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# Party Leaders in Eastern Europe

Personality, Behavior and Consequences

*Edited by*  
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Sergiu Gherghina  
Editor

# Party Leaders in Eastern Europe

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*Editor*

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September 2019

# PRAISE FOR *PARTY LEADERS IN EASTERN EUROPE*

“This volume provides a welcome and useful contribution to the study of political leadership, and of European politics more broadly, by examining very carefully the situation in Central and Eastern Europe. Theoretically, it also strongly contributes to debates and theories on political leaders, political parties and democratic politics.”

—Jean-Benoit Pilet, *Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium*

“This book is an important contribution to the study of personalized politics and political personalization. One of its main innovations is in presenting leader-party relationships from the perspective of leaders. This is highly relevant in the era of personalised politics, which sees leaders at the center of the arena while parties are relegated to the back seat.”

—Gideon Rahat, *The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel*

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Party Leaders in Eastern Europe: Traits, Behaviors and Consequences

*Sergiu Gherghina*

## INTRODUCTION

Party leaders are crucial actors for political decision-making, their parties and voters. Contemporary politics sees a decline in the centrality of political parties as groups intended to aggregate, articulate and represent different societal interests. This centrality of parties is being replaced by politicians who—through the general process of personalization—have become the main anchors of interpretation and evaluation in the political arena (Bennett, 2012; W. P. Cross, Katz, & Pruysers, 2018; Garzia, 2013; Karvonen, 2010; Langer, 2007; Passarelli, 2019; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Rahat & Kenig, 2018). However, the general relevance of political leaders is not limited to “matter because politics matters” (Hartley & Benington, 2011, p. 204). Party leaders have become central drivers of electoral competitions in an unprecedented manner. Political parties grow less reliant on their organizational basis and more on the leadership figures. Whether it is the case of new parties, fringe parties, or large and well-established parties, leaders continue to rise to prominence

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(Blondel & Thiebault, 2009; Bolleyer & Bytzek, 2017; W. P. Cross et al., 2018; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007).

The role of leadership expands beyond electoral politics where leaders occupy the center stage and increase the appeal of their parties through various means (Aarts, Blais, & Schmitt, 2011; Bittner, 2011; Helms, 2012). Within a context of decreasing electoral turnout, the party supporters represent the essential precondition of winning elections and surviving multiple electoral cycles. That is why the approach of leaders in managing their parties has much wider relevance for their organizational survival (Blondel & Thiebault, 2009; Chiru & Gherghina, 2012; W. Cross & Pilet, 2016; Langer, 2011). The leadership style matters both in relation to the voters, who get mobilized and this is reflected in the share of votes, and in relationship to the party organization by organizing the internal structures, boosting membership or bringing organizations to life in a more general sense. In this context, the leadership style allows us to better understand the life of parties and to clearly identify their goals, such as the mobilization of voters, boosting party membership, developing the party organization etc.

The consequences of party leaders for state and society can be best understood through the study of their characteristics and behaviors in office. They do not operate in a vacuum but in an environment in which their values and personality traits as well as the perception of others and their expectations toward their actions are highly influential. The ways in which leaders act are driven by a series of factors ranging from character traits to institutional pressure. In spite of extensive research devoted separately to personality and leadership styles, leaders' actions and the consequences they produce, little attention had been paid to the relationship between these three variables. To date, the few studies addressing this relationship were focused on influential political leaders and investigated their relationships with followers and analyzed their time in office as prime ministers or country presidents (Bass, 1990; Greenstein, 2009; Kavanagh, 1974; Post, 2004; Steinberg, 2008). Although many of these political leaders were also heads of parties, their characteristics and behaviors as party leaders were often overlooked. Moreover, since many analyses used a single-case study approach, with emphasis on one leader and several contextual explanations, there are only isolated comparisons between political leaders. Finally, most research of leadership styles focused either on established democracies or on authoritarian countries.

They did not consider newly emerged democracies or transition countries although these two categories form an important share of the global states.

