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Special Issue: - Understanding Prime Ministerial Leadership in the United Kingdom and Japan in the Twenty-First Century-Editorial

Understanding prime ministerial leadership in the United Kingdom and Japan in the 21st century: Introduction to a special issue

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Abstract

The introduction to this special issue begins by presenting a recent puzzle – the increasingly strong position of the Japanese prime minister, who has traditionally been regarded as weak, in contrast to the increasingly fragile position of the United Kingdom prime minister, who has traditionally been regarded as strong. To make sense of these developments, the introduction reviews existing academic perspectives related to prime ministerial leadership with a specific focus on the literature on the UK and Japanese prime ministers. It subdivides our understanding of prime ministerial leadership into three distinct but inter-related levels of analysis. First, the institutional setting, which concentrates attention upon prime ministers' relations with the machinery of government and a range of institutions including the executive, legislature and judiciary, and relates to prime ministerial versus cabinet government debates, and the core executive model. Second, the party context, which focuses on prime ministers as leaders of their political parties and debates surrounding party centralisation, internal party cohesion and leadership selection and ejection. Third, the role of agency within these above two settings and in relation to the broader public, which includes the personal skills and performative styles of individual prime ministers.

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Overview

The context for this special issue is a timely one. Traditionally, and in the simplest of terms, the United Kingdom (UK) prime minister has been characterised as relatively strong and the Japanese prime minister as relatively weak. However, over recent years we have witnessed the opposite situation emerge. Since 2010, the UK experienced political turbulence in the form of coalition governments, the fallout from the Brexit referendum and weak, 'zombie' or controversial prime ministers. In contrast, after 2012, Japan moved away from the 'revolving door' of prime ministers that characterised Japanese politics between 2006 and 2012 and instead experienced political stability under the leadership of Shinzō Abe. Despite political scandals and societal concerns over some of his more nationalist policies, Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) secured a string of landslide elections and became Japan's longest serving prime minister in November 2019 before stepping down the following year. The reversal in fortunes between the two countries could not be starker. In more arcane, academic terms, it appears that the UK and Japan are exchanging positions on the x-axis of Lijphart's (2012) two-dimensional conceptual map of democracy: the UK is becoming more consensual and Japan more majoritarian. Yet comparing these two countries has often been overlooked in the academic literature on the nature of prime ministerial leadership.

This is disappointing as the UK and Japan share similar goals, as the UK-Japan Joint Vision statement set out during Prime Minister Theresa May's visit to Tokyo in August 2017:

> Japan and the UK are global strategic partners, sharing common interests as outward-looking and free-trading island nations with a global reach, committed to the rules-based international system. We share the fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law (GOV.UK, 2017).

So, with the aim of exploring these recent developments through the lens of the extant academic literature, the contributors to this special issue successfully secured seed funding from the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council in 2018 aimed at fostering the development of long-term relationships between UK and Japanese researchers, as part the UK-Japan Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Connections Grants. During the term of the grant, we held workshops in Sheffield, Tokyo, London and online to develop our thinking and engage a range of academic and non-academic partners. Although we are not claiming any causation between these two phenomena, we are interested in explaining them in their own right and then addressing a range of questions that emerge. These include: by what methodological frameworks and conceptual tools has prime ministerial leadership traditionally been understood and measured in both countries? What similarities and differences exist between UK and Japanese prime ministers in terms of their relations with the institutions and machinery of government, their own parties, as well as their skills, styles and available resources? Finally, what lessons can each side learn from the other? This special issue represents our initial findings.

Understanding leadership

Leadership is a highly contested term. Stogdill (1974: 259) inferred that 'there are nearly as many concepts of leadership as there are persons who attempted to define them'. As a result, the body of literature manages to be simultaneously highly fragmented, overlapping and littered with redundant concepts, neatly described by Rowold et al. (2015) as a 'Tower of Babel'. The literature is too wide-ranging to capture here but has centred on the disciplines of psychology, management and political science. Traditional definitions would stress an individual leader (redolent of the 'great man theory'), their innate skills and their position and role within different structures as they seek to enact change. House's (1971) work on charismatic leadership defined leadership as '[t]he ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members' (Antonakis and House, 2014: 1). In contrast to this focus on the role and qualities of individual leaders, Chemers (1997) examined leadership as a process of influence in which the leader is able to obtain the support of others to achieve a common goal. In this definition, the focus of leadership is on the dynamics of social interaction, such as communication and persuasion, which ultimately impact the external environment. Over recent years there has been a mini-boom in the extant literature that seeks to move the debate from traditional understandings of leadership to embrace topics such as authentic leadership, toxic leadership and non-leadership.

