led to high-profile defections however, including Alan Howarth and Emma Nicholson (Dorey 1999b, Nicholson 1996).

- *Justified critique - Major a consolidator of Thatcherism, not innovator:* The Prime Minister equally was a consolidator, evincing a continuation of the Thatcherite agenda between 1990 and 1997 in a large raft of policy areas, including: in tackling inflation, lowering taxes, privatisation, public service reform, deregulation, EU opt-outs, and devolution (Ludlam and Smith 1996c). Major also went far further than Thatcher in a number of policy areas, including British Coal privatisation (1992), British Rail privatisation (1992), and the attempted privatisation of Royal Mail (1994) (Jenkins 1995). Thus Major should be associated with ‘late Thatcherism’ instead of a new brand of post-Thatcherite Conservatism (McAnulla 1999).
- *Acknowledged strength - nudge towards ‘compassionate conservatism’:* John Major, during his first term as Prime Minister, – the 1994 National Lottery an exception, - did, to some extent, develop his own policy agenda, particularly in the area of public service reform, the centrepiece of which was the Citizen’s Charter initiative (Hogg and Hill 1995, 95). The Charter, combined with the abolition of the Poll Tax in 1991, is regarded by some commentators as one of the earliest examples of post-Thatcher ‘modernisation’ and which proved electorally beneficial to Major in his attempts to move Conservatism beyond its Thatcherite legacy in the run-up to the 1992 election (Richards 2017). Furthermore, the Charter, plus other initiatives, could be argued as Major’s own tentative steps to “nudge Conservatism towards its compassionate roots” early in his premiership (Major 1999, 214).

### **Cognitive Style & Emotional Intelligence**

Using the evidence resulting from this thesis, the justified critique for this, the fifth and sixth of the Greenstein criteria, is that whilst John Major’s *personal* cognitive style was widely recognised as displaying his strengths as a decision-maker, he was, by complete contrast, maladroit in terms of his *collective* cognitive style, seen in his consensual consultative style of Cabinet management (Clarke 2016). The cause of such a weakness in decision-making ability was arguably interconnected with the second of the psychology-orientated Greenstein criteria,



emotional intelligence. The need for consensus arguably resulting from Major's own emotional 'perturbations': all coping mechanisms to conceal deep childhood insecurity (Seldon 1997).

- *Acknowledged strength - Major had a strong personal cognitive style:* A master at absorbing civil service briefs on complex government policies, Major, as a former Cabinet colleague recalled, "really was a brain" (Lang 2017). Such ability was useful for: negotiations at domestic and international level; in inter-personal relationships, which aided his advance to the premiership (Horam 2017); and in taking major decisions, such as the 1992 election (Major 1999) and 1995 leadership contest (Foukes 2017).
- *Justified critique - Major had a weak collective cognitive style at Cabinet level:* This is best summed up by Major's former Cabinet colleague, Clarke: "It became seriously problematic that Cabinet could not reach a conclusion in one meeting on any one subject" (Clarke 2016, 254). And such problematic decision-making was displayed even before what is regarded for some as the key turning point in Major's 'consensual consultative style of Cabinet decision-making': Black Wednesday, September 1992 (Hennessy 2000), having been displayed by the Prime Minister early in his premiership on the issue of the replacement of the Poll Tax in 1991 (Hogg and Hill 1995).
- *Strengths and weaknesses - Major subject to 'emotional perturbations' but not to a degree that incapacitated him:* Through the prism of Major's first sixteen years it is possible to see all of his emotional 'perturbations' which were to manifest themselves in later life (Seldon 1997), thereby allowing the Prime Minister to display through a variety of emotions both strength and weakness at different times in his political career. These were: a *sensitivity to criticism*, particularly towards the media (Major 2012); *pride at his achievements*, which often meant that he got overly-attached to seemingly lost causes, such as sterling within the ERM (Major 1992b) and Maastricht (Hurd 2003); a *mental toughness and resilience*, which meant

that he could work long hours on his boxes (Turnbull 2017), but also could, if provoked by critics, display his street fighting toughness from his Brixton upbringing both in the media, referring to Cabinet colleagues as ‘bastards’ and in his attacks on former Cabinet colleagues in the Commons chamber which some regarded as un-Prime Ministerial (Seldon 1997). And, finally, a *cacophony of emotions* based upon the perceived success or failure of his premiership. These emotions were very *real*, as was confirmed by Gyles Brandreth (2017) and Ian Lang, who recorded that concern at Major’s low moods whilst he was Prime Minister in his memoirs (Lang 2002).

### 8.3 The Question of Context and John Major’s Leadership

With so many of the critiques of Major so comprehensively proved to be justified by this thesis - poor communication skills, lacking organisational capacity, lacking political skill, without vision, lacking in cognitive skill, and subject to an almost debilitating number of emotional perturbations, - the question that arises next is to what extent was context, or ‘adverse circumstances’ a key variable in prime ministerial performance?

It remains an issue which academics such as Theakston have argued is a variable of crucial importance in any study of political leadership, both within Presidential Studies and Prime Ministerial Studies. As Theakston stated:

“Greenstein’s model identifies key leadership abilities, characteristics and skills, but the context in which those skills and abilities are displayed cannot be neglected when assessing prime ministerial effectiveness” (Theakston 2007, 248-249).

This is something even Greenstein himself accepted<sup>68</sup>.

For those such as Anthony Seldon who do argue that ‘circumstances’ are the key variable in any assessment of Major, which included the constraints imposed by Major’s legacy ideologically from Thatcherism (Hayton 2012b), as well as the

---

<sup>68</sup> See chapter two

constraints imposed at an intra-party level by a small majority and at inter-party level by Blair and New Labour (Butler and Kavanagh 1992), Major's premiership deserves to be highly rated. As he re-asserts, in an argument he made in his 1997 biography of John Major (Seldon 1997):

“In history, Major is not a towering figure like Attlee or Thatcher, but nor is he a failure like Balfour or Eden, nor a footnote like Bonar Law or Douglas-Home. If parliamentary circumstances had been different, Major might have been a Baldwin, presiding over a new deal between party and mass electorate. His government's enduring successes, achieved in the face of adverse circumstances, mean from the perspective of 2017 that we can say that Major was among the more effective leaders of any party since 1945” (Seldon and Davies 2017, 339).

But this viewpoint, arguably, does veer too far towards an overly-sympathetic and, to an extent, unduly determinist, structuralist account of the Major premiership, as though Major had no agency within the political environment he faced. Therefore, whilst it is accurate to say that Major was seemingly caught between the high water-mark of Thatcherism and the onset of New Labour, endured the trauma of Maastricht and Black Wednesday, he still, at every moment, could have made a different choice, or have taken a different direction, in order to secure a different outcome. This is proven in each of the six Greenstein criteria.

Indeed, the 'adverse circumstances' theory was debunked by this thesis in five of the six Greenstein criteria:

- *Public communicator*: It was proved that whilst Major had a very traumatic experience with the press and media post-Black Wednesday, both the Prime Minister and the Number 10 Press Office were maladroit at responding to media criticism before Blair, Campbell and New Labour 'spin' – this was epitomised by Major's 'Back to Basics' speech in 1993.
- *Organisational capacity*: It was proved that the dysfunctionality at the heart of Number 10 was prevalent even *before* Black Wednesday in autumn

1992, as asserted by Jonathan Hill (Hill 2017), as witnessed by the problematic creation of the Citizen's Charter in 1991 (Beesley 2017).