## GOALS OF THE BOOK, THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

This book seeks to fill these gaps in the literature and analyzes the relationship between party leaders' personality traits, behaviors and general consequences for their parties. The volume has a three-fold goal:

1. To describe and compare the personality traits and associated behavior of party leaders.
2. To assess the changes in leaders' personality traits during their time in office.
3. To identify the impact of leaders' traits on their parties' electoral performance and organization.

When compared to other studies on leadership, this book has a few unique features: the explicit focus on the position of party leader rather than high political office at national level, the existence of a common theoretical and methodological framework applied systematically across leaders and countries, the emphasis on potential change during the term in office and the attempt to explain that change, and the focus on the less-investigated region of Eastern Europe characterized by a mix of new democracies and transition countries. To begin with, let us consider the basic theoretical elements and dimensions for analysis that lie at the core of this book.

### *Theoretical Foundations*

From management and leadership studies to research into organizational structures and functions, research into styles of leadership has been at the forefront of a wide range of disciplines for decades. Specific investigation into political leadership is a relative latecomer to this field even though some of the most prominent analytical approaches (Blondel, 1987) have started off by looking at political leaders. This book relies on three different strands of literature to come up with several analytical dimensions and formulate testable hypotheses regarding the effect of leadership traits on party electoral performance and organization.

To begin with, the trait theories and research are a useful starting point. The study of leadership traits is not new and its origins go back to the 1930s and 1940s when several works sought to identify individual characteristics that distinguish leaders from non-leaders. While most studies in that period were descriptive and lacked theory, Stogdill (1948) made a first step in the direction of theoretical notions by looking at the interaction between traits and the situations leaders faced. The trait paradigm gradually developed and several decades later research analyzed how specific traits were associated with or could predict their behaviors (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; House, Shane, & Herold, 1996). In line with these specific traits, the Leaders Motive Profile (LMP) theory was developed and argued that leader effectiveness is associated with high desire to acquire status and have an impact on others (power motivation), high concern for the moral exercise of power and power motivation greater than affiliative motivation (House et al., 1996; McClelland, 1975, 1985; Winter, 1978). In more recent studies, the principles of the LMP theory are articulated in the form of the leaders' need for power (Cottam, Mastors, Preston, & Dietz, 2015).

In parallel, the Charismatic Leadership Theory emphasized the existence of several traits such as self-confidence, strong motivation for influence, and strong conviction for the moral correctness of beliefs to be conducive to charisma and effectiveness (House, 1991). Leaders with such traits are likely to produce change in the organization and research showed that this is effectively achieved (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994) also when these traits are combined with the power motivation from the LMP theory (House, 1991). In addition, leader flexibility and social sensitivity are traits that can foster the leadership emergence (Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991). The adaptation of leaders to the information-processing demands of the environment is essential in the attempt to achieve goals (Suedfeld & Rank, 1976).

Second, the literature from the leader behavior paradigm complements the trait theories and relies extensively on the observation of what leaders do or what others perceive as leaders' behavior. The primary differentiation that these theories offered was between task-oriented behavior, person-oriented behavior and individual-prominence seeking (House & Aditya, 1997). There are nuances to these differences and most of them are situational; leaders behave according to the context. The life cycle theory develops the idea of four leadership styles, relative to the followers: telling, selling, participating and delegating (Hersey ad Blanchard 1982). The Cognitive Resource Theory focuses

on leaders' intelligence and experience, and stress faced by leaders and followers to explain performance (Fiedler, 1995). Along similar lines, research has emphasized analyzed the impact of conceptual complexity and policy expertise on historical analogy during foreign policy decision-making (Dyson & Preston, 2006). The findings indicate that high complexity political leaders draw analogies from a wider range of sources and do not rely exclusively on generational and cultural context as it happens with the low-complexity leaders.

