Evaluating British Prime Ministerial Performance: David Cameron in Political Time

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“I am the heir to Blair”

David Cameron to newspaper executives, October 2005
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<th>Resilient regime</th>
<th>Affiliated leader</th>
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David Cameron in Political Time

Opponent or affiliate? Affiliate

Regime vulnerability
or resilience? + Vulnerability

= Disjunctive prime minister
Disjunctive Leadership

Skowronek’s account

- “the very definition of the impossible leadership situation” (1993, p.93)

- Few warrants for authority:
  - reify technique
  - privileged insight into national problems
  - personal dedication
Characteristics of the Disjunctive Premiership

- Claim to personal expertise and competence
- Candid assessment of national challenges (lower expectations)
- Claim to national leadership
Characteristics of the Disjunctive Premiership

- Wait out events, hope to buy time
- Policy u-turns, ‘inter-paradigm borrowing’
- Intra-party dissent
- Populist, maverick challengers
- Increasing support for minor parties
“Experience is the excuse of the incumbent over the ages... In 1979, James Callaghan had been Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor before he became Prime Minister. He had plenty of experience. But thank God we changed him for Margaret Thatcher”

David Cameron, 2008
Evaluating Cameron’s Disjunctive Premierships

Cameron’s claim to governing authority

- Determination to take tough decisions, guided by values
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Cameron’s claim to governing authority

- Determination to take tough decisions, guided by values
- “the worst inheritance of any incoming government for at least sixty years”
- National rather than sectional or partisan leadership
Evaluating Cameron’s Disjunctive Premiership

Cameron’s management of a vulnerable regime

- Unforced errors, policy failures and u-turns
- Labour Opposition stance
- ‘Essay crisis’ leadership = buying time
- Circumscribed authority within his party
- Johnson and Farage as populist alternatives
Evaluating Cameron’s Disjunctive Premiership

Regime vulnerability after five years in office

- ‘Debt crisis’ exaggerated but economic stabilisation
- Stabilisation of media and policing
- SNP ascendancy - instability in territorial politics
- Europe - now a hostage to renegotiation and the public
Conclusions

- Heath, Wilson and Callaghan are more appropriate bases for evaluation than Blair or Thatcher
- A relatively successful disjunctive prime minister
- Can Cameron escape disjunctive politics after the 2015 election?