- *Political skill:* It was proved that, far from being constrained by a small majority and a PCP riven by intra-party warfare on Europe, Major handled such problems skilfully, through the effective use of manipulation and hiding techniques. And the intra-party warfare on Europe actually proved to be largely self-inflicted, through threats of votes of confidence on three occasions and an unnecessary and divisive leadership contest.
- *Vision:* It was proved that a lot of the compassionate rhetoric that could have envisioned a new post-Thatcherite Conservatism was more of a cosmetic exercise for electoral purposes as Major sought to win the upcoming general election – contrast Major's 1990 wish to have 'a nation at ease with itself' (Major 1990a) with his 'Back to Basics' speech (Major 1993b) three years later (Gilmour and Garnett 1998).
- *Cognitive style:* It was proved that, contrary to what has been asserted (Hennessy 2000, Kavanagh and Seldon 1999), that John Major 'consensual consultative' style of Cabinet decision-making did not become problematic from Black Wednesday onwards, but had, instead, been noticeable even during Major's early months in office as he sought to replace the Poll Tax in 1991 (Clarke 2016).

#### **8.4 Value of the Greenstein Model as a Tool to Measure Political Leadership**

Thus, the value of the Greenstein model as a tool to measure political leadership can be widely seen from the assertions that can already be made in terms of both the critiquing and the defending of John Major. Overall, therefore, what are the key lessons that have been discerned by this thesis about both John Major's premiership and the Greenstein model itself?

##### ***Lessons from the Major premiership:***

Unquestionably, this thesis has shone a forensic light on the Major premiership. But has it elucidated any new findings in comparison to the earlier academic

literature? How has this thesis contributed to earlier knowledge on Major and his six-and-a-half years as Prime Minister?

Arguably, this thesis, by looking at Major in the round, has shone a new light in a number of areas on the Major premiership which could be the source of further research for historians and academics in the following fields of academia: post-Thatcherite Conservatism; Conservative history; parliamentary dissent; rhetoric studies; governmental studies; and, finally, parliamentary leadership studies. Such areas for further research have been highlighted by each of the Greenstein criteria:

### **Public communicator**

More exploration could be made within rhetoric studies of Major's skill in such intimate forums as television, meetings of party grassroots and, most of all, in political campaigning, through use of a soapbox (in 1992 and 1997). Though the soap box is often referred to, - it has almost become emblematic of the Major premiership, - no clear impact studies have been done on its importance in either political campaigning or as a means of persuasion. Thus, it is an approach to the Major premiership that appears overlooked within the academic literature.

### **Organisational capacity**

The most revealing aspect of this leadership criteria was a comment made by Jonathan Hill, who said as part of his interview with the author that John Major believed in government by 'relationships' not 'systems' (Hill 2017), hence Major's closeness to advisers within Number 10 such as Sarah Hogg, to the seeming detriment of close Cabinet colleagues. Hill was seeking to contrast Major's style of government with Blair's, and attached a label to what he saw as two forms of management of Number 10, the Cabinet and Whitehall. This could be explored further by Whitehall and governmental studies of Major, an area which so far appears overlooked in academic literature.

## **Political skill**

When looking at such a variety of different skills, of which John Major was skilled at the majority (negotiation, manipulation, hiding), even if he was weak at persuasion, the one apparent constant was Major's apparent ability at what could be termed 'relational politics' – a theme that runs through all of the six Greenstein criteria when assessing the Prime Minister. Indeed, his gift with people ensured arguably: his acquisition of the premiership, success at Maastricht and in Northern Ireland. The concept of relational politics and its effectiveness is therefore worthy of further exploration with regard to Major, but also could be applied to other political leaders.

## **Vision**

The clearest area for further exploration in this, the fourth Greenstein criteria, is that which even Major talked of in his own memoirs – his desire to 'nudge' the Conservative Party towards its 'compassionate roots' (Major 1999). As this thesis sought to show, Major did, to an extent, raise the issue of public service reform and social liberalism during his premiership, even if this did not develop into a new, coherent vision for post-Thatcherite Conservatism. Such a mantle was picked up instead by Major's successors as Leader of the Conservative Party, including David Cameron. Major's part in such an evolution of post-Thatcherite Conservatism remains absent however from the current academic literature on Conservatism.

## **Cognitive style and Emotional intelligence**

The role of psychology in British political science is relatively overlooked as a field of political science, largely mirroring America. The application of psychological concepts to Prime Ministers is also rare (Iremonger 1970). The systematic application of two psychological concepts through the Greenstein model to Major is therefore a new development in Prime Ministerial studies. The academic literature is also sparse on this subject in relation to Major himself (Davidson 2011), despite much of the academic literature – largely in biographies and autobiographies - seeking to understand what has been referred to as the

'Major enigma,' in the words of Penny Junor (Junor 1996, 2). Yet no real systematic attempt has been made to explore John Major, and Prime Ministerial leadership, from a psychological perspective. The message from the application of these two Greenstein leadership criteria is that examining the psychological underpinnings of a political leader is not only entirely valid, but equally that much can be learned when such an investigation is made in relation to the leadership of John Major.

***Lessons from the Greenstein model:***

The value of the Greenstein model as a tool to examine prime ministerial performance is arguably vindicated by this thesis. Its value is summed up best in this regard by Theakston, who asserts:

“the real value of the Greenstein approach is that it moves the focus away from the traditional and limited debate about the power of the Prime Minister and on to an analysis of what prime ministers do, how they do it and how well they do it” (Theakston 2011, 96).

This has been largely confirmed in the comprehensive analysis of Major's prime ministerial performance within this thesis. There remain however a number of issues that centres upon the use of the Greenstein model in Presidential Studies and Prime Ministerial Studies that needs to be clarified as part of this thesis conclusion. They are the following:

**Hierarchy**

Meena Bose asserts in her own critique of the Greenstein model that one of the most problematic aspects of the model is its lack of a hierarchy of importance, thus “leaving the reader unclear as to which qualities are most significant for effective presidential leadership.” Bose then goes on to create her own hierarchy of importance of each criteria, with vision first, political skill second, organisational capacity third, public communicator fourth; with the two psychological elements, cognitive style and emotional intelligence fifth and sixth respectively (Bose 2006, 28-29).

By contrast, Greenstein offers no hierarchy of importance, whilst asserting that, as part of his overall 'Coda' on Presidential leadership, that: "Beware the presidential contender who lacks emotional intelligence. In its absence all else may turn to ashes" (Greenstein 2009a, 231) – thus making the argument that this criteria for leadership should be first. Both Bose and Greenstein therefore offer polar opposite views as to the importance of each of the six Greenstein criteria in any analysis of leadership.

Bose however has arguably missed the point of the Greenstein model in believing that there should be a hierarchy of his six leadership criteria. Indeed, despite Greenstein's view on emotional intelligence above, the whole approach of Greenstein to the assessment of political leadership was specifically designed to be inductive by nature, as he himself stated:

"My approach is part inductive and part interpretive, in that I steep myself in the available evidence of particular presidents and characterise them in their own terms. But I also apply a set of common criteria for analysing and comparing presidents, criteria that relate to the demands of the presidential role" (Greenstein 2006, 22).

Thus Greenstein wishes his analytical framework to explore what does make a 'difference' in political leadership, but with the maximum of flexibility that is possible, which to some extent also explains the cross-over that Bose herself recognised within the Greenstein criteria (Bose 2006). This is further evidence of its value as a tool to assess political leadership performance in Presidential and Prime Ministerial leadership. As Theakston has argued having when discussing the question of hierarchy of the Greenstein criteria within his own study of Prime Ministers:

"Greenstein's [model] had a wide appeal and influence...based on the accessibility, coherence and economy of his checklist approach" (Theakston 2011, 81).

Bose's argument has not therefore been sustained by this thesis.