Political leadership comprises the relationships and dynamics between leaders, institutions, followers and the socio-political context in which they operate (Morrell and Hartley, 2006). It matters as it explains how policy decisions are determined, outcomes emerge and political systems work. As a consequence, a wide range of approaches, frameworks and concepts have been advanced to define and explain political leadership; however, it is also essentially a disputed concept (Blondel, 1987; Elgie, 1995). It could be argued that the diverse academic literature on political leadership reflects the classic debate within political science between structure and agency, and identifies a number of approaches (Hay, 1995). First, an institutional interpretation emphasises the dominance of structure and the extent to which the agency of political leaders is determined, or constrained, by the institutional environment in which they are forced to operate. Second, a contrasting interpretation identifies the importance of individual agency, and the extent to which leadership derives from the skills and style of the political leaders and can overcome the environment in which they are operating. Located between these two perspectives is an interactionist approach that seeks to transcend the structure/agency dichotomy and implies that the relationship is dialectical. In other words, structures can condition the performative level of a political leader, but they can also create political space and (re-shape their external environment) through their political skills and style of leadership.

The case of the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair shows the validity of the interactionist perspective. Through his individual skills and decisions, he reconfigured the environment in which he was leading. For example, his political operating environment was conducive because he had large parliamentary majorities and managed his party relatively effectively. However, that majority was a consequence of his performance as leader of the opposition (1994–1997) and the shifting of voter perceptions about the Labour Party. This was in part a consequence of his leadership skills and the repackaging and repositioning of the Labour Party on the centre-ground of British politics. Conversely, if he contributed positively to shaping his own structural environment by winning such large majorities, he also contributed negatively to his own structural environment by his intervention in Iraq (O'Malley, 2007). The interactionist approach guides us towards considering the

ambitions and styles of individual prime ministers and their ability to manage/exploit their institutional environment whether it be executive and/or party environments (Elgie, 1995).

Finally, the leadership capital index (LCI) captures these individual, relational and institutional factors in seeking to measure leadership (Bennister et al., 2015, 2017), and has been used to analyse political leadership in individual countries such as Japan, Italy and Hungary (Burrett, 2016; Grimaldi, 2017; Körösényi et al., 2017). However, how has prime ministerial leadership in the specific UK and Japanese contexts been understood?

Understanding prime ministerial leadership in the UK

In contrast to Japan, where the powers of the prime minister are codified, constitutional conventions established over time explain the powers of the UK prime minister. Moreover, whereas notions of weakness have characterised Japanese prime ministers, variability in terms of power and influence has traditionally defined how UK prime ministers are evaluated, with many prime ministers exploiting their circumstances to exert strong leadership (Foley, 2000; Smith, 1995). The existing academic literature on prime ministerial power in the UK highlights how they may be empowered or constrained by their institutional settings, be that within the executive itself, within their own parties or in executive–legislature relations.

The emphasis on the variability of prime ministerial power and influence shaped the academic debate between two perspectives – the shift towards the prime ministerial government thesis (Mackintosh, 1968) and the counter position of the enduring validity of the cabinet government thesis (Jones, 1985, 1990). The prime ministerial versus cabinet government debate then contributed to the emergence of the core executive model as a new perspective on power and influence. This emphasised how the prime minister was positioned within a 'complex web of institutions, networks and practices', in which decision-making was based around 'bilateral negotiations' (Rhodes, 1995: 12). The value of the core executive model was that it showcased how prime ministerial power and influence are relational and contingent, rather than positional (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003: 57), as they are constrained by their 'operating environment' (Heffernan, 2003: 349).