Third, the literature dealing with leadership images in media coverage provides important input. With the contemporary trend of media sources acting as citizens' principal source of political information the ways in which leaders are portrayed through these sources is very important. Existing studies provide a variety of leadership characteristics, with extensive disagreement regarding both the number of dimensions and content. The number of dimensions varies from two (Kinder, Peters, Abelson, & Fiske, 1980) to four or five (Barisone, 2009; Bean, 1993; Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, & Whiteley, 2004). In terms of content, the dimensions include elements such as: intelligence, task-orientation, competence, reliability, transactional leadership, character, personal attraction, verbally skilled, charisma, likeability etc. The traits listed by various studies are quite heterogeneous and pertain to different aspects. For example, competence refers to how well leaders fulfill the tasks associated with their position, the verbal skills are directly connected to the process of communication, while transactional leadership refers to the ways in which leaders punish or reward the followers. In spite of broad disagreement regarding their content, several scholars argue that the number of dimensions is limited to six (Aaldering & Vliegenthart, 2016; Bittner, 2011; Garzia, 2011). The analytical framework of this book combines the three theoretical perspectives reviewed above and derives six traits/dimensions for analysis. These traits cover different elements in order to provide a comprehensive view of the leadership style and to capture its possible impact on electoral performance and organizational development.

### *Dimensions for Analysis and Hypotheses*

In this book the six dimensions for trait analysis are: self-confidence (including emotional stability), competence, integrity, need for power, flexibility, and cognitive complexity. They are briefly conceptualized as follows. Self-confidence assesses the extent to which leaders are decisive,

they do not hesitate, and are emotionally stable. Competence means being capable of handling the job, understanding the political game, and having the political skills required by the job. Integrity reflects perceptions of honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, being guided in actions by party's needs rather than their own, strong conviction in the moral correctness of their beliefs. Need for power relates to the increasing and centralizing control within the party, major involvement in party decisions, limiting the power of other bodies/individuals in the party. Flexible infers being adaptable, the ability to react to the opinions of the public or of party members, and being accessible. The cognitive complexity involves awareness of real problems with and within the party, thus bringing together general and specific knowledge in office.

These traits have been derived from the literature dedicated to leadership characteristics; for a comprehensive review of the literature, see Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2016). Self-confidence has been characterized in different ways in previous studies ranging from issues related to the ability to lead and administer, the sense of efficacy or decisiveness to emotional stability, absence of nervousness or the display of confidence that contribute to the image of a strong leader (Bean & Mughan, 1989; Bittner, 2011; Cottam et al., 2015; Hogan et al., 1994; Kenney & Rice, 1988). Competence has been outlined as a key leadership feature in several studies, especially when referring to the ways in which voters look at leaders (Bean, 1993; Bittner, 2011; Glass, 1985; Kinder et al., 1980; Miller & Miller, 1976; Pancer, Brown, & Barr, 1999; Stewart & Clarke, 1992). Some of these studies went as far as claiming that competence is one of the two defining personality characteristics. Such an argument is plausible only as long as these characteristics are very broadly defined, to include other traits (Aaldering & Vliegenthart, 2016, p. 1873).

Similar to competence, integrity is another trait that has been widely investigated in earlier studies on leadership. This was approached either with the narrower characteristics of trust, trustworthiness, honesty and reliability (Barisone, 2009; Holmberg & Åkerblom, 2001; Miller & Miller, 1976; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986; Shabad & Andersen, 1979) or with the broad concept of integrity as used in this book (Bean, 1993; Bittner, 2011; Greene, 2001; Miller et al., 1986; Pancer et al., 1999). The next trait, need for power, is rooted in two strands of literature. First, there are studies of political psychology about how leaders behave in office. Key in this respect is the research conducted by Preston (2001) on how American presidents handle the policy

process. One of his dimensions for analysis is the need for power, which is equivalent for the need for control and degree of involvement in the decision-making process. Second, the literature on how decisions are taken within political parties is useful, especially the works analyzing the centralization and inclusiveness of decision (Gherghina, 2014; Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Lundell, 2004; Pennings & Hazan, 2001). Many political parties have a hierarchical structure and whenever the decision is taken at the upper echelons of this hierarchy, with little or no involvement of other bodies and individuals (e.g. local branches, party members etc.).

