

# THE SECRET OF POLITICAL LEADERS' PERSONAL APPEAL: (HOW) DO PERSONALITY TRAITS MATTER?<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

The personalization of politics is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that impinges on numerous sectors of democratic life (Poguntke & Webb, 2007; Wattenberg, 1991; Hermans & Vergeer, 2013; Langer, 2007, 2009; Meyer, 2002; Aelst, Sheafer & Stanyer, 2012; Corner & Pels, 2003; Jebir et al, 2013; Stanyer, 2012) including electoral behaviour, and popular predispositions towards politicians (Bean & Mughan, 1989; Kaase, 1994; Keeter, 1987; McAllister, 1996; King, 2002; Bittner, 2011). In personalized politics, party leaders or individual candidates are seen to overshadow ideological affiliations and institutional agencies, and the line between the public and the private becomes blurred (Karvonen, 2010; Garzia, 2011). In the twilight of a mass democracy, the private and the personal are said to bridge the growing gap between the realm of politics and a present-day citizenry (Corner, Pels, 2003).

The secret of *personal appeal* in political competition, including electoral campaigns, is yet to be revealed. Scholarly attempts to explain the popular appeal of individual political figures range from the refinement of the classic Weberian notion of charismatic authority and leadership (House et al, 1991; Bligh et al, 2004; Andina-Diaz, 2006), to an exploration of the role of a candidate's appearance and visual imagery (Shaw, 1999; Little et al, 2007; Lawson, 2010; Brusattin, 2012), communication – style or emotional expression (Kaid, Johnston, 2001; Bystrom et al, 2004; Glaser, Salovey, 1998; Stroud et al, 2005), and to the study of psychological constellations of partisans (Caprara, Zimbardo, 2004). Image-making and political branding also dominate this area of research (Newman, 1999; Grabe, Bucy, 2009; Spiller, Bergner, 2011; Archetti, 2013). Which characteristics in candidate's personality are the key to success?

In contrast to the aforementioned scholarly attempts, this paper focuses on a *politician's personality* as an important determinant of popularity. The paper aims to examine the impact of voters' assessment of political leaders' personality traits on their popular appeal. Do the perceived personality traits of leading politicians explain their popular appeal in the electoral campaign? If so, which aspects of personality matter to the citizenry and how?

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In order to answer these questions, the subsequent tasks are carried out in the following order. Firstly, theoretical considerations regarding the study's dependent variable, *personal appeal*, and independent variable, *personality traits and dimensions*, are developed and research questions are posed. Secondly, readers are introduced to Lithuanian data from 2012 on popular sentiments and political leaders' personality traits, as well as to the research methodology (including controlled variables). Thirdly, three theoretical models are built and run, followed by a discussion on regression results and the impact of the personal "portraits" of well-known political leaders on their popularity among the Lithuanian constituency in the wake of the 2012 general elections.

#### LEADER'S PERSONAL APPEAL IN "THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER"

Curiously enough, in political science debates, the notion of *appeal* is often attributed to the realm of electoral campaigning and the strategic communication of political elites (Roddy, Garramone, 1988; Toka, 1988; Brader, 2005; Dinas, 2008; McIlwain, Caliendo, 2011; Jones et al, 2013). Politicians issue appeals to win over their electorates. This is generally perceived as a *candidate-driven* phenomenon, a matter of calculating tactics to attract votes or policy-support. An "appeal," according to Merriam-Webster Thesaurus, refers to the power of irresistible attraction, magnetism, captivation, and enchantment (Merriam-Webster, 2014). With this word's denotation of 'influence,' it is no surprise that past studies even conflated a candidate's appeal with its effects on voters, that is with, electoral success (Winter, 1987).

However, such a reading of voters' passive, merely 'affected' agency, erroneously lumps the act of 'issuing an appeal' with the state of 'being liked by someone,' an entirely different meaning of the same word. Even though an *attempt to attract voters* is not the same as *being attractive to them* indeed, voters' sentiments have not received enough scholarly attention. Even the 'Feeling Thermometer,' a popular survey tool used by researchers to grasp politicians' personal appeal (Nelson, 2008), lacks the autonomous analytical categories and concepts to define and explain these feelings. In the tradition of political science, voters' predispositions to individual politicians or party leaders have customarily been treated as derivatives of the "non-personal" realm such as partisanship, ideology, or social class.

Shamir (1994) notes that progress in personalisation research has historically been impeded by the erroneous and widespread view that personality-focused voting was simply 'irrational' and, therefore, ineligible for deeper examination (see Converse, 1964). Due to similar reasoning, charismatic leadership, for a long time, was also mistakenly denounced as a "non-rational oddity of the past" (Pappas, 2006), alien both to the spirit and study of modern democracy. Ongoing discussions about electoral choice trends in new democracies suffering from high electoral volatility and low party identification still emphasize the unreasoned spontaneity of uninformed voters and mourn their capitulation to a populist mantrap of charismatic leaders (Innes, 2001; Donskis, 2004; Bielinis, 2002; Laucius, 2012).

This paper aims to address the *personal appeal* of party-leaders, bypassing the outmoded discourse of irrationality as well as the notion of a purely 'emotional voter' (Isbell, Ottati, 2002; see also Marcus, MacKuen, 1993; Ladd, Lenz, 2008). Predispositions of voters are not

treated as a direct derivative of the strategic appeals of political candidates. The paper rests on the premise that “the image of a candidate is essentially “in the eyes of the beholder” and thus voter-driven rather than candidate-driven (Hacker, 2004). Incidentally, it may well coincide with the projected image, but what really matters is the way in which it is perceived by voters (Garzia, 2011, p. 700). Therefore the paper pays special attention to political leadership images, *projected by voters*. Voters’ predispositions towards political personas on the individual level are linked to their cognitive judgement – assessment of politicians’ personality across its different dimensions and traits.

