



The Leadership Capital Index: A New Perspective on Political Leadership

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Conclusions

LCI Revisited

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Abstract and Keywords

This concluding chapter reflects on how the LCI has performed and how it can be developed. Application of the LCI is analyzed across different leadership puzzles and contexts and for what this tells us about the authority of political leaders. Some interpretations of capital fluctuation across the chapters are presented. The LCI allows exploration of how skills, relations, and reputations create, build, or erode authority. Questions remain over the weighting of indicators, the balance between hard and soft measurements, and broader questions about how capital is acquired, preserved, and, in rare cases, regained. Leaders in weakly democratic systems may be less prone to “normal” patterns of capital fluctuation. Overall, the LCI does allow students of political leadership to think about the difference between political office-holding and exercising political leadership, and about why and when some leaders are able to make the political weather rather than being swept along by it.

Keywords: leadership, measurement, patterns, comparison, political leadership, capital, LCI

The Leadership Capital Index (LCI) was presented as a new, parsimonious, and flexible analytical instrument in the toolbox of political leadership study. Through a series of single and comparative case studies, this volume has explored how the LCI framework functions in assessing and interpreting the dynamics of political leaders’ licenses to operate. Each chapter was designed around a distinct puzzle (Rhodes and 't Hart 2014, p.1) about the authority and

political efficacy of a leader or set of leaders. The chapters cover a wide range of political systems, office-holders, and leadership capital puzzles. This concluding chapter now examines what the LCI can and cannot teach us about political leadership, and where its future lies. We ask a series of interlinked questions. (1) How did the LCI hold up when applied to such a wide variety of puzzles and contexts? (2) What can be learned about the authority of political leaders? (3) How can we interpret the observed patterns of capital fluctuation? (4) Where lies the future for the LCI and the study of leadership capital in politics?

LCI at Work: Strengths and Limitations

In Chapter 1, we presented the LCI and provided guidelines for its application. We anticipated the applications solicited from the authors of this volume would:

1. Extend our knowledge beyond conventional opinion polling and uni-dimensional measures of leader popularity.
- (p.280)** 2. Bear out our claim that the LCI offers a new framework that bridges the traditional divide between leader-centric/personal and contextual/situational approaches to understand how three key attributes of political leadership—skills, relationships, and reputation—interact to enhance or diminish the level of support a political leader enjoys.
3. Allow us to compare leadership episodes and tenures of office-holders within—and potentially across—political systems to better understand their political fortunes and legacies.

In the empirical chapters, the LCI-construct has certainly worked effectively as a puzzle-generating device. The authors draw on the capital metaphor and its key concepts to set up questions relating to leaders' rise and fall, longevity, stability, personal impact on policy, structural constraints, and response to shock in ways that would not have been possible without the benefit of the new toolkit. The LCI also helped answer important parts of these questions, certainly more so than any of the current popularity tracking devices tend to do. The LCI embodies what Elgie (2015, p.164) has termed a "personality-in-context" approach, bridging the divide that underlies much modern political leadership research. It invites its users to examine (and try to disentangle) how personal factors interact with institutional and situational factors in shaping the ebb and flow of a political leader's authority. However skillful they are, political leaders' ability to control their political fortunes is constrained by the opponents and partners they have to deal with, the "rules of the game" within their parties and the larger political arenas in which they operate, the *Zeitgeist* and the mood of the public, and, inevitably, the 'events' that history throws at them.

The desire for synchronic and diachronic comparison was a particular catalyst for this project. The revival of political leadership studies has so far seen only a modest number of comparative studies (Helms 2005; Poguntke and Webb 2007; Bennister 2012). As Blondel points out here, confronted by the "small n, many

variables” challenge, political leadership scholars have struggled. Examining the extent to which the LCI framework helps address the riddle, and facilitate comparative analysis, was a driver in the conception of this volume. The yield? A series of within-system comparisons of different leaders in Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, and Canada. Five diachronic single-leader analyses in the United States (a president and a governor), Australia, Germany, and Hungary. Taken together, they show us how in different situational and institutional contexts leadership capital was accrued and depleted. They also show how the particular skill sets and styles of political leaders affect the nature and strength of their authority claims.