## Character

Another point of controversy between Bose and Greenstein was that pertaining to character. Her viewpoint appeared to emerge in the aftermath of the Clinton impeachment scandal of 1998, and seems to be a matter of, principally, definition, feeling that Greenstein's use of Barber's definition of character in his sixth leadership criteria of emotional intelligence was not sufficient. Instead, Bose argued that character should be an entirely new criterion of leadership, its definition being "[i]ts more popular connotation,...[referring] to a president's honesty, treatment of others, and morality in public and private life" (Bose 2006, 36). Bose therefore veers close to adopting the criteria of moral commitment first suggested by Erwin Hargrove in his book *The President as Leader* (Hargrove 1998, 47). Greenstein himself felt, in a clear repost to Bose, the Clinton impeachment showed the problematic nature of the Barber typology (Greenstein 2006, 21-22)<sup>69</sup>.

Within this thesis the question of morality, particularly in relation to Major, was addressed, but through the work *not* of Barber but Neustadt, and the first of his precepts – to guard your own stakes (Ellis 2002, 48). And not in relation to the Greenstein criteria pertaining to the more psychologically focused emotional intelligence, but instead to that pertaining to political skill.

Therefore it is arguable morals are far more significant with regard to questions on a political leader's professional reputation, alluded to by Neustadt in relation to Presidential leadership, and is therefore a far more productive avenue for further research, than that offered by Barber. Bose's argument has not therefore been sustained by this thesis.

## 8.5 Conclusion

The debate surrounding the legacy of John Major's six-and-half year premiership both within Conservatism and within political history is still a live issue to this day, the twentieth anniversary of the 1997 general election largely a secondary consideration due to Sir John's interventions in the most recent divisive issues to

---

<sup>69</sup> See chapter two

overshadow the British polity: Scottish independence and Brexit. Major's visibility has thus increased exponentially within the last five years, his latest intervention causing further controversy on the issue of Brexit (Major 2018).

A number of the Maastricht rebels remain prominent to this day, including Sir Bill Cash, Bernard Jenkin, Iain Duncan Smith, and John Redwood, all still MPs in the current 2017 Parliament. Norman Lamont, Michael Howard and Michael Forsyth remain active members of the House of Lords. Often, in testimonials as part of this thesis, Maastricht and the battle over ratification some twenty-five years ago have become conflated with the issue of Brexit and the travails of the current Conservative Prime Minister, Theresa May, today.

Pro-Europeans are more likely to be sympathetic to Major and his legacy as compared to Brexiteers, who, on the whole are not. Thus a former adviser such as Jonathan Hill, a former EU Commissioner now in the House of Lords, typically represents the former when he argued:

“History will be more generous to him than people were at the time. He bequeathed a country in, economically, extremely good nick. He fulfilled his foreign engagements and he got the Northern Ireland peace process off the ground. So if you look at it from an internal Tory perspective, with the 1997 election defeat, you think ‘Christ!’ but if you look at the country in terms of when took over and when he left, he left the country in a much better shape” (Hill 2017).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there are the detractors, who simply wish to dismiss John Major's political leadership entirely. These are usually Brexiteers, their main focus Europe when discussing Major with the author. Former MP and Maastricht rebel Andrew Robathan is particularly scathing on Major's leadership and his legacy, even if he acknowledges Major's role in the Northern Ireland peace process:

“There was no leadership, just a sense of chaos and no plan and no way forward. And every time he tried to rescue things he fell flat on his face...But he

also took brave decisions, like Northern Ireland, which wouldn't have happened without him" (Robathan 2017).

By far the most damning criticism of Major's leadership came from a former MP who wasn't a rebel on Maastricht, but rebelled on the Scott Report, and is a Euro enthusiast: Quentin Davies. Almost uniquely of all the testimonials, Davies feels that Major was ill-equipped to be Prime Minister:

"I think most [MPs on either side of the EU divide] would say, good, decent guy, well meaning, for most jobs, totally reliable, but PM of the country, cuckoo, barking. Not fair to him, not fair to the Tory Party" (Davies 2017).

But also left no lasting legacy, arguing:

"[Major's premiership] won't be remembered, like Bonar Law's. If you look carefully through a magnifying glass you may be able to find something concrete Bonar Law left behind. I don't think May or Major will be remembered" (Davies 2017).

Major did have many achievements which are, on the whole, uncontested: Northern Ireland (Norton 1999); the National Lottery, which arguably led to Britain's Gold medal success at the 2012 Olympics (Jefferys 2017); and a number of significant constitutional reforms to government which made it more transparent and efficient (Hennessy 2000). Major's efforts at public service reform are becoming arguably more recognised, despite the reception the Citizen's Charter originally received at the time (Hill 2017, Brandreth 2017). The economy question is contestable, not least because the economy began arguably to recover since Britain withdrew from the ERM, which led to a 'voter less recovery' for the Major government (Butler and Kavanagh 1997).

It is also clear that both of Major's successors as Conservative Prime Minister (Cameron, May) have not fared markedly better than him from a party management perspective on the main fault line that still runs through the Conservative Party: Europe. Due to the state of the current Conservative Party, and the country as it goes through the process of leaving the EU, it appears likely that it will remain the case that it will be through the prism of Europe that the

debate surrounding John Major's premiership, and his legacy, will continue to be judged.

**Appendix: Political elites who contributed to 2017 fieldwork**<sup>70</sup>

Brandreth, G. (2017) Gyles Brandreth. Interview, BBC, 5/12/2017.

Davies, Q. (2017) Lord Davies of Stamford (Quentin Davies). Interview, House of Lords, 6/12/2017

Fookes, J. (2017) Baroness Fookes of Plymouth in the County of Devon (Janet Fookes). Letter, 10/11/2017.

Former Minister A (2017) Interview, House of Commons, 21/11/2017.

Former Minister B (2017) Interview, House of Lords, 6/12/2017.

Garel-Jones, T. (2017) Baron Garel-Jones of Watford in the County of Herefordshire (Tristan Garel-Jones). Phone interview, 12/10/2017.

Hawkins, N. (2017) Nick Hawkins. Interview, 1/11/2017.

Hill, J. (2017) Baron Hill of Oarford in the County of Somerset (Jonathan Hill). Interview, House of Lords, 27/11/2017.

Horam, J. (2017) Baron Horam of Grimsargh in the County of Lancashire (John Horam) Interview, House of Lords, 28/11/2017.

Lang, I. (2017) Baron Lang of Monkton of Merrick and the Rhinns of Kells in Dumfries and Galloway (Ian Lang). Interview, House of Lords, 28/11/2017.

Lynne, R. (2017) Sir Roderic Lyne. Questionnaire, 14/11/2017.

MacGregor, J. (2017) Lord MacGregor of Pulham Market (John MacGregor). Interview, House of Lords, 5/12/2017.

Maitland, O. (2017) Lady Olga Maitland. Interview, central London, 22/11/2017.

Renton, D. (2017) Baron Renton of Mount Harry of Offham in the County of East Sussex (Tim Renton). Via email 9/10/2017.

Robathan, A. (2017) Baron Robathan of Poultney in the County of Leicestershire (Andrew Robathan). Interview, House of Lords, 22/11/2017.

Turnbull, A. (2017) Baron Turnbull of Enfield in the London Borough of Enfield (Andrew Turnbull). Interview, House of Lords, 27/11/2017.

---

<sup>70</sup> Due to confidentiality, the names of some interviewees have been kept anonymous.

Wakeham, J. (2017) Baron Wakeham of Maldon in County of Essex (John Wakeham). Interview, House of Lords, 22/11/2017.

Waldegrave, W. (2017) Baron Waldegrave of North Hill , of Chewton Mendip in the County of Somerset (William Waldegrave). Questionnaire, 14/11/2017.

Widdecombe, A. (2017) Ann Widdecombe. Phone interview, 15/11/2017.