#### ASSESSMENT OF A LEADER’S PERSONALITY: COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

In the analysis, a voter’s assessment of a political leader’s *personality traits* is examined as a predictor of the voter’s affective reaction, whether they like or dislike the politician. Over time, the issue of personality in political leadership research evolved into questions about which features of a leader’s character are most important and most attractive to voters, and about which personality traits best allow a candidate to connect with their electorate. On the one hand, integrity, reliability, intelligence, leadership ability, and empathy seem to be repeated among the most valued and desired traits across studies of candidate personality judgement (Funk, 1996; see Miller et al, 1986; Miller, Shanks, 1996, Hayes, 2005). On the other hand, there are lots of other relevant traits, and “therefore, by no means has the literature developed a consensus” (Hacker, 2004, p. 52) on the issue. Moreover, another setback here is the fact that “candidate characteristics are often treated as a lump sum that can be pulled apart but ultimately sum together in models of candidate evaluation” (Funk, 1999, p. 700).

To address the aforementioned problems, this study is based on the comprehensive approach to *personality* offered by the Big Five, a five-dimensional personality model. The Big Five approach is extensively covered in literature (for a general review and relevance for political sciences, see John & Srivastava, 1999 and Gerber, 2011) and a broader discussion of the model would go far beyond the limits of this paper. However, it should be noted that this particular theoretical approach was chosen due to the fact that the Big Five are seen as broad domains of personality, collectively representing a hierarchy that organizes and summarizes the vast majority of subsidiary traits” (Mondak, 2010, p. 25). This approach is promising in the context of previous research on public perceptions of political leader’s personalities that suffers from fragmented and inconsistent views on personality, and from arbitral sets of personality traits in empirical studies (for the summary, see Zamora, 2010). It is important that the five-factor model, as “a taxonomy would permit researchers to study specified domains of personality characteristics, rather than examining separately the thousands of particular attributes” and offer “standard vocabulary” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 102). Moreover, the Big Five has a strong empirical orientation and, therefore, provides the conceptualization of methodological tools for an empirical examination of personality. Last but not least, this approach has already received attention in political psychology (Caprara et al, 1999; Caprara et al, 2002).

In the Big Five theory, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience are five major dimensions of human personality (John et al.,

2008). Bunevicius notes that “each of five dimensions is a bipolar factor (e.g., extraversion – introversion) that reflects human personality on the most abstract level. Each bipolar factor covers more specific aspects of personality (e.g., sociability) which encompass a multitude of peculiar personality traits (e.g., talkative, outgoing)” (Bunevicius et al., 2008). *Extraversion* refers not only to gregariousness but also to assertiveness, high activity levels, enthusiasm and warmth, and an opposite pole of the dimension (*introversion*) respectively refers to gloominess, restrain, low activity levels and emotional coldness of an individual. *Agreeableness* encompasses such personality facets as sincerity, altruism, tender-mindedness and compliance, in contrast to hypocrisy, egoism, cold-heartedness, and nonconformity at the opposite pole of this dimension. Facets of self-discipline, dutifulness, good organization and diligence belong to the *conscientiousness* dimension; irresponsibility, bad organization, idleness and the lack of self-discipline indicate the lack of conscientiousness. *Emotional stability* precludes anxiety, impulsiveness, diffidence and discontent, in contrast to neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999; Mondak, 2010; Zukauskienė & Barkauskienė, 2006). The structure of the fifth personality dimension – openness to experience – is more complicated and debatable (McCrae, 1997; Dollinger et al., 1996), however, it covers sensitivity to aesthetic experience, spirituality, creativity and propensity to embrace novelty. In contrast, a personality with low levels of openness to experience is imperceptive, unreflective, unimaginative, unrefined and “earthy” (Goldberg, 1992).

The presented study draws heavily on the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the Big Five. However, it includes an extra element, not elaborated on in the Big Five approach. That is personal *charisma*, the fundamental component of political leadership (Pancer, 1999). Existing research argues that, “leaders’ perceived charisma added significantly to the prediction of voting preferences, especially under conditions of personal elections” (Shamir, 1994, p. 265). Present scholarly debates feature a growing consent that charisma refers not to a particular *trait* of personality but rather to the leader-follower *relationship* (Shamir et al, 1993; Howel & Shamir, 2005). However, at the same time, a lack of effort to integrate theorizing on the Big Five and charismatic leadership is acknowledged (De Hoogh et al, 2005). The analysis offers primary insights into the relationship between assessed leaders’ appeal, Big Five traits, and charm.

Given the interest in personality characteristics as the key to political leaders’ public acceptance and popularity, the paper aims to answer three questions (Q) in the following order:

Q1: *Can an assessment of a political leader’s personality explain voter’s affinity for the leader?*

Q2: *Do personality dimensions differ in terms of their impact on a political leader’s appeal?*

Q3: *(How) Does personal charm matter to the appeal of a politician?*

The suggestion is that personality does matter. One might suggest that two of the Big Five personality dimensions, *conscientiousness* and *agreeableness*, are uncontested predictors of a leader’s popular appeal because these dimensions relate to traits emphasized in previous research such as integrity, honesty, morality, competence (intelligence), empathy and reliability.

However, there is also evidence that individual perceptions of leaders' *conscientiousness* and *agreeableness* are strong correlates of voters' value orientations, and thus might have little independent explanatory power. In contrast, judgements of leaders' *extraversion* or *emotional stability* are not affected by normative predispositions (Kavaliauskaite, 2013). This controversy and the lack of knowledge on the interplay between personality traits and charismatic effects in Big Five literature precludes further hypothesis statements and urges proceeding with an exploratory analysis. At the same time, it allows for the evaluation of the moderating effects of a series of controlled factors, which are potentially vital to a politician's appeal (see the "Data and Methodology" section).

