

## Explaining Political Judgement

What is political judgement? Why do politicians exhibit such contrasting thought styles in making decisions, even when they agree ideologically? What happens when governments with contrasting thought styles have to deal with each other? In this book Perri 6 presents a fresh, rigorous, explanatory theory of judgement, its varieties and its consequences, drawing upon Durkheim and Douglas. He argues that policymakers will understand – and misunderstand – their problems and choices in ways that reproduce their own social organisation. This theory is developed by using the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 as an extended case study, examining the decision-making of the Kennedy, Castro and Khrushchev régimes. Explaining political judgement is the first comprehensive study to show what a neo-Durkheimian institutional approach can offer to political science and to the social sciences generally.

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## Epigraph

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### I

Everybody complains of his memory, but nobody of his judgement.  
 La Rochefoucauld (1958 [1665], 48)

The great danger and risk in all of this is a miscalculation – a mistake in judgment.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, President of the United States, 1960–63,  
 Tuesday, 23 October 1962, in conversation with Robert Kennedy,  
 Attorney-General; Kenneth O'Donnell, special adviser; and Theodore  
 Sorensen, special counsel, as reported in Kennedy (1968, 65).

You will never know how much bad advice I had.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy on the Cuban missile crisis, private  
 conversation with John Kenneth Galbraith.<sup>1</sup>

### II

[E]vents and results, especially in war, depend for the most part on fortune,  
 which will not conform or subject itself to our reason or foresight . . . our  
 opinions and deliberations depend on fortune just as much, and that she  
 involves our reason too in her uncertainties and confusion.

Montaigne, 'On the uncertainty of our judgement' (1958 [1580], 129–130).

We are trying to get ourselves out of this *aventyura* [reckless gamble]  
 and now you are pulling us into another one!

Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, Chairman of the Praesidium and First  
 Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR, to Vasili Kuznetzov, First  
 Deputy Foreign Minister, 22 October 1962 (Zubok and Pleshakov,  
 1996, 260–261)

### III

If [the imperialists] actually carry out the brutal act of invading Cuba in  
 violation of international law and morality, that would be the moment to  
 eliminate such danger forever through an act of clear legitimate defence,  
 however harsh and terrible the solution would be, for there is no other.

Fidel Castro, Prime Minister of Cuba, to Nikita Sergeevich  
 Khrushchev, 26 October 1962 (Blight *et al.*, 2002, 509–510)