It is because the core executive perspective is a power-dependency model that perceptions of prime ministerial power and influence are variable. This places a strong emphasis on a prime minister's ability to exploit the resources that they do have. These resources can include the institutional power to change the machinery of government, and redefine the dynamics within Whitehall by dissolving, creating or merging departments to off-set the dangers of departmentalism, as well as their powers to appoint, move or dismiss ministers within departments and cabinet. They also include personal or reputational powers, for example their political skills and abilities, their association with actual or anticipated political success, their public popularity and their standing within the party (Heffernan, 2003: 350–356).

Perceptions of prime ministerial power and influence also reflect executive–legislature relations, due to the significance of parliamentary majorities, and the level of parliamentary cohesion within the governing party. When King (1991: 25) argued that UK prime ministers needed to remember that it was a 'party job before it was a government job', he was raising four important issues in relation to prime ministers and their parties. First, the power of appointment should be used as a method of party management to enable the prime minister to enhance their power within both the government and the party. Second, the level of parliamentary dissent within the governing power is an important indicator of prime ministerial power, but its impact depends on majorities. Third, the extent to which power is centralised within parties can influence the perception of prime ministerial

power. Finally, the rules governing how to evict an incumbent prime minister from the leadership of his or her party are also an influence upon perceptions of power (Heppell, 2013).

Clear trends are discernible in relation to these four issues over recent decades. UK prime ministers have shown a growing propensity for dismissing ministers and engaging in repeated reshuffles to showcase their power over their own parliamentary parties (Berlinski et al., 2007; King and Allen, 2010). Running parallel to greater ministerial instability has been the steady growth in terms of backbench dissent, and although ideological factionalism and disunity have long been a characteristic of Labour Party politics, they have also become an increasing constraint upon Conservative prime ministers since 1990 (Cowley, 2005; Cowley and Norton, 1999). While UK prime ministers have found the management of their parliamentary parties increasingly a challenge, they have engaged in processes of party change that have centralised power and decision-making in the hands of the leadership at the expense of the membership base (Heffernan and Webb, 2009). Finally, procedural changes have made it harder for parties to evict their leaders when in power, as the costs associated with seeking to remove the leader – time, financial and disunity – act as an impediment, which can leave parties with relatively secure but weak prime ministers (Quinn, 2012).

Although variability remains a justifiable way of assessing UK prime ministerial power and influence, the academic literature has become increasingly focused on debates about presidentialisation and personalisation. The prime ministerial tenures of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair were said to have increased the level of prime ministerial power and legitimised the notion of the British presidency (Foley, 1993, 2000). The two key properties of the British presidency thesis were the ideas of spatial and public leadership. Spatial leadership reflected the ability of the leader to distance themselves from the executive, while at the same time being part of it. Blair was particularly adept at projecting himself as an outsider. New modern media methods were used to project Blair as the personification of the policy agenda of 'New Labour', allowing him to distance himself from his party. This enabled him to engage in public leadership, presenting and justifying choices via the mass media, and in part limiting the complexities associated with negotiation within the core executive and within the party (Foley, 2000: 24–25, 89, 110–111).

However, while advocates of the presidentialisation of the UK prime minister emphasise these themes – and others, such as the centralisation of power in Downing Street and increased international summitry (Foley, 2000; Webb and Poguntke, 2013) – sceptics of the presidentialisation thesis counter this by claiming that the prime minister is merely 'predominant' (Dowding, 2013; Heffernan, 2003). They re-emphasise the constraints upon prime ministers, by highlighting the challenging circumstances David Cameron was faced with (Bennister and Heffernan, 2014). For example, factors such as parliamentary arithmetic and his position as a coalition prime minister constrained Cameron's policy choices, such as in terms of foreign policy and military intervention in Syria (Kaarbo and Kenealy, 2016). The constrained Cameron stood in contrast to the empowered Blair in the case of the intervention in Iraq (O'Malley, 2007), with both cases demonstrating the variability of prime ministerial input and influence upon foreign policy (Dyson, 2006, 2009; Kaarbo, 1997).