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

### *Data*

This study utilizes data from an internet survey, conducted in Lithuania from August 30 until September 14, 2012, just before the 2012 Lithuanian general elections. The survey, administrated by Berent, is representative of internet users in Lithuania.<sup>2</sup> According to official state statistics (Spring 2013), the share of internet users amounts to 70 per cent of the total country population; internet usage reaches 90-100 per cent in the 15 to 39-year-olds age group and amounts to 57 per cent and 27 per cent among the 50 to 59-year-olds and 60 to 74-year-olds respectively (TNS, 2013).<sup>3</sup>

### *Selected Political Leaders*

Participants of the survey were asked about five well-known Lithuanian political leaders. Two of these politicians, Algirdas Butkevicius of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party and Andrius Kubilius of the Homeland Union Lithuanian Christian Democrats, chair Lithuania's largest and oldest parliamentary parties. At the moment, Viktor Uspaskich of the Labour Party, and the Order and Justice party's Rolandas Paksas are both members of the European Parliament, founders and ex-chairmen of their parties, and sustain influence in these political bodies. Arturas Zuokas, a former leader of the Liberal and Centre Union and founder of "YES," a newcomer in 2012, is also included in the analysis due to his charismatic popularity<sup>4</sup> and personal approach to political leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> The Berent panel did not allow self-enrolment; the panel included at least 20,000 inhabitants of Lithuania. A representative sample of 1,564 individuals from the panel, born between 1939 and 1994, completed a self-administrated online questionnaire. For more information about Berent, an international market research company, visit <http://www.berent.com/html/index.php>.

<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, the probability of a slight age bias in the Internet survey sample is a limitation of the study. On the other hand, in this way we target age groups most susceptible to personalisation of politics. If the impact of leader personality is low among younger citizens, effects on the oldest generation are even less likely.

<sup>4</sup> Probably the most popular mayor of Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, over a couple of decades, Arturas Zuokas also ran for the Presidency of the Republic of Lithuania in 2014.

### *Dependent and Independent Variables*

*Dependent variable (political leaders' appeal).* Participants of the survey were asked to separately rate each of five political leaders, using a common 11 point "Feeling Thermometer"<sup>5</sup> scale, in which "-5" denoted "like [the politician] very much" and "5" – "dislike very much"; an "I do not know" answer option was also available (for the summary of results, see Appendix, Table 1).

*Independent variables (political leaders' personality traits).* The participants were then asked to assess each of five selected political leaders on a number of personality traits, indicated in the questionnaire. The construction of the inventory to measure a leader's personality (Table 1) has been presented in detail in another paper (Kavaliauskaite, 2013). It can be shortly said that the inventory of traits is based on the logic of abbreviated Big Five measurement models (e.g. Goldberg, 1992; Gosling, 2003, Saucier, 1994), and consists of a set of semantic differentials (Kaid, 2004). The semantic differentials denote particular traits distinctive to each personality dimension of the Big Five, for example, "active-passive" for *extraversion*, "sincere-false" for *agreeableness*, "organized-chaotic" for *conscientiousness* (see Appendix, Table 2). In the inventory and on the questionnaire, none of the personality traits is presented as 'good' or 'bad', even though most differentials express a 'positive' trait, such as "character strength" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), on one extreme, and a 'negative' trait, or a weakness, on the other extreme. This dichotomy expressed on the 7 point ('3-2-1-0-1-2-3') scale comes from the five-factor approach and allows the semantic differentials to be treated as quantitative variables in further analysis. The examination of charisma is limited to analysing assessments of a leader's personal *charm* as indicated by emotional proximity, emotional and intellectual stimulation, the leader's ability to inspire and the leader's ability to be perceived as an innovator (see Wasielewski, 1985; House & Howel, 1992).

On the basis of the set of semantic differentials, scales of five personality dimensions and personal charm were constructed (see Appendix, Table 2). The general internal consistency of scales, as measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , is good, but varies depending on the politician and personality dimension under consideration: *extraversion* (4 items), from 0,737 to 0,896; *agreeableness* (4 items), from 0,892 to 0,912; *conscientiousness* (4 items), from 0,810 to 0,919; *openness to experience* (2 items), from 0,844 to 0,873; *emotional stability* (2 items), from 0,613 to 0,745; and *charm* (3 items), from 0,839 to 0,905.

### *Controlled variables: What else Matters in Voter's Predispositions?*

Even in new democracies, research on the personalisation of politics and popularity of party leaders cannot ignore classic predictors of electoral behaviour. Up to this day, electoral outcomes are often explained and predicted without addressing voters' assessment of the personality characteristics of political elites. In order to reveal the independent explanatory power of popular judgements of leaders' personalities, we included a series of controlled variables in the forthcoming analysis. What are they?

<sup>5</sup> Question in the questionnaire: "Please, tell how do you like each leader of the following parties?" The leader of party [x], [leader's name, surname].

*First of all*, studies of electoral behaviour traditionally address *social cleavages* (as well as cleavage-related socio-demographic characteristics of electorates) and voters' party affiliations along their ideological orientations and political values (Bolski, 1993; Morkevicius, 2009; Ramonaite, 2009). In the Lithuanian political realm, a voter's *attitude towards the Soviet past*<sup>6</sup> reflects the defining factor of the core socio-political cleavage, major divisions in mass political thinking and party preferences over the last two decades (Ramonaite, 2007, p. 166; also see Ramonaite, 2008). This normative polarisation can be plotted on a one-dimensional continuum with an anti-communist (anti-Soviet) orientation on the one side, and an ex-communist (pro-Soviet) orientation on the opposite one (Ramonaite & Ziliukaite, 2009a; Ramonaite, 2009). Partisanship in Lithuania is a more complicated issue. Due to the lack of a democratic tradition with a long-term party system, over the half of the population has no stable party attachments, and even the existing mode of partisanship seems to be a derivative of other social characteristics (Ramonaite, forthcoming). Therefore, instead of self-reported affective party attachment, the analysis includes a measurement of the inclination to *support a (certain) party* in the 2012 general elections.<sup>7</sup> We also included respondents' *basic socio-demography* (correlating with liking at least one of selected politicians) including: year of birth, gender, education achieved, income level, and ethnicity.

