

Charismatic

1. **Charisma/charismatic** do not feature in RW's *Keywords* (1976) nor the Blackwell/OU *New Keywords* (2005). Interesting that in 2016 one of Jeremy Corbyn's main failings, according to his PLP critics and the mainstream media (MSM), is his lack of 'charisma'?
2. Going round, those who wish, comment on why **charismatic** is now a word of some importance in political debate (bearing in mind any of the points below, or others maybe not mentioned ...).
3. What does **charisma** mean? OED: 'The word came into English mid 17th century via ecclesiastical Latin from the Greek *Kaharisma*: 'Compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others'.
4. Discuss contemporary use of linked words and phrases: **spin** and **spin-doctors** (seeking to impress and influence)? '**Celebrity**' (C17 referred to a solemn process of ritual celebration whose legitimacy was relatively unquestioned, it now refers to the popular representation of a cultural figure whose fame is definitive but of questionable legitimacy - "they are famous for being famous" from *New Keywords*. Celebrities now have considerable influence especially with the young?
5. Reviewing the history of individual politicians, from, say, Joan of Arc & Cromwell, through to Gladstone and Disraeli, are the words **charismatic** and **celebrity** relevant to them? Did they have and use the equivalent of 'spin-doctors'?
6. Take Churchill (hugely charismatic?) and Attlee as examples. Compare and contrast, as Prime Ministers. Both earlier in their careers were not widely regarded as 'electable'? Churchill now comes top by a large margin in all attitude-surveys when pollsters ask: 'Who is the best British Political Leader?' Churchill made big mistakes, apologised for them, changed his mind on a number of big issues and, indeed, changed Parties twice. Are those points relevant to the poll rating above?
7. Consider connections with changes in technology and media of communications. The relationship between these changes and political leaders: Where would Hitler have been without a microphone? **Rhetoric, Oratory** and public speaking, including Parliamentary performances were crucial for Disraeli, Gladstone (who spoke on several occasions in the HoC for well over 2 hours, without stopping...), and Churchill, who also used radio brilliantly? Attlee was not an orator or a 'performer' in the same way, but his 1945 Government was exceptionally important and influential and he surrounded himself with powerful leaders?
8. **Leadership** and 'charisma' changing radically in recent times: popular suspicion and cynicism about 'spin' and 'celebrity' and 'the Westminster village elite'? At the same time, the 'new social media', requires different kinds of skill and communication techniques.
9. Back to Corbyn: his deliberate rejection of 'charisma'; 'rhetoric' and 'oratory' is actually appealing to many young people - 'refreshing and honest'? Corbyn's use of facebook and e-mails - direct, uncluttered, plain speaking...?
10. Consider most of the above in relation to these comments on **celebrity** in *New Keywords*: 'The new pervasiveness of celebrity has raised questions about its cultural function. Among the provocations to such questions was the international public reaction to the death of Diana, princess of Wales, in 1997. Some saw this... as evidence that the public could be manipulated by the media to exhibit quite irrational behaviour. Others argued that we can indeed develop relationships with people we know only through the media, in ways that are similar to our relationships with 'real' friends and acquaintances. **Celebrity** remains a highly ambiguous concept and its operation is often treated with great scepticism. Individual celebrities may overcome this by convincing their public of their authenticity, but the concept itself is seen by many as representing *the triumph of the image over substance, and of the representation over the real*. (Our emphasis).