(p.281) Design Variations

Authors committed to use the LCI framework but were left free to design the specifics. This has produced some variation in how authors have interpreted their briefs, allowing us a better sense of what might be possible in LCI analysis and how different methodological choices pan out. Some important differences in the approaches taken by the authors of this volume include:

- *The number of leaders included in the analysis.* Some focus on just one leader across time (Merkel, Gyurcsány, Gillard, Johnson, Brown), others engage in pair-wise comparison of successive office-holders (e.g. the Dutch, Swedish, British, and Canadian chapters), one compares three (the Italian presidents).
- *The number and kind of “data points” chosen for measurement purposes.* LCI scores for most leaders were gathered twice, but some were assessed three (e.g. Thatcher and Blair), four (e.g. Lyndon Johnson and Jerry Brown), six (Gyurcsány), and even ten times (Merkel) throughout their terms of office. The selection of these data points was mostly targeted, pinpointing specific moments in political time to create a quasi-experimental pre-post comparison (e.g. for Zapatero), or to coincide with key moments in the electoral cycle, or other “milestones,” crises and turning points in the office-holder’s political career (e.g. for Gyurcsány). But in at least one instance (the Merkel chapter), data were collected “randomly,” that is, once during every year of Merkel’s then 10-year period in office. Also, there were differences in the specificity of the points in time at which assessing took place (a week, month or even more diffusely, a year).
- *The extent to which the authors used the LCI as given or chose to adapt it to the specific institutional context or role in focus.* The LCI wears the traces of its “logic of discovery”: the study of prime ministers in Westminster style parliamentary systems. Those taking the LCI into the study of presidents, prime ministers in semi-presidential systems, governors, or more consensual democracies found some of the measures less than optimal for their purposes. This led some authors in this volume to propose adaptations (cf. Sweden

and Italy), mostly modest modifications of single measures. In three instances changes were made to the variables or data sources. For example Swinkels et al. and Bynander and Daléus modified the LCI to suit the coalition politics of the Netherlands and Sweden, while Grimaldi molded it to the office of the Italian president.

- *Choices in measurement, analysis, and presentation.* Authors made different decisions about what sources (such as opinion polls, expert judgment, or surveys) they chose to rely on, what next-best measures to apply when tailor-made data were unavailable, and how to arrive at scores for the **(p.282)** qualitative measures. They also made important analytical choices, particularly about how to justify the scores provided and how to interpret those scores. In structuring their argument, authors varied in the placement of and prominence accorded to the scoring tables.

The challenges of comparing the leadership capital dynamics across different leadership offices and political systems became evident. The LCI applications presented in this volume covered different heads of government working in diverse institutional environments, operating in different historical eras, facing different types of economic and political conditions. This diversity limits our ability to make direct comparisons among the leaders studied across the different chapters.

Take for example, the attribute of communicative skills measured in the second LCI indicator. These are a prized possession in Westminster style systems, with their cultural penchant for oratory, debate and rhetorical combat in parliament. Yet, in consensus style systems, there is not nearly as much emphasis on rhetorical prowess, since in multi-party systems, party leaders and prime ministers cannot afford to be too outspoken. They are much better off with low-profile, small target postures, cryptic language, and other forms of willful ambiguity. This perhaps helps explain why Carl Bildt had a much shorter tenure in office than Fredrik Reinfeldt in the Swedish case.

Likewise, the possibility of a credible leadership threat varies enormously depending on party rules for leader (de)selection, which vary both within and among political systems. Walter shows how the threat of an abrupt coup is ever present in Australian political parties, as manifested by the ferocious treatment meted out by to the last two Australian Labor Party prime ministers, Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard (and since shared by Rudd's successor, the Liberal Party's prime minister Tony Abbott). In contrast, Malloy demonstrates that leadership coups are almost impossible in Canadian politics.