*Secondly*, the theory of economic voting may lead one to predict that the attractiveness of a political agent depends on (subjective) evaluations of the agent's personal performance (Lewis-Beck, Paldam, 2000; Lenz, 2012). However, this variable, which is useful in assessing heads of governments or states, is less adequate in cases of politicians in opposition who are not only less visible, but also have limited opportunities for self-actualization. Under such conditions, voters' evaluation of a leader's performance can be confusing as it might appear to be a derivative of an assessment of that leader's personal features (e.g. hard-working, strenuous). Interestingly enough, some studies of new democracies show that the salience of economic voting grows as the levels of trust in government increases (Duch, 2001). In the survey we asked about *general political trust*<sup>8</sup>, assuming that voter's general distrust in politicians should result in poorer assessments of both a leader's performance and of their personality traits.

*Thirdly*, the existing literature reveals that voters can absorb the values and attitudes of their favourite political leader (Judd et al, 1983). However, first of all, voters should be aware of these attitudes and values. There is no general agreement on the impact of political interest on the personalisation of politics: is a leader's character assessment a "lifebuoy" for the politically passive and disinterested public, or, contrarily, does low political interest go along

<sup>6</sup> Participants of the survey were to "strongly agree," "agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" with the following in the questionnaire: "In general, the Soviet times were more beneficial than harmful to Lithuania."

<sup>7</sup> Respondents who answered positively to the question, "Are you going to vote in the general elections in October 2012?" were then asked, "Which party will you vote for in the general elections?"

<sup>8</sup> Participants of the survey were to answer, "Which statement would you be more inclined to agree with?" using a 10-point scale with the statement "No politician can be trusted in Lithuania" on the left, and "There are trustworthy parties, politicians in Lithuania," on the right.

with ignorance of a candidate's personal features? (Karvonen, 2010). Even if, during electoral campaigns, voters seek an optimal choice with the lowest costs (Stroh, 1995), are prone to selective exposure (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014), and have an interest in ongoing processes, the political events and actors may stimulate voters to re-assess their personal perspectives and predispositions towards particular political representatives. Therefore, we also included a measure of *subjective political interest*.<sup>9</sup>

Having defined the dependent, independent and controlled variables, three regression models were built. In the first model, respondents' general predispositions towards each of the five political leaders (liking/disliking) is regressed on a list of controlled variables – respondents' year of birth (age), gender, education, income, ethnicity, party support, attitude towards the Soviet past, (subjective) political interest, and political trust. The second model includes the former variables, complemented with five scales measuring respondents' assessment of each leader's personality. The measurement of the perceived charm of each leader is added to the list of regressors in the third model.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Leaving the discussion on personalisation aside for a while, what do classic predictors of electoral behaviour tell us about the roots of political leaders' personal appeal? On the one hand, we have variables, which do not tell much. Basic socio-demography does matter, but just a little here, a result that has been confirmed in other recent studies of Lithuanian voters (Ramonaite, forthcoming). Income, gender, and ethnicity show a statistically significant but small impact on favouring some evaluated politicians.<sup>10</sup> Voters' education levels bare no significance [Table 1]. A reported interest in politics does not explain much either, with the relative exception of the popular appeal of two politicians – Viktor Uspaskich and Arturas Zuokas.

On the other hand, we do have variables, which better explain the attractiveness of political personas. As predicted, political trust (an attitude that there are trustworthy politicians) has a positive effect on the favourable evaluation of four politicians. Paksas is probably an exception to this due to his image as a rebellious leader (Savukynas, 2004), mobilising quite a share of protest voices to the ranks of his adherents (Table 1).

Party support and a voter's attitude towards Lithuania's Soviet past are the two variables with the greatest impact on the popular appeal of politicians. The intent to support a certain political party in the general elections is the strongest predictor of a positive evaluation of the leading figure of that party,<sup>11</sup> and that is nothing new. The latent conflict over the Soviet

<sup>9</sup> Question in the questionnaire: "Are you interested in politics?" (answer options: "very much interested," "interested," "not so much interested," and "not interested at all"). The values were re-coded in reverse order for regression analysis.

<sup>10</sup> Conclusions on the impact of age need to be considered with caution due to some potential age bias in the survey sample.

<sup>11</sup> The negative value of a Beta coefficient in the case of Arturas Zuokas is due to the fact that in time of the survey he was a leader, without a strong party to be led. In 2010 Arturas Zuokas left Liberal and Centre Union (in 2010) in order to create and lead a new party "YES" which, however, appeared to be a failure in General Elections 2012 and did not survive as a viable political force.



Table 1. Model 1: Impact of Controlled Variables on Leader Appeal (-/+)

Regressor	Kubilius	Butkevicius	Uspaskich	Pakas	Zuokas
Gender (1-male, 2-female)	.039	.089**	.064*	.068*	.049
Year of birth	.098***	.009	.004	-.009	.030
Education	.040	-.010	.002	-.056	.041
Income	.077**	.011	-.036	-.079*	.087**
Ethnicity (1-Lithuanian, 2-non-Lithuanian)	-.018	.010	.093**	.107***	.072*
Attitude towards Soviet Past (+/-)	.239***	-.089**	-.265***	-.245***	.001
Support to Leader Party (-/+)	.424***	.358***	.388***	.257***	-.270***
Political Trust (-/+)	.115***	.117***	.094**	.047	.113***
Political Interest (-/+)	.035	.036	-.077**	-.009	.069*
<i>R Square</i>	.367	.168	.314	.205	.123
<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	.361	.159	.308	.197	.115
<i>Standard error of the estimate</i>	2.828	2.758	2.958	2.941	3.215
<i>Number of observations</i>	919	890	909	908	999

Remark: Results of linear regression (OLS); "leader appeal" – a dependent variable (measured by 'Feeling Thermometer, along the continuum from "dislike very much" to "like very much"). The table presents values of standardized coefficient (Beta) with the indicated significance level (\*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.01$ ; \*,  $p < 0.05$ ).