Built into the debates on the British presidency thesis has been a growing awareness of the importance of the personality of the prime minister. This has been magnified by the fact that voter choice has become shaped by valence-based explanations, or the perceived competence of parties or more specifically their leaders, as opposed to positional-based explanations or the classic class-based cleavage (Clarke et al., 2009). That increased focus on leaders relative to parties, and the personalisation of politics, has meant that political campaigning and party branding

have become as much about image and symbolism as they are about content and policy (Langer, 2007). The increasing emphasis on the prime minister in modern election campaigning has also been fuelled by the transformation of the media, with accountability functions such as Prime Minister's Questions, and electioneering events such as leadership debates, serving to intensify the focus on the charisma, likeability and personal traits of prime ministers and party leaders (Langer, 2011). To reflect these developments, there has been an increasing academic focus on examining the rhetoric and oratory skills of prime ministers (Toye, 2011). Academics have also developed different frameworks for analysing prime ministers' performance, covering heresthetics and their skills at political manipulation (McLean, 2001), or their capabilities at statecraft (Buller and James, 2012). Historical comparisons have been developed that seek to rank the overall effectiveness of post-war UK prime ministers (Theakston and Gill, 2006).

Understanding prime ministerial leadership in Japan

The traditional English-language literature on the Japanese prime minister has focused on outlining and explaining their marginal and powerless position in comparison to their international peers (Hayao, 1993; Hayasaka, 1994). Henry Kissinger went further by describing the Japanese prime minister as 'the custodian of the national consensus, not the creator of it' (quoted in Pyle, 1987: 245). Explanations for this weak position vary from the structural nature of Japanese political parties based on the central role of factions, to opposition parties and other actors such as bureaucrats and policy tribes (*zoku*). The result is that the Japanese prime minister has been a compromise figure who avoids alienating people and has some appeal across a wide spectrum. Others have highlighted the limited resources available to a Japanese prime minister as explaining their weak position, including the limited number of dedicated staff (Hayao, 1993). Fukai (1999: 179) argues that the dominance of the LDP within Japanese politics has also been detrimental to the development of leadership qualities:

> The one-party dominant system has led to the institutionalization of the intra-LDP appointment and promotion practices based on seniority and factional balance rather than ability of expertise. This system has tended to breed mediocre leaders and led to a situation similar to a crisis of leadership.

In addition, Neary (1996: 11) points to cultural aspects and 'the often-cited tendency of Japanese leaders to avoid taking on an up-front role preferring to exercise power by manipulating events from behind the scenes'. Edström (1996) has explored the ability of Japanese prime ministers to exert leadership in foreign policy and concluded that a range of constraints exist that limit their agency. Although the Constitution charges the prime minister with a range of duties and there have been some active post-war prime ministers, for the most part either they have been structurally constrained (domestically and/or internationally), or the quality of leadership has not been evident in individual prime ministers. The result has been a prime minister who is:

> a judicious consensus-builder at best, rather than a forceful advocate, constrained from taking independent action. He was expected to move slowly and carefully, articulating the existing consensus on a given issue or nurturing gradual changes in it rather than issuing clarion calls for fundamentally new policies. (Edström, 1996: 257)

Ultimately, the Japanese prime minister has traditionally been regarded as a consensus-builder who follows rather than leads.

In this vein, Aurelia George Mulgan (2000) explored the institutional constraints to executive leadership in post-war Japan until the year 2000. She argued that the inability of prime ministers to make authoritative decisions positions Japan as an unreliable ally in the international arena. The leadership deficit was developed due to a number of factors, one being the gap between the attributions of power to the prime minister and the limitations to exercise this power. George Mulgan argues that this was caused by the loose modelling of the Japanese system on the Westminster parliamentary system, which vests the power in the cabinet but limits the prime minister's independent decisions. A second factor in the executive leadership deficit is the enhanced power of bureaucrats, where in practice, cabinet members do not have the authority necessary to make bureaucrats accountable for their actions, and in turn, ministers often end up resigning for bureaucrats' mistakes or misbehaviour. A significant cause of weak executive leadership is the power of factions, party elders and special interest groups within the LDP.