These structural and cultural differences raise the question whether we are best off with a single unified LCI or a set of context-specific adaptations. Several contributors have already proposed steps on the road to the latter, e.g. Swinkels

et al. and Bynander and Daléus. This would imply that the full potential of LCI as an assessment and interpretive device can best be realized through within-system comparisons. It may still be useful in cross-system comparisons, but only of the most similar system variety.

What Did We Learn?

Table 15.1 examines the primary reasons for the rise or fall of leadership capital for each leader in this volume, highlighting the indicators where the **(p.283)** most significant change took place. Given the caveats outlined above, it is indicative only, a heuristic device looking for commonalities rather than any sort of comparison, grouping as it does leaders in a range of situations, over varying time scales, using measures and data points that differed, sometimes considerably. Such flexibility was built into the design of the LCI itself, though some authors, such as Körösényi et al., called for more flexibility citing too many constant variables, which might be artificially “buffering” the levels of observed capital fluctuation.

Table 15.1. The vagaries of leadership capital: indicative LCI patterns

Leader	Primary source of capital depletion	Primary source of capital accrual	Time period
Merkel (Germany)		Communication, re-election	2005–2015
Gillard (Australia)	Polling, trust, challenge	Vision	2010–2013
Johnson (US)	Communications, polling, trust and legislative effectiveness		1964–1968
Gyurcsány (Hungary)	Polling (leadership and party)		2004–2009
Brown (California US)		Communication, polling, trust, legislature	2011–2015 (also incl. 1982)
Thatcher (UK)	Vision, polling, legislative effectiveness		1981–1989
Blair (UK)	Trust, challenge		1999–2007

Conclusions

Leader	Primary source of capital depletion	Primary source of capital accrual	Time period
Martin (Canada)	Communications, polling, trust and legislative effectiveness		2003–2006
Harper (Canada)	Polling, trust and legislative effectiveness		2006–2015
Balkenende (Netherlands)	Vision, policy effectiveness		2002–2010
Rutte (Netherlands)	Trust	Communication	2010–2015
Bildt (Sweden)	Vision, policy effectiveness		1991–1996
Reinfeldt (Sweden)	Polling	Longevity	2006–2010
Zapatero (Spain)	Polling, trust		2008–2011
Rajoy (Spain)		Communication	2012–2015
Scalfarno (Italy)	Communications		1992–1999
Ciampi (Italy)		Communication	1999–2006
Napolitano (Italy)	Trust	Communication, Vision	2006–2013

This rudimentary summary of the case findings enables us to present some helpful insights into the ebb and flow of leadership capital utilizing the three core components.

(p.284) Skills

A general maxim is that democratic leaders must have a tangible, credible, inspiring storyline that justifies and gives meaning to their incumbency (Bell et al. 1999). The LCI offers no simple answer as to whether vision matters. As Johansson notes, Lyndon Johnson’s vision of eradicating poverty unified the country at a time of intense trauma, but his policy vision—so well communicated earlier—became blurred in implementation and he suffered politically from the “credibility gap” that came from perceived “overpromising and under delivering.” Yet there is some evidence that vision matters less than is supposed. Helms and van Esch show how Merkel’s “visionless” approach has thrived

across three governments, and may in fact have proved an advantage in navigating Germany's coalition politics. In the Netherlands, Balkenende had a clear, consistent vision but the equally successful Rutte was a "light-hearted dealmaker." Moreover, both Blair and Gillard found a more focused policy sense too late, only after trust and popular support had deserted them. Gyurcsány's vision remained stable amid an almost complete collapse of support. Leadership vision may, thus, be context dependent; pragmatic-iterative leadership may be an advantage in multiparty coalition settings, but may not cut it in the political and rhetorical culture of the United States and other presidential systems with a personalized electoral mandate.

Communicative proficiency on the other hand appears to be a much more universally useful leadership asset. Almost all of the observed increases in leadership capital, from Rajoy to Brown and Napolitano, were due at least in part to a politician "finding their voice" or improving their media profile. Grimaldi's Italian case shows how not only the authority of political office-holders, but the reputation of the office itself can be affected by communicative performances. A failure to communicate (or the loss of the ability to be believed when you do) is also at the heart of leadership capital decline, or so it appears from this collection. Even effective orators, such as Blair, found they could no longer talk themselves out of the corner of public distrust and party disloyalty, which had been fueled by their own controversial actions. The centrality of communication for leadership reflects the dominance of the media, where actors increasingly pursue "goals within an environment shaped (in part) by mediatisation" (Peters 2016, p.9; Helms 2012).