past is more interesting for, and specific to, new democracies in the region. Voters with a negative attitude towards the Soviet past tend to favour Andrius Kubilius, the leader of the Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats, which is a successor party of *Sąjūdis*, the Lithuanian national movement of the late 1990s. A positive evaluation of Soviet times tends to go along with warm feelings towards Viktor Uspaskich, a newcomer from Russia in early 1990s, who has been building his businesses as well as political career with Lithuania's Labour Party. Those with positive evaluations of Lithuania's Soviet past also favour Rolandas Paksas, leader of the Order and Justice party, and Algirdas Butkevicius, the current leader of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party. Lithuania's Social Democratic Party is slowly losing its popular associations with its Soviet-era leftist predecessor, the Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party. At least to some extent, this divide still embodies the political Right and Left, and the major socio-political cleavage in present day Lithuania.<sup>12</sup>

What about the entire model, does it work, and for whom? Model 1 is a better predictor of popular feelings towards Andrius Kubilius and Viktor Uspaskich. In the case of Kubilius, the model works best and explains over 36 per cent of the variance, and explains over 31 per cent in the case of Uspaskich. For Kubilius, Model 1 reasserts the relevancy of political parties and

<sup>12</sup> As a (ex)leader of liberal parties, Arturas Zuokas is positioned in the political centre, thus his popular appeal is not significantly affected by anti/pro-Soviet divide of the Lithuanian constituency.

reflects deeply entrenched ideological and normative divisions of popular sentiments towards political elites in Lithuania. The level of explained variance in the case of the leader of the Labour Party is more surprising, taking into consideration a strong stereotype that the viability of this party has been built on the personal charisma of Uspaskich. This result is reaffirmed by the observation that parties led by these two politicians became ultimate rivals in the present Lithuanian political arena; their opposition embodies the axis of the major socio-political conflict (Ramonaite, forthcoming).

Model 1 is the least successful in predicting the popular appeal of Arturas Zuokas and Algirdas Butkevicius (nearly 12 per cent and 16 per cent of variance, respectively). However, the reasons for this variance might be entirely different depending on which candidate is under consideration. Algirdas Butkevicius took the post of Prime Minister after the 2012 general elections when the Social Democratic and Labour parties formed the ruling coalition. However, before Autumn 2012, Algirdas Butkevicius was a 'dark horse' in the Lithuanian political arena. He was quite a blank, indistinct, and hardly visible heir to Algirdas Brazauskas, a former leader of social democrats (also President of Lithuania, 1993-1998; Prime Minister, 2001-2006). Survey results support this argument: in comparison to other political leaders under consideration, Algirdas Butkevicius was the one towards whom the largest share of respondents had no opinion at all.<sup>13</sup> Taken into consideration the obscurity of the public image of Butkevicius and vague feelings about him in the population, it is quite natural that the classic predictors worked poorly in this case.

The case of Arturas Zuokas is entirely different. As mentioned earlier, the popular consciousness positions Zuokas in the centre of the political continuum; he has no strong party attachments to entrench his leadership in the existing party system. Therefore the predictors of Model 1 cannot explain much in regards to Zuokas. This politician is an obvious example of the need to take into account the role of political persona and character. Personality is even more relevant in the Lithuanian context, due to a couple of factors. First, 12 per cent of survey participants have no opinion about the consequences of the Soviet past, second, in 2012 more than 20 per cent of respondents were inclined to skip the general elections and, third, almost one fifth of those who intended to vote were undecided in terms of their party choice several weeks before the elections.

Here we arrive at the core question of the study: *If even some impact of the classic determinants of leader popularity is irrefutable, does a voter's perception of a political leader's personality reveal the sources of voter's affinity for the leader (Q1)?* In order to answer this question, regression Model 2 and Model 3 were tested. First of all, let us discuss the results of Model 2 that encompass Model 1 variables (now controlled variables), plus the assessment of each leader's personality in terms of the five personality dimensions – *extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience* (on the construction of scales, see "Data and Methodology").

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<sup>13</sup> More than 6 per cent of respondents indicated they did not know if they liked that politician, and nearly one quarter answered that they neither liked nor disliked him; the respective numbers for other leaders fluctuate from 2.5 to 4 per cent and from 11 (Kubilius) to 16 per cent (Paksas).

The short answer to the first research question (Q1) is *positive*. In Model 2, five new variables (personality dimensions) raise the total explained variance significantly. The increase in the total explanatory power of the new regression model is greatest when applied to heads of 'personalistic' (leader-centred) parties – Rolandas Paksas, Viktor Uspaskich, and to strong, visible political figures without a viable party, such as Arturas Zuokas. The increase is not so dramatic, but is vivid nevertheless, in the cases of the chairmen of traditional parties, Algirdas Butkevicius and Andrius Kubilius (Model 2, Model 1 in Table 2).

TABLE 2. Explanatory Power of Leaders' Personality Traits Assessment

Change in Adjusted R Square	Butkevicius	Kubilius	Uspaskich	Paksas	Zuokas
Model 2 - Model 1 (Five Personality Dimensions)	.18	.23	.27	.31	.30
Model 3 - Model 1 (Five Personality Dimensions + Charm)	.20	.24	.28	.32	.32
Adjusted R Square (Model 1)	.159	.361	.308	.197	.115
Adjusted R Square (Model 2)	.339	.589	.574	.507	.417

With the assessment of a leader's personality, we are able to explain from 34 to 59 per cent of variance in evaluations of political leaders, depending on the politician under consideration (Tables 2 and 3).

The inclusion of a personality assessment battery in Model 2 resulted in a decrease in the importance of some earlier discussed predictors – a voter's attitude towards the Soviet past, party support, and political trust – even when the impact of these predictors remained statistically significant. Gender, income, and political interest became irrelevant predictors of voter's assessments of all leaders<sup>14</sup> (Table 3). It is clear that personality matters, thus it is time to proceed to the second research question.