The trait of flexibility brings together what earlier studies referred to as empathy (Bittner, 2011; Funk, 1999; Shanks & Miller, 1990) and responsiveness (Stewart & Clarke, 1992). Through this trait, leaders are expected to be accessible for party members and ordinary voters, and to listen and react to their opinions. It involves a certain degree of adaptation even if that comes at the cost of consistency, a feature considered crucial for political leaders in other studies (Aaldering & Vliegenthart, 2016). Adaptability is very important for party leaders because political parties are dynamic organizations with many changes occurring over short periods of time. Finally, cognitive complexity is derived from typologies of leadership style in political psychology where this means a general ability to process and use information about real problems within the party (Cottam et al., 2015; Preston, 2001). Individuals vary greatly in their use of information for decision-making: rely on general information, on specific events, personal and/or particular experiences or heuristics. Cognitive complexity involves the combination of more approaches rather than choosing between them. To some extent, leaders' cognitive complexity requires sensitivity toward their surrounding environment. When the latter refers to the opinions of party members, there is a thin line between flexibility and cognitive complexity. The way in which those opinions are used makes the difference: flexibility refers to leaders' behavior mirroring those opinions, while cognitive complexity means using those opinions to increase cognition.

These traits are assessed qualitatively (see the following section); used to describe differences between leaders (goal 1), evaluate how the traits changed during the period in office (goal 2) and identify the effects on party electoral performance and organization (goal 3). Earlier research has pointed in the direction of potential effects of leaders on democratic elections in various settings (Barisone, 2009; Bean, 1993; Bean & Mughan, 1989; Garzia, 2013; King, 2002). Other studies looked at

the impact that leaders have on the party organization, the performance of parties in government, the ways campaigns are waged or how voters determine their preferences (W. P. Cross et al., 2018; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Rahat & Kenig, 2018; Webb, Poguntke, & Kolodny, 2012). This book bridges the findings of these works and seeks to assess the impact of party leadership traits on the electorate and organization. In line with the reviewed literature, the expectation is that party leaders who score highly on those traits are likely to establish a good relationship with the electorate and develop the party organization. The contributions to this volume will empirically test the extent to which party leaders who score high on these traits are more likely to:

H1: Improve their party's electoral performance.

H2: Increase the intra-party cohesion.

H3: Boost party membership.<sup>1</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

To test these hypotheses, the book uses a common methodology across all its empirical chapters. This section describes the case selection, data collection and methods used for data analysis. To begin with the case selection, each chapter of the book has the party leader as the unit of observation. To ensure a comparative perspective both within and across countries, each chapter includes two party leaders from the same country with at least two terms in office, anytime between 1991 and 2018. The choice of party leaders in each country is made according to their importance for the political arena and they should come from the top five political parties in the country in the last two and a half decades (not necessarily at this moment). To broaden the scope of comparisons, the two leaders from the same country will not belong to the same party. Some of the party leaders occupy also high public office (e.g. prime minister, country president) but the analysis in the book is confined to their position as party leaders. Each contribution sought to isolate as much as possible the public office from party leadership although there were

<sup>1</sup>The electoral performance refers to the vote share in the national legislative elections. Intra-party cohesion and party membership rolls are about developments at the national level.

instances in which the party leader displayed similar traits across the two positions held simultaneously.

The volume includes country chapters from: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. Seven out of the 10 countries are EU Member States, one is in the process of accession and two are in the process of transition to democracy. The focus on Eastern Europe rests on two major arguments. First, the political regimes in the region are quite diverse ranging from new democracies that joined the European Union one decade ago to countries that occupy the “precarious middle ground between a full-fledge democracy and outright dictatorship” (Carothers, 2002). These cases deserve a closer investigation of their party leaders due to the major differences in terms of political dynamic compared to the established democracies: less institutionalized and stable environment for political parties, more volatile and open electorates and more opportunities for political actors to use state resources (Gherghina, 2014; Sikk, 2005; van Biezen, 2003; van Biezen & Kopecký, 2014). These countries are the most likely cases to expect the prevalence of different personality traits among party leaders to what we already know from established democracies.

Second, the East European context provides several opportunities to study party leaders that are less observable in established democracies: radical right parties and leaders were in this region popular before gaining momentum in Western Europe, there are strong ethnic parties in several countries with many leaders for a long time in office and there are political parties with dramatic ideological shifts (e.g. Fidesz in Hungary). Overall, the focus on Eastern Europe brings a nuance to existing studies and provides supplementary evidence from an under-investigated region.