Relations

Public popularity as expressed in polling proved an important source of leadership capital variation, which is unsurprising given its prevalence in modern politics, where polls are endlessly discussed and analyzed (Chadwick **(p.285)** and Stromer-Galley 2016). The cases show how capital decline cannot be divorced from public perceptions garnered through polling data. A poll decline, whether gentle as with Blair or sudden as with Zapatero, acts as a signal of a leadership "problem" which, if left unchecked and not reversed, can threaten to lead to removal.

Longevity presents a further conundrum. Embedded within the LCI variables, greater length of time in office helps to increase overall leadership capital. We see leaders from Blair, Merkel and Gillard to Rutte building valuable experience and knowledge and institutional capacity over time, as leaders adapt, stretch and manipulate the office (Foley 2000; Bennister 2007). Time in office increases the scope of leadership networks, as leaders understand and tap the relations at the central necessary to operate and work the system. However it may come at a price. The hubris, denial, and dissonance of Zapatero or Thatcher indicate that

the passage of time may be a double-edged sword. Holding power for a long time may cloud leaders' political acumen if not their moral compass.

Despite the difficulty of measuring and conceptualizing trust, it appears to have a central place in the narratives of defeated leaders. This undoubtedly reflects the growing importance of personality and leader oriented politics, especially as "evaluations of political leaders are powerful heuristics for allowing voters to judge the honesty and trustworthiness of a government" (Whiteley et al. 2015, p. 17). Trust can be lost gradually but also suddenly, though levels of institutional and personal trust appear to affect overall leadership capital less in some systems than others.

How is party polling related to party leaders' personal polling? Does a drop in public approval of a party leader mean that approval of their party as a whole will suffer too, and vice versa? Some analysts note an apparent growth of a "presidential logic," even in multi-party systems, where leaders are sometimes tempted to run independent from or even "against" their party in the "void" of voter loyalty created by the declining strength of party organizations across the world (Webb et al. 2012; Mair 2013), creating opportunity structures for party defectors setting up their own splinter parties and, often meteoric, leadership claims (Beyens et al. 2016). The LCI applications in this volume show how in certain systems the popularity of leaders is closely tied to the fate of their own political parties. Four of the leaders in our study (Zapatero, Gillard, Gyurcsány, and Thatcher) were ultimately removed by their own party, which had become nervous at how their growing unpopularity with the voters would hamper its ability to perform well at the next election. So, political parties may well be in decline, but for contemporary political leaders they still matter, especially when trouble arrives (Webb et al. 2012).

It is less easy to draw any firm conclusions about the impact of leadership rivalry on leadership capital, partly due to institutional and cultural differences. **(p. 286)** The cases here go from the splendid, fortress-like job security of incumbent prime ministers in Canada and the Netherlands all the way to the merry-go-round of removal in Australia, by way of the hidden fragility of rebellion and covert challenges in the United Kingdom. Institutionally, the United States and Italian presidencies offer virtually no opening to potential rivals, while Swedish political culture precludes it. The cases also show the very different forms that rivalry may take. The uneasy "duarchy" between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown differed hugely from the surprise backbench "stalking horse" plot that eventually precipitated Thatcher's downfall or the destabilizing Rudd-Gillard-Rudd swaps. Rivalry may also be real or imagined, as with Lyndon Johnson's obsession with Robert Kennedy, a fixation which helped make it a reality, Johansson argues. For those facing strong rivals, it was undoubtedly a serious capital drain—though rebellion isn't always fatal: Partido Popular leader

Mariano Rajoy stands as an example of a leader who successfully fought off several coup attempts.