Van Wolferen (1989) famously described the Japanese political system as having no point at which the buck stops; rather, the buck continues to circulate in the absence of a centre. In the absence of leadership, it was argued that it was the bureaucracy alone, or a stable political elite dubbed Japan Inc. or the 'iron triangle' of the LDP, the bureaucracy and big business, that was exerting decisive influence. The conclusion that it does not particularly matter who occupies the position of prime minister in Japan was strengthened between the resignation of Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi in September 2006 and Prime Minister Abe's re-election in 2012 when Japan experienced six prime ministers over as many years, prompting Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to declare in October 2009 that 'in Japan ... you say "good morning" to one prime minister and "good afternoon" to a different one' (Soble and Dickie, 2010).

However, some have argued that Japanese prime ministers have demonstrated a more significant degree of leadership – although scholars differ over the extent. At one end of the scale, Hayao (1993) argued that individual prime ministers tend to be able to exert their influence on at least one 'trophy' issue, whether it be the normalisation of relations with the Soviet Union by Ichirō Hatoyama, or the reversion of Okinawa to Japan for Eisaku Satō. Hayao was one of the first to suggest that in atypical cases, the Japanese prime minister could exert charisma and personality in resolving these trophy issues. Shinoda (1999) identified the growing importance of popular approval of the prime minister as a factor in explaining prime ministerial leadership, and the positive and negative impact of public opinion. Building on this, Shinoda (2000) identified power resources available to prime ministers, and illustrated how they instrumentalise them to achieve their objectives. These resources are institutional, as outlined in the Constitution and over time, as well as personal, both within and outside both the political world and Japan. In this light, case studies of Zenkō Suzuki's and Yasuhiro Nakasone's administrative reforms, Nakasone's and Noboru Takeshita's tax reforms and Ryūtarō Hashimoto's administrative reforms provide evidence for Shinoda's thesis. He highlights four distinct leadership styles: (1) the political insider, typified by Takeshita who had well-established personal links with various political actors; (2) the grandstander, typified by Nakasone, who sought to mobilise sources of power outside of the political world, particularly public support; (3) the kamikaze fighter, who sacrifices themself to achieve their objective, such as Hatoyama Ichirō and Nobusuke Kishi; and (4) the peace lover, typified by Suzuki and Toshiki Kaifu, whose efforts to satisfy everyone resulted in failure (Shinoda, 2000: 205–211). Takayasu (2005) takes a similar tack in arguing that although constitutional and legal factors are often identified as acting as constraints on prime ministerial power, they may not be as restraining as has been thought. In addition, he argues that there have been a range of other power resources and channels of influence that the prime minister is able to use

to 'play a key part in policy-making', as evidenced by Kakuei Tanaka's efforts during the 1973 oil crisis (Takayasu, 2005: 163).

In addition, Shinoda (2007) has highlighted the structural reforms that took place in the *Kantei* (the prime minister's official residence that embraces members of the Cabinet Secretariat and the prime minister) at the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. The traditional understanding is that the position of the *Kantei* was weak because it was staffed by personnel on loan from ministries and agencies to which they maintain their loyalty. In addition, the prime minister's personnel appointments were subject to party approval and constraints (Kabashima and Steel, 2010: 22). In short, 'the bureaucracy is dictating the nation's policies by using the prime minister as its mouthpiece' (Narita and Eda, 2002, cited in Kabashima and Steel, 2010: 22). This served to weaken the position of the prime minister. However, these reforms created more robust support mechanisms, particularly in strengthening the meagre resources identified by Hayao (1993: Chapter 8), and enhancing the support given by the Cabinet Secretariat to the prime minister, and as a result, the leadership role of the *Kantei* in policymaking independent from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example. The result has been a top-down decision-making process in contrast to the previous bottom-up process. In short, Shinoda (2007: 15) argues that 'the *Kantei* has become Japan's new policy center in defense and foreign affairs'.