## **Bibliography**

- Alderman, K. (1992) "The Leader of the Opposition and Prime Minister's Questions", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 45(2) 66-76.
- Alderman, K (1996) "The Conservative Party Leadership Election of 1995", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 49 (2), 316-332.
- Alderman, K. (1999) 'Revision of the Leadership Procedures in the Conservative Party', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 52 (2): 260-74.
- Alderman, K. and Carter, N. (1991) "A Very Tory Coup: The Ousting Of Mrs Thatcher", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 44 (2), 125-139.
- Anderson, B. (1991) John Major. Headline Book Publishing: London.
- Baker, K. (1995) The Prime Ministers: An Irreverent Political History in Cartoons. Thames And Hudson: Slovenia.
- Baker, D., Gamble, A., Ludlam, S.(1993a) "Whips or Scorpions? Conservative MPs and the Maastricht Paving Motion Vote", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 46 (2), 151-166.
- Baker, D., Gamble, A., Ludlam, S.(1993b) "1846...1906...1996? Conservative Splits and European Integration", *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 64 (4), 420-434.
- Baker, D., Gamble, A., Ludlam, S.(1994) "The Parliamentary Siege of Maastricht 1993: Conservative Divisions and British Ratification of the Treaty of European Union", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 47 (1), 37-60.
- Bale, T. (2010) The Conservative Party: From Thatcher to Cameron. Polity.
- Bale, T. and Sanders, K. (2001) "Playing by the book: success and failure in John Major's approach to prime ministerial media management", *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 15 (4), 93-110.
- Barber, J.D (1992) The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance In The White House. Prentice-Hall International.
- Beesley, I. (2017) The Official History of the Cabinet Secretaries. Routledge: London and New York.
- Bennister, M. (2015) The oratory of Tony Blair, in Crines, A. and Hayton, R. (2015) Labour orators from Bevan to Miliband. Manchester University Press.
- Bennister, M., Worthy, B., Hart, P. (2017) The Leadership Capital Index: A New Perspective on Political Leadership. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Berman, L. (ed.) (2006) *The Art of Political Leadership: Essays in Honor of Fred I. Greenstein*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Berrington, H. and Hague, R. (1998) "Europe, Thatcherism and Traditionalism: Opinion, Rebellion and the Maastricht Treaty in the Backbench Conservative Party, 1992-1994", *West European Politics*, Vol. 21 (1) 44-71.

Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (2003) *Interpreting British Governance*. Routledge.

Bevir, M. and Rhodes, R.A.W. (2006) "Prime Ministers, Presidentialism and Westminster Smokescreens", *Political Studies*, Vol. 54 (4), 671-690.

Blackwell, N. (2000) Evidence of Lord Blackwell to the Public Administration Select Committee, November 22 2000:  
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/199900/cmselect/cmpublicadm/727/0112203.htm>: 4/5/2017

Blick, A. (2004) *People who live in the dark*. Politico's: London.

Blick, A. and Jones, G. (2013) *At Power's Elbow: Aides to the Prime Minister from Robert Walpole to David Cameron*. Biteback Publishing: London.

Blondel, J. (1987) *Political Leadership: Towards a General Analysis*. Sage Publications.

Bose, M. (2006) What Makes a Great President? An Analysis of Leadership Qualities in Fred I Greenstein's *The Presidential Difference*, in Berman, L. (ed.) (2005) *The Art of Political Leadership: Essays in Honor of Fred I. Greenstein*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Bowles, N., King, D.S., Ross, F. (2007) "Political Centralisation and Policy Constraint in British Executive Leadership: Lessons from American Presidential Studies in the Era of Sofa Politics", *British Politics*, Vol. 2 (3), 372-394.

Brandreth, G. (2000) *Breaking the Code*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London.

Broughton, D. (1999) *The Limits of Likeability: the Major Premiership and Public Opinion*, in Dorey P. (1999). *The Major Premiership: Politics and Policies under John Major, 1990-97*. Macmillan Press.

Buller, J. And James, T. (2008) "Statecraft And The Assessment Of Political Leadership In Britain", (unpublished) Paper for the PSA Annual Conference, University of Swansea, 2008.

Buller, J. and James, T. (2012) "Statecraft and the Assessment of National Political Leaders: The Case of New Labour and Tony Blair", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 14 (4), 534-555.



Bulpitt J. (1986). The Discipline of the New Democracy: Mrs Thatcher's Domestic Statecraft, *Political Studies*, XXXIV, 19-39.

Burch, M. and Holliday, I. (1996) *The British Cabinet System*. Prentice Hall.

Burch, M. and Holliday, I. (1999) "The Prime Minister's and Cabinet Offices: An Executive Office in All But Name", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 52 (1), 32-45.

Burch, M. and Holliday, I. (2004) "The Blair Government and the Core Executive", *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 39 (1), 1-22.

Butler, D. and Stokes D. (1974) *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice*, London: Macmillan.

Butler, D. and Kavanagh, D. (1992) *The British General Election Of 1992*. Macmillan Press.

Butler, D. and Kavanagh, D. (1997) *The British General Election Of 1997*. Macmillan Press.

Byrne, C., Randall, N., and Theakston, K. (2017) "Evaluating British prime ministerial performance: David Cameron's premiership in political time" *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol 19 (1) 202-220.

Byrne, C. and Theakston, K. (2018). "Understanding the power of the prime minister: structure and agency in models of prime ministerial power", *British Politics*, Online preview: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41293-018-0087-7>: 2/2/2018.

Chamorel, P. (2003) "The Comparative Leadership Styles of French and American Presidents", *Leadership Review*, Summer2003: [www.leadershipreview.org/2003summer/article2\\_summer\\_2003.asp](http://www.leadershipreview.org/2003summer/article2_summer_2003.asp) (12/11/2010).

Citizen's Charter (1991) *The Citizen's Charter: Raising The Standard* July 1991 (Cm 1599) <https://0-parlipapers.proquest.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/parlipapers/docview/t70.d75.1990-088356?accountid=14664>: 4/5/2017

Clarke, H., Sanders, D., Stewart, M. and Whiteley, P. (2004) *Political Choice in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Clarke, H., Sanders, D., Stewart, M. and Whiteley, P. (2009) *Performance Politics and the British Voter*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Clark, A. (1993) *Diaries*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson

Clark, A. (1998) *The Tories And The Nation State, 1922-1997*. Phoenix.

Clarke, K. (2016) *Kind of Blue: A Political Memoir*. Macmillan: London.

- Cockerell, M. (1988) *Live from No 10. The Inside Story of Prime Ministers and Television*. Faber and Faber.
- Cowley, P. (1996) "The Mystery of the Third Hurdle: Re-electing the Conservative Leader", *Politics*, Vol. 16 (2) 79-86.
- Cowley P. (1999). Chaos or Cohesion? Major and the Conservative Parliamentary Party, in Dorey P. (1999a). *The Major Premiership: Politics and Policies under John Major, 1990-97*. Macmillan Press.
- Cowley, P. and Bailey, M. (2000) 'Peasants Uprising or Religious War: Re-examining the 1975 Conservative Leadership contest', *British Journal of Political Science*, 30 (4): 599-629.
- Cowley, P. and Garry, J. (1998) "The British Conservative Party and Europe: The Choosing of John Major", *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 28 (3), 473-499.
- Cowley P. and Norton P. (1999). Rebels and Rebellions: Conservative MPs in the 1992 Parliament, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 1(1), 84-105.
- Cowley P. & Stuart, M. (2012) *The Bumper Book of Coalition Rebellions: Or Dissension amongst the Coalition's Parliamentary Parties, 2010-2012: A Data Handbook*. Nottingham: University of Nottingham.
- CRD (1993) "Stepping Up The Fight Against Crime", *Politics Today*, Issue No. 13, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1993. Conservative Research Department: Smith Square, London
- CRD (1994) "The 1994 Budget", *Politics Today*, Issue No. 13, 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1994. Conservative Research Department: Smith Square, London.
- CRD (1995) "Attacks Answered", *Politics Today*, Issue No. 5, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1995. Conservative Research Department: Smith Square, London.
- Crewe, I., Sarlvik, B. and Alt, J. (1977) 'Partisan dealignment in Britain 1964-74', *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 7(1), 129-90.
- Crewe I. (1996). 1979 – 1996, in Seldon A. (ed.), *How Tory Governments Fall: The Tory Party In Power Since 1783*. Fontana Press.
- Crick, M. (1997) *Michael Heseltine: A Biography*. Penguin Books.
- Crick, M. (2005) *In Search of Michael Howard*. Pocket Books.
- Crines, A. (2013) "An Analysis of George Galloway's Oratorical and Rhetorical Impact", *Politics*, Vol. 33(2), 81-91.