Reputation

Being associated with effective public policy did not seem to play as prominent a role in shoring up the political capital of otherwise challenged leaders. Margaret Thatcher did clearly benefit from a series of personalized policy successes during her first term in office. So did Lyndon Johnson during the early years of his presidency and California governor Jerry Brown, who succeeded in repairing California's financial woes. Other leaders, such as Zapatero, failed either for lack of a coherent policy or because they took policy stances that were at odds with the political platforms that had underpinned their mandate. Yet other cases offer pause for thought. Gillard, with a slew of policy successes, showed how policy effectiveness means little for leadership capital if a large part of the public (with perceptions intensified no doubt by a virulently negative media campaign) has already decided it will not stomach a particular leader for other reasons. Angela Merkel, gifted far greater policy autonomy than most German Chancellors, could afford prevarication and delegation on key items on the policy agenda as the German economy was riding high on the wings of the policy legacy of her predecessor, Gerhard Schröder. Later she made big policy calls most notably during the euro crisis and the refugee crisis of 2015. Personalizing policy has an element of risk; electoral expedience and the attendant desire to herd political capital may trump the appetite for ambitious policy commitments (which, after all, may only benefit successors). Even far-reaching and transformative past policy achievements may mean little when the party and the public begin to focus on present annoyances and future challenges.

(p.287) The same observations apply to the indicator of legislative performance. Across the cases it appears relatively stable, fluctuating only slightly even in cases of severe loss. The—observable or attributed—parliamentary effectiveness of a leader may improve over time as she learns to manage her own backbench and the intricacies of legislative coalition-building better. Walter presents a compelling case for how Gillard grew as a skillful manager of her delicately balanced minority government in parliament, even while her overall leadership capital collapsed.

“Natural” Depletion?

In the introductory chapter we expressed doubt that there is such a thing as the “normal” leadership capital trajectory, the “inverted U” of capital build-up, consolidation, and decline as laid out by Breslauer (2002), who was working in the non-democratic context of Soviet political leadership. Not all leaders inevitably lose leadership capital and the “natural” arc of decline is only one among many possible trajectories.

Decline is perhaps the *normal* tendency, as the majority of leaders in this volume did lose their capital. A surprising number, however, *gained* capital during their tenure. Of the eighteen leaders in the cases, four—Bildt, Rajoy, Merkel, and Brown—significantly increased, or regained capital, during their time in office, while Harper improved then returned to his starting point and the three Italian presidents gradually increased the institutional capacity of the office. Increases in leadership capital appear to occur in piecemeal fashion, usually driven by just one or two out of the ten LCI indicators. By contrast, decreases can take many different forms, from gradual depletion, as with Blair or Johnson, to the abrupt, sharp and spectacular “fall from grace” of Gyurcsány or Zapatero.

Looking across the table, are there patterns of capital loss that prove fatal for leadership survival? Ultimately, do certain patterns allow or restrict what Poguntke and Webb (2007) call the “room for manoeuvre” of a leader? The decline in the polls, both personal and party, depletes capital and being a poor communicator or no longer commanding the rhetorical agenda damages survival chances. Here Johnson and Jerry Brown provide opposing cases of a vicious and virtuous spiral around the apparently key areas communication, polling, trust, and legislative effectiveness. Johnson lost across all four, failing to communicate, losing trust and popularity, and losing control of the legislative agenda. Jerry Brown, by contrast, had a positive multiplier gained across all four of the same areas where Johnson lost, and gained exponentially. Such patterns may vary; the two Dutch leaders soldiered on to electoral victory with low trust and poor party polling. Meanwhile Rajoy just about hung on for five **(p.288)** years, relying on good *relations* to see him through despite low trust and poor communication.

Leaders that might otherwise become more vulnerable more quickly sometimes benefit from having chief opponents that are politically weak. From Blair to Thatcher and Rajoy, unpopular prime ministers were able to survive dangerously low poll ratings in the absence of a credible alternative. Merkel’s coalitions effectively negated any strong opponent, while Dutch prime minister Balkenende proved a superior political campaigner than his initially highly popular opposition leader Wouter Bos, and despite lackluster government leadership still managed to win three consecutive elections. Hungarian prime minister Gyurcsány in contrast suffered from an increasingly effective and popular rival in Viktor Orban, who successfully stymied his central policy proposals, blocked the legislature and effectively undid his government.