Around the same time, Krauss and Nyblade (2005) highlighted the salience of a longer-standing trend of presidentialisation of Japanese politics and the rise of personalised government whereby Koizumi could appeal directly to the people, bypassing his own party and the bureaucracy. Although Koizumi was not the first prime minister to do this, his skilful handling of the media and the extent to which he utilised this resource was new, and led to these questions becoming more relevant. In short, the public face of the prime minister (not necessarily the prime minister themself) has steadily increased in importance over the last three decades to become an influential factor. In addition, Krauss and Nyblade (2005) emphasised the impact of recent electoral reform on the position of the prime minister, arguing that it made voters consider the party rather than the candidate, thus bringing the image of the prime minister into play. The reform resulted in the rise of floating voters and created space for prime ministerial leadership to occupy in an attempt to appeal to this influential new group (this phenomenon was seen in the 2005 and 2009 elections, with different outcomes). These changes coincided with changes in the media that created a more entertaining and confrontational form of news reporting, as opposed to the more traditional reverential reportage.

Kabashima and Steel (2010) also pointed to the fact that prime ministers now use the media as a resource in their election as leader, and that this had made personal presentations and public approval much more important factors over recent years. Koizumi is the most salient example of this: he 'played upon the idolization that occurred during the "Koizumi boom" period', during which '[t]he LDP produced and sold around three million dollars' worth of Koizumi dolls, masks, cell-phone straps and posters' (Kabashima and Steel, 2010: 79). In addition, Koizumi expanded the media's access to information and embraced popular and new media, all in the name of providing them with a dramatic narrative of Koizumi-led politics. Naturally these developments have advantages and disadvantages – but taken together they add up to a more proactive role for the Japanese prime minister in policymaking.

As regards understanding recent developments and making sense of the longevity and perceived success of Prime Minister Abe, George Mulgan (2019) has argued that a strengthened, better resourced and more closely coordinated core executive has emerged based on previous reforms and is the chief explanatory factor. She regards this as informed by both the Westminster and presidential

systems but not adequately captured by either. Nevertheless, she describes it as 'one of the most important structural changes in Japan's political system in the postwar period'. In answering the same question, Burrett (2017) has compared and contrasted the first and second Abe administrations, regarded respectively as failed and successful. Based on Elgie's (1995) interactionist leadership model, she links the individual and environmental factors of Abe's premierships. Within the individual factors, Burrett attributes the success of Abe's second administration to an improved public image, as well as a personal responsiveness to the popular support of his agenda, unlike his previous term where he prioritised his agenda over public support. The environmental factors include the societal context and the institutional structures, the latter constituted by the executive branches and the party environment. Burrett argues that minimal internal and external opposition, as well as discipline within the LDP, are crucial reasons for Abe's increased leadership capacity. Similarly, a majority in both houses of the Japanese Diet and an economically focused agenda contributed to his improved leadership in his second term.

Structure of this special issue

This special issue is structured with the readership of the *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* in mind, and in a way that allows us to better understand prime ministerial leadership in Japan and the UK, as well as the interaction between the structural or institutional settings and the agency of individual prime ministers. To this end, the articles are paired together across three levels of analysis, with the preceding Japan-related article providing our initial point of reference and context, and the succeeding UK-focused article teasing out the comparative aspects.

The first level of analysis focuses on the institutional setting and how a prime minister interacts with the machinery of government and a range of institutions including the executive, legislature and judiciary. This approach is focused on the structures of government and how they increase or decrease the power of prime ministers (Foley, 2000; Heffernan, 2003). In the case of the UK prime minister, this used to be defined by the debate between two perspectives, namely the prime ministerial government thesis (Mackintosh, 1968) and the counter position of the enduring validity of the cabinet government thesis (Jones, 1985, 1990). Academics came to critique the prime ministerial versus cabinet government debate, and in so doing contributed to the emergence of a core executive model as a new resource-dependency perspective on power and influence (Rhodes, 1995; Smith, 1995). This emphasised how prime ministers are positioned within a 'complex web of institutions, networks and practices', in which decision-making is based around 'bilateral negotiations' (Rhodes, 1995: 12). Critically, this highlighted the following: (1) other actors within the core executive have resources at their disposal, not just the prime minister; (2) actors within the core executive, including the prime minister, have to exchange their resources to secure their goals; (3) as such, the prime ministerial versus cabinet government debates are misleading as they imply a zero-sum game, namely if one actor (e.g. the prime minister) possesses power, then another actor (e.g. a cabinet member) possesses none. In reality, this command and control assumption is misplaced because the relationship is based on dependencies; (4) we need to trace those dependencies within the core executive and acknowledge that they are structurally linked within overlapping networks; and, accordingly, 5) the prime minister and ministerial elites must build alliances within the networks of the core executive in order to utilise their power (Smith, 2000). Building on these insights, Tomohito Shinoda of the International University of Japan and Kensuke Takayasu of Seikei University explore the (broadly defined) institutional level in Japan and the UK to make sense of recent developments in both countries.