*Do personality dimensions differ in terms of their impact on a political leader's appeal?* The answer to the question (Q2) is affirmative, too. Yes, the role of *leader personality perceptions* differs both across (a) *personality dimensions* as well as (b) *politicians* under consideration. However, if we ask which personality dimensions play the leading role, and which are less important for leader appreciation, there are some vivid regularities and trends, impossible to overlook. Let us start from the most significant aspects of a political leader's personality.

**Agreeableness** The subjective perception of *agreeableness* matters most to a leader's popular appeal, without exception in our study (values of Beta coefficient range from .278\*\*\* to .395\*\*\*; \*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ ; Table 3). The higher a politician is rated in *agreeableness* traits, the more attractive he is to voters, despite their socio-demographic differences, ideological or value conflicts, party support, or level of political trust and interest (controlled variables), and

<sup>14</sup> An exception of Arturas Zuokas in the latter case; for Zuokas, voter's ethnicity became irrelevant in Model 2.

TABLE 3. Comparing Models 1, 2, 3: Impact of Leader Personality Assessment on Leader Appeal (-/+)

Model	Kubilius			Butkevicius			Uspaskich			Pakas			Zukas		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Gender	.039	.019	.024	.089**	.057	.056	.064*	-.014	-.014	.068*	.017	.021	.049	.025	.013
Year of birth	.098***	.125***	.125***	.009	.073*	.074*	.004	-.016	-.012	-.009	.009	.008	.030	.035	.040
Education	.040	.018	.021	-.010	-.009	-.014	.002	.046	.035	-.056	-.038	-.037	.041	.026	.020
Income	.077**	.037	.039	.011	.010	.021	-.036	.001	.006	-.079*	-.007	-.001	.087**	.042	.045
Ethnicity	-.018	-.004	-.003	.010	.021	.023	.093**	.063**	.060**	.107***	.063**	.061*	.072*	.041	.037
Attitude towards Soviet Past	.239***	.080**	.087***	-.089**	-.049	-.037	-.265***	-.096***	-.082**	-.245***	-.109***	-.101***	.001	-.008	-.005
Support Leader's Party	.424***	.242***	.229***	.358***	.171***	.171***	.388***	.191***	.176***	.257***	.106***	.106***	-.270***	-.143***	-.138***
Political Trust	.115***	.045*	.045*	.117***	.086**	.085**	.094**	.042	.015	.047	.035	.044	.113***	.050*	.055*
Political Interest	.035	.034	.046*	.036	.018	.030	-.077**	-.023	-.049*	-.009	.034	.030	.069*	.083**	.088**
Extraversion	-	-.040	-.062*	-	.071	.031	-	-.040	-.064*	-	-.008	-.022	-	.006	-.052
Agreeableness	-	.278***	.194***	-	.330***	.246***	-	.395***	.337***	-	.317***	.254***	-	.358***	.317***
Conscientiousness	-	.324***	.321***	-	.027	.037	-	.195***	.157***	-	.323***	.294***	-	.226***	.181***
Emotional Stability	-	.036	.032	-	.125***	.118***	-	.085***	.083**	-	.001	.003	-	.105***	.090***
Openness to Experience	-	.025	-.057	-	.066	-.034	-	.102**	.010	-	.039	-.019	-	.046	-.040
Charm	-	-	.206***	-	-	.243***	-	-	.232***	-	-	.174***	-	-	.233***
R Square	.367	.596	.608	.168	.350	.368	.314	.581	.597	.205	.514	.523	.123	.425	.442
Adjusted R Square	.361	.589	.602	.159	.339	.357	.308	.574	.590	.197	.507	.515	.115	.417	.434
Number of observations	919	919	919	890	890	890	909	909	909	908	908	908	999	999	999

Remark: Results of OLS regression; liking a leader as a dependent variable (measured with 'Feeling Thermometer' along the 11 scale continuum "dislike very much" – "like very much"). The table gives values of standardized coefficient (Beta) with the indicated significance level: \*\*\*, p<0.001; \*\*, p<0.01; \*, p<0.05). Values of five personality dimensions and charm were re-coded in reverse order (e.g. low in extraversion vs. high in extraversion) for the regression models.

vice versa: low values on this personality dimension tend to lead to aversion to a politician, independent of controlled factors. The result supports an idea that what the electorate really looks for in a political leader are sincerity, honesty, compassion, empathy, amenability and commitment to the common cause. Contrarily, the perception of a politician as hollow, hypocritical, quarrelsome and selfish tends to lead to negative feelings in the population. Being perceived as a man of integrity, and authenticity raises the popularity of a politician (Pancer et al, 1999; Corner, Pels, 2002), and that confirms the salience of the virtuous, moral nature of political leadership.

**Conscientiousness** The impact of *agreeableness* is significant but slightly lower for Andrius Kubilius (Beta=.278\*\*\*; \*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ ) who, at the time of the survey in 2012, was the Prime Minister and coping with the consequences of the global economic crisis and accumulating public discontent. Does that suggest that other personality dimensions might be vital for politician's personal appeal? Yes, it does. The survey participants also appeared to be quite sensitive to projected *conscientiousness* traits of Lithuanian politicians. In the cases of Andrius Kubilius and Rolandas Paksas, assessments of *conscientiousness* predict appreciation for a politician best (respectively, Beta=.324\*\*\* and .323\*\*\*; \*\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ ) if compared to other personality dimensions. To a large extent, their personal appeal owes to being recognized as dutiful, organized, diligent, reliable, that is to say, disciplined and efficient leaders, keeping all things under control. As the head of the government during tough times, Kubilius had little choice but to exercise such style of leadership, and elements of discipline and control are contiguous to public images of both Paksas and his party, Order and Justice. Due to the previously discussed peculiarities of the public image of Algirdas Butkevicius, the leader of social democrats, at the time of the survey, he could hardly boast of highly noticeable achievements, thus *conscientiousness* seems to play no significant role in his popular perception, in contrast to other examined politicians (Model 2 in Table 3). The significance of the remaining three personality dimensions assessed in the survey is much lower (if there is any at all) and less consistent across politicians.