The empirical chapters also speak to the changing nature of leadership and the new contexts in which leaders govern. First, there is a growing personalization of politics and leaders and a consequent emphasis on communication, poll ratings, and personalized trust. Leaders now need to be better media performers operating in multiple fields or zones, adept at what Saward (2014, p.723) calls “shape shifting representation.” By this he means “a political actor who claims (or is claimed) to represent by shaping (or having shaped) strategically his

persona and policy positions for certain constituencies and audiences” (Saward 2014, p.723). Second, parties and party systems are in flux, from growing intra-party rebellion in the United Kingdom to the rise of disruptive new parties in Spain and the Netherlands to near-collapse in Italy. Whether traditional parties are genuinely declining or morphing into more movement-like networks (with looser membership and less central control) remains to be seen, but whatever the exact nature it is having a profound effect on leadership autonomy (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley 2016). As Webb et al. (2012) point out, this may strengthen leaders’ distance and capabilities when they are strong, but make them more vulnerable at times of disadvantage. Third, we see leaders stretching and developing their own institutions to adapt them and reinforce their power (Bennister 2007; Foley 2000). In our cases this is evidenced by Harper’s reforms, Balkenende and Rutte’s new leadership style, and Merkel’s apparently entrenched preeminence as Chancellor. Whether this represents the arrival of “presidential logic” into political systems or simply incidental spasms is as yet unclear (Webb et al. 2012).

This leaves open a final question: does high capital empower leaders and low capital constrain them? At the most basic level, some leaders had the requisite leadership capital to win repeated elections, three in the case of Thatcher, Blair, and Merkel, or unexpected victories as with Rutte and Balkenende. Gillard and Rajoy, failed this most fundamental of tests and Johnson went from a 1964 landslide to an ignominious decision not to run **(p.289)** again in 1968. Whether leaders “spent” their capital well in policy terms and agenda-setting achievements is much more difficult to access, as it is bound up with the methodologically complex question of what constitutes success in office (see McConnell 2010). Johnson and Thatcher carried out enduring, transformative reforms that left an indelible mark on the countries they governed through changes that passed the ten year longevity test of successful policy implementation (Patashnik and Zelizer 2013). Other government leaders achieved less far reaching structural change, which may or may not prove permanent. There may also be a category of negative or defensive “preservation successes” with Merkel’s holding together of the European Union project or the Italian presidents’ successful effort to prevent the collapse of the political system. Certain leaders in this volume spent capital on very obvious policy failures—Blair on Iraq being perhaps the most notable example. There are also pyrrhic victories, such as Gillard’s hard fought policies that were then rapidly reversed by her successor. There may also be more contextual judgments of performance in politically perilous situations: some leaders weathered crises, like Rutte, but others like Zapatero fell victim to them.

Interpreting Leadership Capital Trajectories

The five ideal types characterizing leadership capital dynamics over time has proven a useful interpretive device (see Table 15.2 for an overview of findings).

(p.290) Establishing the (degree of) fit of a particular leader’s capital

trajectory with the ideal types of rock-solid, fading giant, meteoric, misfit, and comeback leaders provides the analyst with an analytical compass and a narrative script and, for leaders whose are in the job at the time of the analysis, a lever for educated guesses about their political futures (‘t Hart 2014).

Table 15.2. Leadership types in the case studies

Ideal Type	Definition	Example
Rock-solid	Enduringly high, stable capital stocks across a long tenure	Angela Merkel Fredrik Reinfeldt Stephen Harper
The “fading giant” leader	Long-serving and once dominant leader whose leadership capital starts on an inexorable slide	Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher in their final phases
The “meteoric” leader	Comes and goes quickly, experiencing a rapid and steep rise in political capital, but never really managing to consolidate it, only to be swept along by a swift decline and deflation	Gyurcsány Lyndon Johnson
The “misfit” leader	Leadership capital never really “gets off the ground” and who soldiers on without a credible mandate for leadership, until they get cut down	Julia Gillard Paul Martin (capital squandered)
The comeback leader	Through a combination of good skills and good fortune rebuilds leadership capital and manages the improbable: to return from the political grave or bounce back from adversity	Jerry Brown