Crines, A , Heppell, T and Dorey, P (2016) *The Political Rhetoric and Oratory of Margaret Thatcher*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Crossman (1985) *Prime Ministerial Government*, in King, A (ed.) (1985) *The British Prime Minister* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Macmillan.

Davidson, J. (2011) *Downing Street Blues: A History of Depression and Other Mental Afflictions in British Prime Ministers*. McFarland.

Daily Telegraph, May 7 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/07/ruth-davidson-im-a-john-major-conservative-but-we-are-on-probatil/>: 1/10/2017.

Denham, A. and O'Hara, K. (2008) *Democratising Conservative leadership selection: From grey suits to grass roots*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Denver, D. (2005) 'Valence Politics: How Britain votes now', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 7(2), 292-9.

Devine, F. (2002) *Qualitative Methods*, in Marsh, D. and Stoker, G. (2002) *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (Second Edition). Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.

Diamond, P. (2011) "Governing as New Labour: An Inside Account of the Blair and Brown years", *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 9 (2), 145-162.

Doig, A. (1993) "The Double Whammy: The Resignation of David Mellor, MP", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 46(2), 167-178.

Doig, A. (1998) 'Cash for Questions': Parliament's Response to the Offence that Dare Not Speak its Name", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 51 (1), 36-50.

Dorey P. (ed.) (1999a). *The Major Premiership: Politics and Policies under John Major, 1990-97*. Macmillan Press.

Dorey, P. (1999b) Introduction, in *The Major Premiership: Politics and Policies under John Major, 1990-97*. Macmillan Press.

Draft Cabinet Manuel (2010) *The Cabinet Manuel – Draft: A guide to laws, conventions, and rules on the operation of government*. December 2010. [http://www.consoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/1321376480\\_magicfields\\_document\\_file\\_9\\_1.pdf](http://www.consoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/1321376480_magicfields_document_file_9_1.pdf) (13/8/2012).

Easton, D. (1953) *The Political System*. New York: Knopf.

Elgie, R. (1995) *Political Leadership in Liberal Democracies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ellis, K. (2002) *Harold Macmillan and the personal influence of British Prime Ministers*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex.

Elster, J (2000) *Ulysses Unbound: Studies in Rationality, Precommitment, and Constraints*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Evans, B. (1999) *Thatcherism and British Politics 1975-1999*. Sutton Publishing: Wiltshire.

Evans, B. and Taylor, A. (1996) *From Salisbury to Major: Continuity and change in Conservative politics*. Manchester University Press.

Evans, G. and Tilley, J. (2012) 'How Parties Shape Class Politics: Explaining the Decline of the Class Basis of Party Support', *British Journal of Political Science*, 42(1), 137-61.

Financial Times, November 30 1990 Joe Rogaly, 'Now events, not vision, will be driving policy'  
[1990https://www.nexis.com/results/enhdocview.do?docLinkInd=true&ersKey=23\\_T27587932308&format=GNBFI&startDocNo=26&resultsUrlKey=0\\_T27587932398&backKey=20\\_T27587932399&csi=459521&docNo=30](https://www.nexis.com/results/enhdocview.do?docLinkInd=true&ersKey=23_T27587932308&format=GNBFI&startDocNo=26&resultsUrlKey=0_T27587932398&backKey=20_T27587932399&csi=459521&docNo=30): 2/1/2018

Finlayson, A. (2007) "From Beliefs to Arguments: Interpretive Methodology and Rhetorical Political Analysis", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 9 (4), 545-563.

Finlayson, A. & Martin, J. (2008) "It Ain't What You Say...": British Political Studies and the Analysis of Speech and Rhetoric", *British Politics*, Vol. 3 (4), 445-464.

Foley, M. (1993) *The rise of the British Presidency*. Manchester University Press.

Foley, M. (2000) *The British Presidency: Tony Blair and the politics of public leadership*. Manchester University Press.

Foley, M. (2002) *John Major, Tony Blair and a conflict of leadership: Collision Course*. Manchester University Press.

Foley, M. (2004) "Presidential Attribution as an Agency of Prime Ministerial Critique in a Parliamentary Democracy: The Case of Tony Blair", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 6 (3), 292-311.

Fowler, N. (2008) *A Political Suicide: The Conservatives' voyage into the wilderness*. Politico's Publishing: London.

Franklin, M. (1985) *The Decline of Class Voting in Britain: Changes in the Basis of Electoral Choice, 1964–1983*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Gamble, A. (1996) *An Ideological Party*, in Ludlam, S. and Smith, M. (1996a) *Contemporary British Conservatism*. Macmillan.

Garry, J. (1995) "The British Conservative Party: Divisions over European Policy", *West European Politics*, Vol. 18 (4), 170-189.

George, A. (1974) "Assessing presidential character", *World Politics*, Vol. 26 (2), 234-282.

Gill, C. (2003) *Whips' Nightmare: Diary of a Maastricht Rebel*. County Durham: The Memoir Club.

Gilmour, I. and Garnett, M. (1998) *Whatever Happened to the Tories: The Conservatives Since 1945*. Fourth Estate: London.

Glover, D. (2011) *The Art of Great Speeches and why we remember them*. Cambridge University Press.

Gorman, T. (1993) *The Bastards: Dirty Tricks and The Challenge to Europe*. Pan Books: London.

Green, J. and Jennings, W. (2011) 'Issue Competence and Vote Choice for Parties in and Out of Power: An Analysis of Valance in Britain 1979-1997', *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(4), 469-503.

Greenstein, F.I. (ed.) (1983) *The Reagan Presidency: An Early Assessment*. The John Hopkins University Press.

Greenstein, F.I. (1987) *Personality and Politics: Problems of evidence, inference and conceptualization*. Princeton University Press.

Greenstein, F.I. (ed.) (1988) *Leadership in the Modern Presidency*. Cambridge University Press.

Greenstein, F.I. (1992) "Can Personality and Politics Be Studied Systematically?", *Political Psychology*, Vol. 13 (1), 105-128.

Greenstein, F.I. (2000) *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style From FDR To Clinton*. Martin Kessler Books. The Free Press.

Greenstein, F.I. (2004) *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style From FDR To George W. Bush* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Martin Kessler Books. The Free Press.

Greenstein, F.I. (2006) *Plumbing the Presidential Psyche: Building on Neustadt and Barber*, in Berman, L. (ed.) (2005) *The Art of Political Leadership: Essays in Honor of Fred I. Greenstein*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Greenstein, F.I. (2009a) *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style From FDR To Barak Obama* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition). Princeton University Press.

Greenstein, F.I. (2009b) *Inventing the Job Of President*. Princeton University Press.

Hargrove, E. (1993) Presidential Personality and Leadership Style, in Edwards III, G.C., Kessel, J.H., Rockman, B.A. (eds.) (1993) *Researching the Presidency: Vital Questions, New Approaches*. University of Pittsburg Press.

Hargrove, E. (1998) *The President as Leader: Appealing to the Better Angels of Our Nature*. University of Kansas Press.

Hargrove, E. (2001) The presidency and the prime ministership as institutions: an American perspective, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 3 (1), 49-70.

