

Ideology, Leadership and the Conservative Party

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Abstract

What do conservatives look for when selecting a new leader of the Conservative Party? Why do some candidates succeed whilst others fail to secure the leadership? What ideological consistencies are there between winners? To address these questions this paper will present a series of hypotheses drawn from the academic literature on leadership selection and apply it to a series of case-study examples. Specifically, Edward Heath, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, David Cameron, and Boris Johnson. These have been selected because of their prominence as Prime Ministers who led not only the party but also the country. The paper will analyse their ideological positions on a range of issues such as European integration, economic policy, and social policy.

By doing so it becomes possible to draw out a series of meaningful conclusions over which leadership characteristics are appealing to Conservative members and the electorate. To ensure the paper is methodologically and intellectually robust it will employ the Greenstein method of evaluating leadership techniques and ideological positions vis-à-vis effective communication, organisational capacity, political skills, vision, cognitive style, emotional intelligence. This ensures the research approach has been exposed to significant intellectual rigour thereby representing a useful typology of evaluating leadership.

Author information

Dr Timothy Heppell is Associate Professor of British politics at the University of Leeds. He has established himself as a leading authority on British political leadership, having published in a wide range of international journals. He is also the author and editor of over a dozen volumes on the subject of political leadership.

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