One close match is Angela Merkel, whose 2005–15 period in office epitomizes the “rock-solid” ideal type of high and highly stable LCI scores. In contrast another female leader in the volume, Julia Gillard, approaches the opposing type of the “misfit” leader (consistently low levels of capital). Comparison suggests that differences, in terms of their actual skill and leadership style were far less stark than their LCI scores suggest. Both were essentially back room operators, dealmakers rather than transformational visionaries. Neither was a natural public orator. The difference between these trajectories, we surmise, therefore can only be explained when taking account of the broader context, both situational and institutional, in which their authority building had taken place.

Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, towards the end of their third terms in office and after a decade each in power, represent fading giants, leading restless parties and unenthusiastic electorates. Their failure appeared tied to controversial and damaging policies (pursued with personalized vigor in the face of opposition) that they would not (or could not) withdraw from, combined with fading popularity and distrust. The hubris tendency had set in as political relations deteriorated.

Gyurcsány is the closest example of a meteoric career, rapidly ascending the ranks of the Hungarian socialist party until apparently effortlessly becoming prime minister. His fall too appeared equally as rapid, with a “cascade” of errors and mistakes, including being publically caught lying and a wholesale reversal of much of his policy platform.

California governor Jerry Brown is a textbook example of the comeback leader, gloriously defying alleged iron laws of linear capital depletion after an interval of decades. Ironically, maybe the latter could only have occurred *because of* the former: having been out of politics for so long, Brown may have been able to run decades later as an again morally clean, yet experienced political operator.

Other cases fit less well, though parts of their capital evolution resemble different ideal types at different stages. Arguably, leaders such as Rutte, Balkenende, and Rajoy, while not rock-solid, represent a kind of lower-level capital stability. Johnson’s collapse, given his own reputation as a powerful persuader and the general two-term tendency for postwar presidents, is at least rapid, if not meteoric. There is scope for more research to be done on how, where, and why these types fit.

(p.291) LCI Futures

Our methodological aims for the LCI were threefold:

1. That it encompasses the major sources of leadership authority as commonly understood, incorporating both individual, relational, and institutional factors.
2. That it contains sufficient flexibility and usability for applications across different political contexts and was not unduly tied to a particular type of political system or office.
3. That it combines theoretical validity with relative parsimony, and relies on relatively easily accessible or obtainable data.

The concept of leadership capital can, as was hoped, do more than simply track the “ups” and “downs” of leadership tenure. It stands as a soft constructivist approach to mapping the arcs of political leaders’ authority. It sits within a suite of approaches that offer “interactionist” and “contextual” accounts of political

leadership (Elgie 2015). Methodologically, our strategy is best described as a series of interpretive case studies (George and Bennett 2005, p.75).

The cases show that the LCI works best as an assessment tool and an interpretive device. As an assessment tool, it facilitates a systematic examination of the strength of a leader's mandate at particular points in time, expressed in numerical terms, and when applied repeatedly allows the analyst to track leadership capital trajectories. As an interpretive device, it offers a three-fold conceptualization in terms of the ten indicators, the three underlying categories (skills, relations, reputation), and the five-fold typology of capital trajectories (from rock-solid to misfit) allowing analysts to construct systematic narratives interpreting the observed authority pattern. It thus helps us understand when and how leaders have gained and lost authority. It enables systematic comparisons across different political office-holders within a polity. So far, the tool has been welcomed as a new interactive approach (Elgie 2015) and has been applied to German chancellors (Helms 2016) and Japanese prime ministers (Burrett 2016).

So how does the LCI work best, now and in future? First, it is primarily a tool for comparative analysis within systems or grouped types: across time, across contexts, across systems, across leaders. Comparisons can also be drawn around exogenous shocks, or particular situations.