Hargrove, E. and Owens, J.E. (2002) "Leadership In Context", *Politics & Policy*, Vol 30(2), 199-207.

Hayton, R. (2012a) Iain Duncan Smith 2001-2003, in Heppell (ed.) (2012) *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churchill to Cameron*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hayton, R. (2012b) *Reconstructing conservatism? The Conservative Party in opposition, 1997-2010*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.

Hayton, R. and Crines, A. (2015) *Conservative orators from Baldwin to Cameron*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.

Hayton, R. and Crines, A. (2016) *Labour orators from Bevan to Miliband*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.

Heath, A., Jowell, R. and Curtice, J. (1985) *How Britain Votes*, Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Heathcoat-Amory, D. (2012) *Confessions of a Eurosceptic*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword.

Heffernan, R. (2003) 'Prime ministerial predominance? Core executive politics in the UK', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 5(3), 347–372.

Heffernan, R. (2005a) "Exploring (and Explaining) the British Prime Minister", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 605-620

Heffernan, R. (2005b) "Why the Prime Minister Cannot be President: Comparing Institutional Imperatives in Britain and America", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 58 (4), pp. 53-70.

Hennessy, P. (2000) *The Prime Minister: The Office and its Holders since 1945*. Penguin Books.

Hennessy, P. (2005) 'The Blair style of government', *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 58 (1), 6–18.

Heppell T. (2002). The ideological composition of the Parliamentary Conservative Party, 1992-97, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 4 (2), 299-334.

Heppell T. (2005). Ideology and Ministerial Allocation in the Major Government 1992-1997, *Politics*, Vol. 25(3), 144-152.

Heppell, T. (2006) *The Conservative Party Leadership of John Major 1992 to 1997*. Edwin Mellin Press.

Heppell, T. (2007a), 'Weak and Ineffective: Reassessing the Party Political Leadership of John Major', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 78, (3), 382-391

Heppell, T. (2007b), 'A Crisis of Legitimacy: The Conservative Party Leadership of John Major', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 21 (4), 471-490.

Heppell, T. (2008a) "The Degenerative Tendencies of Long Serving Governments...1963...1996...2008?", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 61 (4), 578-596.

Heppell, T. (2008b) *Choosing the Tory Leader: Conservative Party Leadership Elections from Heath to Cameron*. I.B.Tauris.

Heppell, T. (Ed.) (2012) *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churchill to Cameron*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heppell, T. and Seawright, D. (2012) *Cameron and Conservatives: The Transition to Coalition Government*. London: Palgrave.

Heppell, T. (2014) *The Tories: From Winston Churchill to David Cameron*. London: Bloomsbury.

Heppell, T. and McMeeking, T. (2015) *The oratory of John Major*, in Hayton, R. and Crines, A. (2015) *Conservative orators from Baldwin to Cameron*. Manchester University Press: Manchester.

Heseltine, M. (2000) *Life In The Jungle: My Autobiography*. Coronet Books.

Hewison, R. (1994) *The Arts*, in Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (1994) *The Major Effect*. London: Macmillan.

Hickson, K. and Williams, B. (eds.) (2017) *John Major: An Unsuccessful Prime Minister? Reappraising John Major*. Biteback Publishing.

Hogg, S. and Hill, J. (1995) *Too Close To Call: Power and Politics – John Major* in No. 10. Warner Books.

Holmes, M. (1998) "The Conservative Party and Europe: From Major to Hague", *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 69 (2), 133-140.

Honeyman, V. (2007) The Leadership of Harold Wilson Assessed Using the Greenstein model, unpublished paper.

Hurd, D. (2003) *Memoirs*. Little Brown.

*Independent*, April 3 1993 <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/leading-article-john-major-is-he-up-to-the-job-1453316.html> 1/1/2018.

The Independent, April 23 1993 <https://www.independent.co.uk/archive/1993-04-23> 1/1/2018

The Independent, 4 October 2017  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-speech-live-coughing-lost-voice-apology-philip-hammond-cough-sweet-conservative-party-a7982501.html>. 1/1/2018

Iremonger, L. (1970) *The Fiery Chariot: A Study of British Prime Ministers and the Search for Love*. Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd.

Jago, M. (2017) *Robin Butler: At The Heart Of Power From Heath to Blair*. Biteback Publishing: London.

James, S. (1992) *British Cabinet Government* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Routledge.

Jefferys, K. (2017) Sport and Arts – Kevin Jefferys, in in Hickson, K. and Williams, B. (eds.) (2017a) *John Major: An Unsuccessful Prime Minister? Reappraising John Major*. Biteback Publishing.

Jenkins, S. (1996) *Accountable To None: The Tory Nationalisation Of Britain*. Penguin Books: London.

Jones, G. (1973) "The Prime Minister and Parliamentary Questions", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 26 (Mar), 260-273.

Jones, G.W. (1985) *The Prime Minister's Power*, in King, A (ed.) (1985) *The British Prime Minister* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Macmillan.

Jones, G.W. (1990) "Mrs Thatcher and the Power of the Prime Minister", *Contemporary Record*, Vol. 3 (4), 2-6.

Jones, G.W (2011) Role and powers of the Prime Minister. Written Evidence to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee.  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpolcon/writev/842/842.pdf> : 23/4/2011.

Junor, P. (1996) *John Major: From Brixton to Downing Street*. Penguin Books.

Kavanagh, D. (1994) *A Major Agenda?*, in Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (1994) *The Major Effect*. London: Macmillan.



Kavanagh, D. (1997) *The Reordering of British Politics: Politics after Thatcher*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (1994) *The Major Effect*. London: Macmillan.

Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (1999) *The Powers Behind The Prime Minister: The Hidden Influence of Number Ten*. Harper Collins.

Kettell, S. (2008) "Does Depoliticisation Work? Evidence from Britain's Membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 10 (4) 630-648.

King, A. (1998) *The Night Itself*, in King A., Denver D., McLean I., Norris P., Sanders D. and Seyd P. (1998) *New Labour Triumphs: Britain at the Polls*. Chatham House Publishers, Inc.

King A., Denver D., McLean I., Norris P., Sanders D. and Seyd P. (1998) *New Labour Triumphs: Britain at the Polls*. Chatham House Publishers, Inc.

Lamont, N. (2000) *In Office*. Little, Brown.

Langer, A. (2007) 'A historical exploration of the personalisation of politics in the print media: British Prime Ministers 1945-1999', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 60(3), 371-87.

Langer, A. (2011) *The Personalisation of Politics in the UK: Mediated Leadership from Attlee to Cameron*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lang, I. (2002) *Blue Remembered Years: A Political Memoir*. Politico's Publishing.

Lasswell, H.D. (1977) *Psychopathology and politics*. University of Chicago Press

Lawson, N. (1992) *The View From No. 11*. Bantam Press.

Leith, J. (2011) *You Talkin' To Me: Rhetoric from Aristotle to Obama*. Profile Books.

Lewis, N. (1993) "The Citizen's Charter and Next Steps: A New Way Of Governing?", *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 64 (3), 316-326.

Lovenduski, J. (2012) "Prime Minister's questions as political ritual", *British Politics*, Vol. 7(4), 314-340.

Lowi, T.J. (1985) *The Personal President: Power Invented, Promises Unfulfilled*. Cornell University Press.