**Emotional Stability** The impact of *emotional stability* was statistically significant for three political leaders – Algirdas Butkevicius, Viktor Uspaskich and Arturas Zuokas. It is difficult to deny that self-confidence, ease, and high self-esteem are hallmarks of the public images of both Uspaskich and Zuokas. However, the fact that this dimension played no important role for evaluations of Rolandas Paksas and Andrius Kubilius implies that the appeal of these two leaders does not depend upon a high-level of optimism or a relaxed temper. On the contrary, it may be assumed that some level of anxiety and strain is perceived as intrinsic to their type of leadership and, moreover, appeals to some groups of their electorate. This is important considering insights of previous studies that perceived *style* of leadership, "leadership evaluations have a significant impact on both intent to vote and actual voting behaviour even after accounting for the influence of party identification" (Pillai, 1998, p. 397).

**Extraversion** With all five personality-dimensions included in the analysis, *extraversion* bears no observable impact on leader appeal. Perhaps a persona in the leadership position is naturally related to assertiveness, energy, and high levels of activity and social engagement, thus both adherents and opponents acknowledge these characteristics in public figures

that succeeded in making their way to the upper echelons of political power. However, it is also interesting to note that the direction of the relationship between the leader's appeal and the assessment of *extraversion*, or positive emotionality, in the case of two politicians, Kubilius and Paksas, is negative, although statistically insignificant in Model 2 (Table 3). These results might suggest that at least some sub-dimensions of *extraversion* (e.g., spanning over such traits as sociability, gregariousness, cheerfulness or being out-going) might even be extraneous to leaders' images held by their adherents, preferring a more solemn and austere style of political leadership.

**Openness to Experience** The fifth personality dimension, *openness to experience*, was also found to lack the potential to predict a political leader's appeal, even if we limited our analysis aspects of this trait that are likely most relevant for the study.<sup>15</sup> Recognizing *openness to innovation* and *open-mindedness* goes in the same direction as a general positive evaluation of a leader, however, the relationship between these variables is not statistically significant, with the exception of Viktor Uspaskich. Nonetheless, we can observe the certain peculiarity of Uspaskich, as all personality dimensions except *extraversion* matter to the popular appeal of this politician.

A comparative glance at five Lithuanian political leaders (Model 2 in Table 3) supports Simonton's (2012, p. 1-2) argument that "the personality variables that predict performance in one type of leadership might differ markedly from those that predict success in another leadership type." Only two personality dimensions are relevant to Andrius Kubilius and Rolandas Paksas (*conscientiousness* and *agreeableness* for both), and to the case of Algirdas Butkevicius (*agreeableness* and *extraversion*). Three dimensions are relevant to the case of Arturas Zuokas (*agreeableness*, *conscientiousness* and *emotional stability*), and, as mentioned above, even four of the five personality dimensions matter to Viktor Uspaskich's popular appeal, with controlled variables included.

Interestingly enough, in the Lithuanian public sphere, exactly the latter two politicians, Viktor Uspaskich and Arturas Zuokas, are recognized as leaders gifted with a *charisma* (Sabaliauskas, 2013; Makaraityte, 2011) that distinguishes both in the Lithuanian political arena. There are few party leaders, including Arunas Valinskas, founder and leader of the extravagant but transient "Party of National Resurrection" (Tautos prisikelimą partija) (Kavaliauskaite, 2010), capable of challenging these politicians in this regard. Therefore, let us finally proceed with the last research question (Q3) concerning the role of charismatic leadership. How does the inclusion of this last regressor (personal charm) change the significance of the precedent elements and the five personality dimensions (see Model 3)? *Does personal charm matter to the popular appeal of politicians?* The answer to these questions is more complicated than to the former ones.

**Charm.** The inclusion of the assessment of a leader's charm into the model hardly changes the significance level of socio-demography and other controlled variables presented in

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<sup>15</sup> Sub-dimensions of *openness to experience*, referring to fantasy, aesthetics, imagination, artistic sensitivity, and attentiveness to inner feelings were deliberately omitted from the analysis due the specific subject of our study, political leaders.

Model 2 (Table 3). Political interest is the single exception: it positively affects the appeal of the former Prime Minister, Andrius Kubilius and negatively affects the attractiveness of one of the former opposition leaders, Viktor Uspaskich. A similar situation is observed regarding the significance of personality assessment – they remain almost unaltered, but some trends, traced back to Model 2, show up clearly now. On the one hand, when charm is included in the regression model, the impact of *extraversion* becomes slightly negative for the overall appeal of two leaders, Kubilius and Uspaskich (Model 3 in Table 3). In other words, charm makes *introversion* (reversed *extraversion*) more appealing in the cases of these leaders. Moreover, in Uspaskich's case, the emergence of the slight impact of *extraversion* occurred along with a loss in the significance of *openness to experience*. On the other hand, the Beta value is truly low, thus the latter changes are statistically significant, but apparently very low.

Nevertheless, taken as an individual category, the perception of charm is relatively important to the overall likeability of a political leader. This holds for all politicians under consideration (Beta values from .174\*\*\* to .234\*\*\*; \*\*\*,  $p < 0,001$ ). Being charming, essentially being recognized as inspiring, progressive and simpatico – is as important, and for some leaders, even more important, than *conscientiousness* and *extraversion* (Model 3 in Table 3). Nevertheless, paradoxically, with charm included, Model 3 explains little more compared to Model 2. The total explained variance increases by one to two per cent depending on the politician. The latter and formerly discussed results prove that it's not likely that charm is another autonomous personality dimension. However, Sankar's (2003, p. 45) claim that "character not charisma is the critical measure of leadership's excellence" does not seem to hold, at least in the examined population. Charm is most probably inwrought with major personality dimensions, and the root of different politician's charm in the eyes of different audiences may not coincide. The role of the five personality dimensions in the charismatic appeal needs further study.