Second, LCI analysis is primarily a post-hoc tool. Almost all the leaders in this collection, at the time of writing, had left office. Partly this is simply about data availability and partly the intellectual advantage of knowing how the "leadership story" ends. Can the LCI be used to predict as well as interpret retrospectively? **(p.292)** The outlines of possible trajectories of current and future leaders can certainly be mapped. However, the sheer uncertainty of "events," and the unpredictability of "slight returns" or "bounce-backs," should induce caution about any predictive aspirations. Few would have expected in 1964 that Lyndon Johnson would fall so quickly or in 1980 that Margaret Thatcher would govern for a decade. California's Jerry Brown stands here as the exemplar par excellence of how unexpected and unpredictable the shape of political careers can be.

Third, a further consideration is not just the make-up of the LCI measures, but the possibility of their weighting, as Blondel makes clear in Chapter 13. The ten measures of the current LCI were left equally balanced for methodological reasons. There was an initial reluctance to include any weighting in the LCI, as it proved too challenging to justify which components were to be weighted and to what degree. Now, the challenge is on to design, justify, and apply weighted versions of the index.

Fourth, the mix of “hard” and “soft” components in the LCI will continue to raise problems of measurement precision. While certain hard measures (largely based on polling and perceptions) can be pinpointed exactly, the softer ones, short of an obvious focusing event (like a speech or a crisis) often cannot. Increasing the robustness of the latter, such as with the expert analysis for the Italian and Hungarian cases, without making their application overly labor-intensive is an important test for future LCI analysts.

Fifth, does it matter where a leader’s capital stems from? Jentges in Chapter 14 offers some conceptual groundwork for considering this question, taking us back to Pierre Bourdieu’s political capital and field theory. More needs to be understood as to how capital is built and how it can be “carried” into office by active and connected elites within the political field (Davis and Seymour 2010). Many of the leaders discussed in this volume had previous political positions in legislatures as ministers or deputies. Some leaders come to office with reputations derived from success outside the world of politics, particularly in (show) business. Others possess “brand recognition” through family name and association. A smaller, rarer group of leaders carry considerable “moral capital” from actions taken before announcing their candidacy for office (Kane 2001). How do these various root sources of capital influence their political mandates? There is also the question of whether the means and timing of the ascent itself may shape the amounts of leadership capital. The cases studied here stretch from steady rises through party ranks to meteoric electoral success, to party room coups, to the entrepreneurial founding of new and personalized political parties—which route to the top helps or hinders a leader? Systematic tracking of leadership capital in the pre-political and early political lives of future political leaders can help us address this question.

Finally, perhaps the greatest challenge for the LCI is whether and how to move its conceptualization and application from Western-style democratic **(p.293)** systems to other types of polities, as Blondel recommends. Blondel asks how far it can stretch into other political cultures and beyond the (blurry) edges of democratic systems. There are such pivotal differences in the norms and rules of the political game that fine-tuning the LCI toolkit is inevitable. Beyond the democratic world, political leaders rise, thrive, and fall in an array of semi-democratic, semi-authoritarian, and authoritarian systems—can a modified form of LCI-style assessment help us understand the shape, sources, and variability of their political fortunes (see Brooker 2013)?

There are a host of challenges in applying the LCI in these new settings: aside from simply gathering the data, elections have questionable validity, while polling on trust or popularity is more likely to reflect outward conformity or outright manipulation than real views. More fundamentally, Blondel argues, leaders in such systems may be immune to “normal” patterns of capital “loss” and can manipulate the very rules and institutions that provide it. Their power to

weaken, at the very least, rival groups, politicians, and critical media is also far greater. Perhaps the LCI could first be applied in systems closest to democratic stability, to test the waters.

In conclusion, though it is far from perfect and much work remains to be done to improve its robustness and versatility, the LCI framework holds considerable promise. It invites its users to track the ebb and flow of leaders' mandates, and to explore how skills, relations, and reputations interact to create and diminish those mandates. Most importantly perhaps, it allows students of political leadership to think about the difference between political office-holding and exercising political leadership, and between leaders who make the political weather and those who are swept along by it.

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