Tony Blair has dominated British political life for more than a decade. Like Margaret Thatcher before him, he has changed the terms of political debate and provoked as much condemnation as admiration. At the end of his era in power, this book presents a wide-ranging overview of the achievements and failures of the Blair governments. Bringing together Britain's most eminent academics and commentators on British politics and society, it examines the effect of the Prime Minister and his administration on the machinery of government, economic and social policy and foreign relations. Combining serious scholarship with clarity and accessibility, this book represents the authoritative verdict on the impact of the Blair years on British politics and society.

Anthony Seldon is Master of Wellington College and the co-founder of the Institute of Contemporary British History. He is a prominent commentator on British political leadership and the leading author on Tony Blair, having written or edited five books on him including The Blair Effect 2001–5 (with Dennis Kavanagh, Cambridge, 2005).
BLAIR’S BRITAIN,
1997–2007

EDITED BY
ANTHONY SELDON
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to
Dennis Kavanagh for twenty years’
partnership, inspiration and friendship
## CONTENTS

**List of contributors**  
**Preface**  

### PART I Politics and government

1. The Blair premiership  
   **DENNIS KAVANAGH**  
   3  

2. Parliament  
   **PHILIP COWLEY**  
   16  

3. Elections and public opinion  
   **JOHN CURTICE**  
   35  

4. Local government  
   **TONY TRAVERS**  
   54  

5. Central government  
   **PAUL FAWCETT AND R. A. W. RHODES**  
   79  

6. The Constitution  
   **PHILIP NORTON**  
   104  

7. Media management  
   **RAYMOND KUHN**  
   123  

8. Tony Blair as Labour Party leader  
   **RICHARD HEFFERNAN**  
   143  

9. Social democracy  
   **VERNON BOGDANOR**  
   164
## Contents

### Part II Economics and finance

10 The Treasury and economic policy  
   **Peter Sinclair**  
   p. 185

11 New Labour, new capitalism  
   **Robert Taylor**  
   p. 214

12 Transport  
   **Stephen Glaister**  
   p. 241

13 Industrial policy  
   **Nicholas Crafts**  
   p. 273

### Part III Policy studies

14 Law and the judiciary  
   **Michael Beloff**  
   p. 291

15 Crime and penal policy  
   **Tim Newburn and Robert Reiner**  
   p. 318

16 Immigration  
   **Sarah Spencer**  
   p. 341

17 Schools  
   **Alan Smithers**  
   p. 361

18 The health and welfare legacy  
   **Nick Bosanquet**  
   p. 385

19 Equality and social justice  
   **Kitty Stewart**  
   p. 408

20 Culture and attitudes  
   **Ben Page**  
   p. 436

21 Higher education  
   **John O’Leary**  
   p. 468

### Part IV Wider relations

22 The national question  
   **Iain McLean**  
   p. 487
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Ireland: the Peace Process</td>
<td>509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Frank Millar</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Iain Bache and Neill Nugent</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Richard Manning</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Kunal Khatri</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Foreign policy</td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Michael Clarke</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Lawrence Freedman</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Timothy Garton Ash</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Philip Stephens</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion: The net Blair effect, 1994–2007</td>
<td>645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Anthony Seldon</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Bibliography</strong></td>
<td>651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Index</strong></td>
<td>666</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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This is the fifth volume in the series which analyses the impact of British contemporary government. The earlier volumes, often co-edited with Dennis Kavanagh, *The Thatcher Effect*, *The Major Effect*, *The Blair Effect 1997–2001* and *The Blair Effect 2001–05*, were published in 1989, 1994, 2001 and 2005, respectively. The focus of enquiry has remained always the same. What difference does a prime minister make across the waterfront of policy and government? The books were inspired by the Institute (now Centre) of Contemporary British History, founded in 1986.

The formula in all five volumes has not changed. Leading authorities from academe and the commentariat were asked to address common themes in their own specialist area:

- What was the state of your area when Labour took office in May 1997?
- What was the state of the area in June 2007, when Tony Blair left office?
- What changed and why?
- How successful or effective have the changes been?
- Where relevant, why was more not achieved?
- To what extent was change driven by the Prime Minister himself, by No. 10 in general, by Gordon Brown, by other ministers, departments, think-tanks, or by any other factors?
- What has been the net ‘Blair effect’ in your area between 1994/7 and 2007?
- To what extent did policy mark a departure from traditional Labour (and Thatcher/Major) policy?
- Finally, how enduring might those changes prove?

Authors were presented with these questions and asked to address them, while also being encouraged to develop distinctive approaches of their own. With such a diverse team of individuals, it is unsurprising that some interpreted their brief more loosely, while others saw the questions almost as a series of short essay titles to be addressed sequentially. The timeframe was the bookends of Blair’s government, since his election in
May 1997 until his departure in June 2007, while also taking heed of what he had done as party leader from July 1994 onwards. Several new chapter subjects were added to this volume, including development (covering international poverty and Africa) and climate change, neither of which featured prominently for Blair in his first two terms. Two authors, Tim Garton Ash and Philip Stephens, offer short commentaries at the end of the book, and I write a brief concluding essay looking at Blair’s personal achievement and why it came so late in his premiership.

Books in this series aim to be scrupulously non-party political. Where individual authors have particular political persuasions, I sought to balance them by others with alternative outlooks. It is hard to achieve a clear perspective on governments on the cusp of their ending. The challenge is heightened, but made much more rewarding, if they were unpopular and controversial, as was the case with the Blair government, above all for taking Britain into a highly unpopular and contentious war. The task was all the more fascinating, and necessary, when the principal political resistance came not from the opposition parties, but from the Prime Minister’s own party.

This book aims to achieve a balanced perspective not only on the man but also his government. As such, the hope is that it will not only be interesting in 2007 and 2008, but also in 2017 and 2032, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Blair’s departure. Experience shows that judgements of contemporary history can be of enduring value, not only for describing how a government looked at the time, but also long after. All history is contemporary history, because every new generation judges the past afresh.

Finally, I would like to thank the authors for being so punctilious and pleasant to work with, to Julia Harris for being such an outstanding editor’s assistant, for John Haslam, Liz Davey and the team at Cambridge University Press for making the book’s production a pleasure, to my Blair biography team, Peter Snowdon, Daniel Collings, Rob McNamara, and Susanna Sharpe for excellent back-up and particularly to Kunal Khatri for bringing the book together in the final stages, to Tom Lowe for final checking, to Dennis Kavanagh to whom I dedicate this book, and finally to my colleagues and governors at Wellington College for being so understanding and stimulating throughout.