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Robert Elgie

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To Etain, my family and my friends

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Preface

This textbook aims to provide an introduction to the study of political leadership in liberal democracies. It is part of a series which is designed primarily to be of interest to a student audience both undergraduates and postgraduates. However, it is also hoped that it will be of interest to both the informed general reader and to academics with an interest in some of the issues which surround the study of political leadership. In sum, the intention is to present essential information in a clear, readable and methodical way, while at the same time stimulating further interest in both the study of political leadership in general and the role of political leaders in contemporary politics in particular.

This book provides an introduction to political leadership by analysing the role played by Presidents and Prime Ministers in six liberal democracies – Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Japan and Italy. It focuses on the leadership of the executive. In part, this focus was chosen because it is salient to many of the degree courses that are taken by undergraduate and postgraduate students in English-speaking countries. For good or bad, students have to study the political systems of the above countries and wish to understand why they operate in the way that they do. Less mundanely, this focus has also been chosen because it responds to a widely-perceived gap in the existing academic literature. Perhaps surprisingly, with the exception of the US presidency, there are very few studies of Presidents and Prime Ministers in these countries. For both reasons, it is hoped that this book will serve as a reference for all those people who are interested in learning about the role played by the leaders of these six countries in the context of their respective political systems.

Although this book focuses on Presidents and Prime Ministers, it is not primarily concerned with the role of individuals in the political process. It does not consist of case studies of, for example, Roosevelt, Churchill, de Gaulle, Adenauer, or Thatcher. Reference will be made to all these leaders during the course of the book, but it is not designed as a study of selected personalities, their individual motivations, or the impact they might have had on particular societies. Neither is it

the purpose of the book to identify the essential characteristics of different types of leaders. Instead, this book is more concerned with the relationship between leaders and their institutional settings. It examines each country's leadership environment from an institutional perspective so as to determine the dominant leadership pattern that has been present since 1945. By focusing on leadership since this time, it is not concerned with whether or not there is currently a crisis of leadership in contemporary political systems. By taking an institutional perspective, it will not make rational choice assumptions about leader/follower utility maximisation, nor will it adopt explicitly behavioural assumptions about leaders responding to and transforming the wants and needs of group members. Instead, by concentrating on leadership patterns, it attempts to identify whether or not leadership responsibilities have generally been concentrated in one institution, divided between several institutions, or absent altogether.

Political leadership is a huge and amorphous subject. Any book can deal with only a fraction of the issues which might be included under the heading of 'leadership studies'. Nevertheless, this book tries to provide a positive contribution to certain aspects of such studies. In the first chapter, it sets out a framework with which to study the leadership role of Presidents and Prime Ministers in liberal democracies. In the next six chapters, it examines this role in Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Japan and Italy since 1945. In the final chapter, it reflects on the institutional approach to politics and what this study of political leadership can tell us about the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach. In these ways, it is hoped that it will both inform and make a modest contribution to an ever-expanding field of study.

ROBERT ELGIE

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By way of these thanks, I hope to have repaid at least some of the debts that I have accrued over the last couple of years. It simply remains to say that the usual caveat applies; all responsibility for the final content of the book is entirely my own.

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