## CONCLUSIONS

What is the secret of political leaders' personal appeal? This paper looked for the roots of leaders' personal appeal in *personality characteristics*, as assessed by common voters. Consequently, do personality traits matter? How do they matter in the eyes of a citizen? The first conclusion of the Lithuanian case study is that the significance of *personality*, as an independent variable, differs both across *personality dimensions* and between *politicians* under consideration. *Agreeableness* was found to be the most important and universally desirable dimension of a political leader's personality, followed by *conscientiousness* which emerged as the second most salient factor, with classic predictors of electoral choice controlled. The results prove that the popular yearning for moral leadership, complemented by high performance, discipline, and efficiency, persists regardless of how, or if, the political game or the (post) modern citizen have changed. That's the *essence* of political representation, not a *style*. The inconsistency of the impact of the remaining personality dimensions across politicians leads to different inferences.

It needs be emphasized that the impact of *extraversion*, *emotional stability* and *openness to experience* on a leader's popular appeal is considerably smaller, if noticeable at all,



in particular cases. *Emotional stability* seems to be a matter of *different styles* of political leadership, attractive to different audiences in distinctive ways. For example, for some, a politician is appealing if he is perceived as someone who is relaxed and takes things easy, yet for others, some degree of anxiety and taking things very seriously are much more attractive in a leader. The traits of *extraversion* in well-known public figures with successful political careers appear to be widely recognized as intrinsic to political leadership, making the factor trivial as an affective distinction among political elites. *Openness to experience* also lacks explanatory power, and similarly to the former personality dimensions, requires further research of the peculiarities of different styles or types of political leadership and the preferences of different electorates.

*Secondly*, the results of the study show that the largest number of personality dimensions appeared to be significant to the popular appeal of those politicians who are widely recognized, even though more often rebuked than praised, as political leaders “gifted with charisma.” Thus what about the role of personal charm? The results of the study are not conclusive. On the one hand, as an individual category in the final regression model, charm stands out as unquestionably salient to the appeal of all examined political leaders (controlled variables included). Being recognized as inspiring, progressive and simpatico is as important, and for some leaders, even more important than being recognized as highly *conscientiousness* or having strong traits of *extraversion*. On the other hand, the charm factor adds little to the overall explanatory power of the model. Thus it is likely that charm is inwrought with the five major personality dimensions, and the root of different politician’s charm in the eyes of different audiences may vary.

Nevertheless, our *final* conclusion is that the personality of a politician truly matters to voters. The comparison of regression models does not refute the role of classic predictors of electoral choice, however, the assessment of leader personality offers an opportunity to predict popular sentiments better. Five personality dimensions raise the total explained variance of the model significantly – from 18 to 31 per cent, depending on the politician under consideration. The increase in the total explanatory power of the regression model, with five personality dimensions included, is greatest in cases of current or former leaders of “personalistic” (leader-centred) parties but is also significant in cases of the chairmen of traditional, ideology-based political parties.

The presented study indicates promising directions for the further development of research on the personalization of politics. However, a number of issues ought to be addressed in further research. Firstly, the models proposed in this study should be run on data received from surveys, not limited to internet users. Secondly, the ridge between personality dimensions, found to be highly relevant (*agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*) and those that were less relevant (*extraversion*, *emotional stability*, *openness to experience*) for political leaders’ personal appeal should be further examined, comparing different styles of political leadership, and types of leadership (e.g. party leaders vs. government leaders vs. presidents) as well as electorates, with different characteristics. Thirdly, five personality dimensions need more attention in the research of charismatic leadership as a peculiar mode of relationship between political representatives and their proponents.



## APPENDIX

TABLE 1. Results of "Feeling Thermometer"

	Butkevicius	Kubilius	Uspaskich	Paksas	Zuokas
Mean	-0.06	-1.89	-0.42	-1.67	-1.04
St. deviation	3.05	3.38	3.54	3.27	3.32
Missing *	98	39	61	59	46
Num obs	1466	1525	1503	1505	1518

\*Missing values encompass "I do not know" answers in the 'Feeling Thermometer' results.

TABLE 2. Inventory to Assess Political Leader's Personality<sup>16</sup>

Extraversion (E)	Agreeableness (A)	Conscientiousness (C)
Active - Passive Ambitious – Ambitionless Cheerful – Grave Sociable – Unsociable	Sincere – False Kind-hearted – Cold-hearted Amenable – Categorical Committed (to Lithuania) – Selfish	Responsible – Careless Organized – Chaotic Hard-working – Lazy Trustworthy – Unreliable
Emotional Stability (N)	Openness to Experience (O)	Charm
Self-confident – Diffident Optimist – Pessimist	Open to innovation – Averse to innovation Open-minded – Narrow-minded	Simpatico – Charmless Progressive – Old-fashioned Inspiring – Flat

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<sup>16</sup> The Lithuanian version of the inventory is as follows: Extraversion: *veiklus – pasyvus, ambicingas – be ambicijų, linksmas – rimtas, lengvai bendraujantis – sunkiai bendraujantis*; Agreeableness: *nuoširdus – veidmainis, geraširdis – kietaširdis, sukalbamas – kategoriškas, atsidavęs Lietuvai – savanaudis*; Conscientiousness: *atsakingas – nerūpestingas, organizuotas – besiblaškantis, darbštus – tingus, patikimas – nepatikimas*; Emotional Stability: *pasitikintis savimi – nepasitikintis savimi, optimistas – pesimistas*; Openness to Experience: *atviras naujovėms – nemėgstantis naujovių, plačių pažiūrų – siaurų pažiūrų*; Charm: *simpatiškas – nepatrauklus, šiuolaikiškas – senamadiškas, įkvepiantis – išsikvėpęs*.

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