- Ludlam, S. and Smith, M. (1996a) *Contemporary British Conservatism*. Macmillan: Hampshire and London.
- Ludlam, S. a Smith, M. (1996b) Introduction, in Ludlam, S. and Smith, M. (1996a) *Contemporary British Conservatism*. Macmillan: Hampshire and London.
- Ludlam, S. and Smith, M. (1996c) The Character of Contemporary Conservatism, in Ludlam, S. and Smith, M. (1996a) *Contemporary British Conservatism*. Macmillan: Hampshire and London.
- Lynch, P. and Whitaker, R. (2013) "Where There is Discord, Can They Bring Harmony? Managing Intra-Party Dissent on European Integration in the Conservative Party", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 15 (3), 317-339.
- McAnulla, S. (1999) "The Post-Thatcher Era", in Marsh D., Buller J., Hay C., Johnston J., Kerr P., McAnulla S., Watson M., (1999). *Postwar British Politics in Perspective*, Polity Press: Cambridge.
- MacAnulla, S. (2002) Structure and Agency, in Marsh, D. and Stoker, G. (2002) *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacGregor Burns, J. (1979) *Leadership*. Harper Torchbooks.
- MacGregor Burns, J. (2003) *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness*. Grove Press
- Mackintosh, J.P. (1968) *The British Cabinet*. Stevens & Sons.
- Major (1989) Mr Major's speech to the Adam Smith Institute on 27th June 1989, entitled "Adam Smith and the Public Sector". <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page883.html>: 3/6/2017.
- Major (1990a) Mr Major's interview with journalists at the doorstep of 10 Downing Street on 28th November 1990. <http://johnmajor.co.uk/0003.html>: 3/6/2017.
- Major, J. (1990b) Mr Major's speech given by the Prime Minister at the presentation meeting of the new leader. The speech was given at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre at Westminster, Tuesday 4th December 1990. <http://johnmajor.co.uk/page174.html>: 3/6/2017.
- Major, J. (1991a) Handwritten note from the Prime Minister to Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher MP, March 19, 1991. PREM 19/3424. LOCAL GOVERNMENT. The future of the rating system: rating revaluation; Community Charge; part 23. National Archives: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/recordcopy/RC1465064-8afa2c87-9f3c-417d-86df-1d802a142ddf> : 14/2/2018

Major, J (1991b) "The Evolution of Europe". Speech by Rt. Hon. John Major MP to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Bonn, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1991. Konrad Adenauer Foundation/Conservative Political Centre: Smith Square, London.

Major (1991c) Mr Major's speech to Conservative Central Council, held in Southport on 23rd March 1991. <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page2017.html> : 3/6/2017.

Major, J. (1992a) Mr Major's speech to Scottish Conservative candidates, made at the Moat House Hotel in Glasgow on Saturday 22nd February 1992. <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page1267.html>: 3/6/2017.

Major, J. (1992b) Mr Major's Speech to the Scottish CBI at Forte Crest Hotel Glasgow on 10 September 1992 <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page1210.html>: 23/1/2013

Major, J. (1993a) "Conservatism in the 1990s: Our Common Purpose". Speech by the Rt.Hon. John Major MP, Prime Minister, The Carlton Club, London, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1993. Carlton Club/ Conservative Political Centre: Smith Square, London.

Major, J. (1993b) Mr Major's speech to Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool on 8th October 1993. <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page1096.html> : 3/6/2017.

Major, J. (1994) Mr Major's speech to the European Policy Forum on 27th July 1994. <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page1110.html>: 3/6/2017.

Major, J. (1995a) Mr Major's Resignation Speech in the garden of 10 Downing Street on 22 June 1995 <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page724.html>: 23/1/2013

Major, J (1995b) John Major's speech to the Annual Conservative Party Conference, Blackpool, 13 October 1995  
<http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page1269.html> 10/2/2017

Major, J. (1997) Mr Major's Comments on the Single Currency on 16 April 1997  
<http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page1996.html>: 23/1/2017

Major, J. (1999) John Major: The Autobiography. Harper Collins.

Major, J. (2000) Evidence of John Major MP to the Public Administration Select Committee, July 18 2000  
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmpubadm/821/0071802.htm>: 4/5/2017

Major, J. (2012) Sir John Major's Evidence to the Leveson Inquiry 12 June 2012  
<http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Transcript-of-Morning-Hearing-12-June-2012.pdf>: 8/8/2012

- Major, J. (2014) Sir John Major's speech at the Scottish Parliamentary Journalists' Association, held in Edinburgh on Tuesday 17th June 2014. <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page4374.html> : 3/6/2017.
- Major, J. (2015) Speech made by Sir John Major in Solihull on 21 April 2015. <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page4387.html> : 3/6/2017.
- Major, J. (2016) Extracts of the speech made by Sir John Major in Bristol on 22 June 2016. <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page4404.html> : 3/6/2017.
- Major, J. (2018) Sir John Major's speech at Somerset House in London on 28 February 2018. <http://www.johnmajor.co.uk/page4412.html>: 29/2/2018
- Marsh D., Buller J., Hay C., Johnston J., Kerr P., McAnulla S., Watson M. (1999) *Postwar British Politics in Perspective*, Polity Press: Cambridge.
- McAnulla, S. (1999) "The Post-Thatcher Era", in Marsh D., Buller J., Hay C., Johnston J., Kerr P., McAnulla S., Watson M., (1999). *Postwar British Politics in Perspective*, Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Meyer, C. (2005) *DC Confidential: The Controversial Memoirs of Britain's Ambassador to the US at the Time of 9/11 and the Run-up to the Iraq War*. Orion Books Ltd: London.
- Myers, F. (2000) "Harold Macmillan's "Winds of Change" Speech: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Policy Change", *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Vol. 3 (4), 555-575.
- Negrine, R. (1995) The "Gravest Political Crisis Since Suez": the Press, the Government and the Pitt Closures Announcement of 1992, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 48 (1), 40-56.
- Neustadt, R.E (1990) *Presidential Power And The Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. The Free Press.
- Newsweek, 27 April 1992. Margaret Thatcher, 'Don't undo what I have done' <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111359> 1/1/2018
- Nicholson, E. (1996) *Secret Society: Inside – And Outside – The Conservative Party*. Indigo: London.
- Norris, P. (1997) "Anatomy of a Labour Landslide", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 50 (4), 509-532.
- Norton, C. (1999) *Renewed Hope for Peace? John Major and Northern Ireland*, in Dorey, P. (1999a) *The Major Premiership: Politics and Policies under John Major 1990-1997*. Macmillan.
- Norton, P. (1987) "Prime Ministerial Power: A Framework for Analysis", *Teaching Politics*, Vol. 16 (3), 325-345.

Norton, P. (ed.) (1996a) *The Conservative Party*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.

Norton, P. (1996b) History of the party III: Heath, Thatcher and Major, in Norton, P. (ed.) (1996a) *The Conservative Party*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall.

Osborne, P. and Walters, S. (2004) *Alistair Campbell*. Aurum Press Ltd.

Olmsted, W. (2006) *Rhetoric*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Parker, M. and Surrey, J. (1993) "The October 1992 Coal Crisis And UK Energy Policy", *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 64 (4), 396-409.

Parris, M and Maguire, K. (2005) *Great Parliamentary Scandals: Five Centuries of Calumny, Smear & Innuendo*. London: Robson Books.

Patten, C. (2017a) *First Confession: A Sort of Memoir*. Penguin Books.

Patten, C. (2017b) "John Major and Europe". Lecture by Chris Patten (Lord Patten of Barnes), Friday 17 November 2017. *Prime Ministers and Europe Since Thatcher - The Hereford Lectures*: <http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/prime-ministers-and-europe-thatcher-hertford-lectures>. 12/12/2017

Pearce, E. (1991) *The Quiet Rise of John Major*. Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

Peele, G. (2016) David Cameron's leadership and party renewal, in Peele, G. and Francis, J. (eds.) (2016) *David Cameron and Conservative renewal: The limits of modernisation?* Manchester University Press: Manchester.

Peele, G. and Francis, J. (eds.) (2016) *David Cameron and Conservative renewal: The limits of modernisation?* Manchester University Press: Manchester.

Price, L. (2010) *Where Power Lies: Prime Ministers v The Media*. London: Simon & Schuster.