On the second level of analysis, prime ministers are leaders of their own parties and must balance the demands of this ongoing responsibility against their role as the head of government. With the exception of Cameron during the 2010–2015 period of his tenure, all post-war UK prime ministers have led single-party governments and have thus avoided the constraints associated with coalition leadership (Bennister and Heffernan, 2014). Thatcher's and Blair's capacity to provide strong and assertive prime ministerial leadership benefited from their landslide parliamentary majorities. For example, Thatcher had majorities of 144 in the 1983 Parliament and 102 in the 1987 Parliament, while Blair had considerable freedom of manoeuvre with majorities of 179 and 167 in the 1997 and 2001 Parliaments respectively (Cowley, 2005; Foley, 2000; Little, 1988). Conversely, the perception that Major was weak and ineffectual was partly attributed to a small (and dwindling) majority of 21 in the 1992 Parliament and the fact that he was leading a badly divided parliamentary party (Heppell, 2007). The importance of executive–legislative relations will increase in times when the governing party has a small parliamentary majority and prime ministers will be forced to devote considerably more of their political time towards issues around party management. A stronger emphasis will be placed on determining whether policy objectives can be achieved and will be acceptable to backbenchers, and the role of the government chief whip becomes more important in these circumstances. Prime ministers are thus placed in the position of considering differing options when internal party intelligence warns them of the likelihood a rebellion. Do they: (1) retreat, thus pulling the proposed legislation; (2) negotiate, and amend the legislation to make it acceptable to the rebels; or (3) proceed anyway and risk the possibility of defeat? Whichever of these three routes they take will weaken them politically. It is also worth noting that UK prime ministers have shown a growing propensity for dismissing ministers and engaging in more repeated reshuffles in an attempt to showcase their power over their own parliamentary parties (King and Allen, 2010). Yu Uchiyama of Tokyo University and Timothy Heppell of Leeds University explore changes in the party setting over recent years in the case of Abe and the LDP on the one hand, and Cameron, May, Johnson and the Conservative Party in the UK on the other hand.

On the third level of analysis, alongside the academic focus on prime ministers within the institutional settings, it is also important to recognise the significance of individual skills, styles and personality. Foley identified how personality, as a factor in relation to prime ministerial power and influence, has been an underdeveloped relative to the institutional focus (Foley, 1993, 2000). However, scholars have increasingly recognised the transferability of ideas from presidential studies on skills (Hargrove, 1998), and focused on the interaction between the political skills of leaders and the institutional environment in which they are operating. This model encourages scholars to engage with the following themes: (1) the personal characteristics of individual political leaders, their moral commitment and personal integrity; (2) their abilities to persuade, which requires an assessment of their negotiating and rhetorical skills; and (3) their capabilities in terms of political manipulation or maximising political opportunities (or space) for themselves and minimising political opportunities for their opponents. Theakston (2011) identified six core qualities that equate to effective performance: (1) proficiency as a public communicator; (2) organisational capacity; (3) political skill; (4) policy vision; (5) cognitive style; and (6) emotional intelligence. In this light, Chiho Maruoka and Caroline Rose of Leeds University and Mark Bennister of Lincoln University focus on the role of agency, the significance of analysing performative abilities and the impact of individual prime ministers' skills and styles in the case of Japan and the UK.

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