Pryce, R. (1994) The Treaty Negotiations, in: Duff, A., Pinder, J. and Pryce, R. (1994) *Maastricht And Beyond: Building the European Union*. London and New York: Routledge.

Read, M.D. and Marsh, D. (1997) The Family Law Bill: Conservative Party Splits and Labour Party Cohesion, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 50 (2), 263-279.

Rentoul, J. (2001) *Tony Blair: Prime Minister*. Little, Brown and Company

Redwood, J. (2017) The View from the Right - John Redwood MP, in Hickson, K. and Williams, B. (eds.) (2017) *John Major: An Unsuccessful Prime Minister? Reappraising John Major*. Biteback Publishing.

Rhodes, R.A.W. (1995) "From Prime Ministerial Power to Core Executive", in Rhodes, R. A. W. and Dunleavy, P. (eds.) (1995) *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive*. Macmillan.

Rhodes, R.A.W. (2000) "The Governance Narrative: Key Findings From The ESRC's Whitehall Programme", *Public Administration*, Vol. 78 (2), 345-363.

Rhodes, R. (2011) *Everyday Life In British Government*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Richards, S. (2017) *Leadership Reflections with Steve Richards 3: John Major*. First Broadcast 20<sup>th</sup> April 2017, BBC Parliament.  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08f4gm1> : 20/4/2017.

Riesman, D. and Glazer, N. (1961) *The Lonely Crowd: A Reconsideration in 1960*, in Lipset, S. and Lowenthal, L. (eds.) (1961) *Culture and Social Character*. New York: The Free Press

Riker, W. (1986) *The Art of Political Manipulation*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sarlvik, B. and Crewe, I. (1983) *A Decade of Dealignment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sanders, D. (1996) "Economic Performance, Management Competence and the Outcome of the Next General Election", *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 44 (2) 203-231.

Searing, D. (1994) *Westminster's World: Understanding Political Roles*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Seldon, A. (1994) *The Conservative Party*, in Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (1994) *The Major Effect*. London: Macmillan.

Seldon A. (ed.) (1996) *How Tory Governments Fall: The Tory Party In Power Since 1783*. Fontana Press.

Seldon, A. (1997) *Major: A Political Life*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Seldon, A. (2004) *Blair*. Free Press.

Seldon, S. and Davies, M. (2017) *An Overall Assessment – Sir Anthony Seldon and Mark Davies*, in Hickson, K. and Williams, B. (eds.) (2017) *John Major: An Unsuccessful Prime Minister? Reappraising John Major*. Biteback Publishing.

Seymour-Ure, C. (1994) *Mass Media*, in Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (1994) *The Major Effect*. London: Macmillan.

Seymour-Ure, C. (1995) Prime Minister and Public: Managing Media Relations, in Shell, D. and Hodder-Williams, R. (eds) (1995) Churchill to Major: The British Prime Ministership since 1945. London: Hurst & Company.

Shell, D. and Hodder-Williams, R. (eds) (1995) Churchill to Major: The British Prime Ministership since 1945. London: Hurst & Company.

Shephard, G. (2000) Shephard's Watch: Illusions of Power in British Politics. Politicos Publishing.

Skowronek, S. (1997) The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton. The Belknap Press Of Harvard University Press.

Smith, M. J. (1999) The Core Executive in Britain. Macmillan.

Smith, G. (2009) 'Conceptualizing and Testing Brand Personality in British Politics', *Journal of Political Marketing*, Vol. 8(3), 209-32.

Smith, G. and French, A. (2011) 'Measuring the changes to leader brand associations during the 2010 election campaign', *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 27 (7-8), 718-35.

Sowemimo, M. (1996) "The Conservative Party and European Integration, 1988 to 1995", *Party Politics*, Vol. 2 (1), 77-97.

Sperlich, P.W. (1975) Bargaining and Overload: An Essay on Presidential Power, in Wildavsky, A. (1975) Perspectives on the Presidency. Boston: Little Brown.

Stanyer, J., and Wring, D. (2004) 'Public images, private lives: An introduction', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 57(1), 1-8.

Stark, L. (1996) Choosing a Leader: Party Leadership Contests in Britain from Macmillan to Blair. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stephens, P. (1996) Politics and the Pound: The Tories, the Economy and Europe. Macmillan.

Stevens C. (2002) "Thatcherism, Majorism and the Collapse of Tory Statecraft", *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 16(1), 119-150.

Stuart, M. (1998) Douglas Hurd: The Public Servant. Mainstream Publishing: Edinburgh and London.

Taylor, M. (ed.) (2001) Walter Bagehot: The English Constitution. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Taylor, R. (2006) Major. Haus Publishing.

Thatcher (1990) A Grand Finale: The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher's last speech as Prime Minister, House of Commons, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1990. Conservative Political Centre: Smith Square, London.

Thatcher M. (1993) The Downing Street Years. Harper Collins.

Thatcher, M. (1995) The Path To Power. Harper Collins.

Theakston, K. (1999) A Permanent Revolution in Whitehall: the Major Government and the Civil Service, in Dorey P. (1999a). The Major Premiership: Politics and Policies under John Major, 1990-97. Macmillan Press.

Theakston, K. (2002) "Political Skills and Context in Prime Ministerial Leadership in Britain", *Politics & Policy*, Vol. 30 (2), 283 - 323

Theakston, K. (2007) "What Makes For An Effective British Prime Minister?", *Quaderni Di Scienza Politica*, Vol. 14 (2), 227-249.

Theakston K, After Number 10: Former Prime Ministers in British Politics (London:Palgrave, 2010)

Theakston, K. (2011) "Gordon Brown as prime minister: political skills and leadership style", *British Politics*, Vol. 6 (1), 78-100.

Theakston, K. (2012) David Cameron as Prime Minister, in Heppell, T. and Seawright, D. (2012) Cameron and the Conservatives: The Transition to Coalition Government. London: Palgrave.

Theakston, K. and Gill, M. (2006) "Rating 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Prime Ministers", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 8 (2), 193-213.

Theakston, K. and Gill, M. (2011) "The Postwar Premiership League", *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 82 (1), 67-80.

Theakston, K. and Heppell, T. (2011) Role and powers of the Prime Minister. Written Evidence to the House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee.  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpolcon/writev/842/842.pdf>: 23/4/2011.

Thelen, K., Steinmo, S. and Longstreth, F. (1998) Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis. Cambridge University Press.

Thorpe, A. (2008) A History of the British Labour Party. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

The Times, 30 March 1994 'Major faces new struggle for survival' Times Archives Gale Document Number: IF502029874: Accessed 1/1/2018



The Times, 11 October 1995 'Tories make Europe their new battleground' Times Archives Gale Document Number: IF500739716 Accessed 1/1/2018.

The Times, 23 June 1995 'Major challenges his critics to fight' Times Archives Gale Document Number: IF502132489: Accessed 1/1/1018

The Times, 17 September 1993 'Major told to sharpen performance' Times Archives Gale Document Number: IF503367800: Accessed 1/1/2018.

Toye, R. (2011) "The Rhetorical Premiership: A New Perspective on Prime Ministerial Power Since 1945", *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 30(2), 175-192.

Tucker, R.C. (1981) *Politics as Leadership*. University of Missouri Press.

Waldegrave, W. (2015) *A Different Kind Of Weather: A Memoir*. Constable: London.

Wall, S. (2008) *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair*. Oxford University Press.

Wickham-Jones, M. (1997) 'Right turn: A revisionist account of the 1975 Conservative Party leadership election', *Twentieth Century British History*, 8 (1): 74-89.

Williams, H. (1998) *Guilty Men: Conservative Government, 1992-1997*. Aurum Press.

Willman, J. (1994) *The Civil Service*, in Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (1994) *The Major Effect*. London: Macmillan.

Wilson, H. (1976) *The Governance Of Britain*. Book Club Associates.