In terms of data collection and analysis, the book uses a qualitative method. The traits of leaders are assessed based on their activity and behavior in office. Unlike some of the previous studies that tried to predict behaviors with the help of traits, this book will assess the traits through the observed behaviors and attitudes. Each of the six character traits will be qualitatively assessed on an ordinal scale (high, medium, low) based on qualitative content analysis of primary (leaders' speeches, press releases on the party websites) and secondary data (media reports about leaders' actions). A coding scheme with indicators has been provided to the chapter contributors to make their assessments consistent. For example, a leader scoring high on the competence trait must be

able of handling the job, understanding the political game and have the political skills required by the position.

The consequences for the electoral performance (H1) and party organization (H2 and H3) are also assessed qualitatively and the evaluation—higher, no effect, or lower—is relative to the previous status. For example, if the political party under the first term in office of a party leader ( $t_1$ ) gets better electoral results than in the legislative elections prior to the election of this leader ( $t_0$ ), then the evaluation on electoral performance will read “higher”. If in the following legislative election with the same leader ( $t_2$ ) the party has a stable vote share, then the assessment will be “no effect”. The same coding rules apply to the other two variables.

## RELEVANCE AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The rich information and analytical findings presented in the book present significant scientific relevance. To begin with, the book will be a valuable source of data for scholars conducting political research in Europe. The systematic collection and use of primary data, and the in-depth analyses will make the book a relevant starting point for both single case and comparative studies. This volume is also relevant with respect to its emphasis on the conceptualization of party leaders. The book proposes an analytical framework that could be replicated by further studies since it has no context-sensitive elements such as features working only in democracies. It is tested in different political regimes and across different types of political parties. The focus on several elements that were not analyzed together until now will show whether the personality and behaviors of party leaders can help us explaining or predicting events in society. So far, many societal or political consequences were attributed to actions undertaken by politicians in high political offices.

Although party leaders have been extensively scrutinized in relation to electoral performance and influence within the party, there is no research trying to link their personality, behaviors and consequences. This book is a pioneering study that is likely to represent a source of data and a valuable starting point for further research. It is the first comparative study of a relatively large number of party leaders—in total 20—from different countries, which broadens the analytical scope of the few case studies presented so far in the literature. The particular focus on party leaders in less-investigated countries will allow both the development of

more comprehensive analyses of leadership evolution in Europe, but in a broader perspective will constitute a valuable tool for scholars interested in questions of intra-party democracy, party organizations, political participation, transition patterns etc. The approach used in this book complements a series of recent works, which focus on the presidentialization or personalization of power within parties (W. P. Cross et al., 2018; Passarelli, 2019; Rahat & Kenig, 2018).

The chapters have a common structure and they use similar tables and graphs to provide the evidence required to reveal the leadership traits, behaviors and consequences. Every chapter will include five sections: (1) An introduction that provides an overview of the social structural and political economic factors in the country and explanations for the selection of the two party leaders to be analyzed; (2) a history of the two party leaders with emphasis on how they reached that position, political experience prior to office, background information and brief descriptions on their parties; (3) an analysis of the leaders on the six personality dimensions and their behaviors during the terms in office, including analyses of change; (4) an analysis of consequences for the parties and explanations for them (a test of the three hypotheses presented above); and (5) concluding remarks with focus on the main findings and implications of the analysis.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# ‘Deviating’ Party Leadership Strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Comparison of Milorad Dodik and Dragan Čović

*Jasmin Hasić*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1990, the Bosnian and Herzegovinian (BiH) Parliament, still functioning within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, underwent significant changes. On February 21, 1990, a law on ‘multipartyism’ was passed, allowing the emergence of new political parties.<sup>1</sup> Most were extremely small, while others operated within broad political coalitions (Chandler, 2000). Whereas the first democratic elections in several other post-communist countries took place in 1990–1992, the first elections in BiH after the conflict took place in 1996, under the supervision of the international community. The first BiH national government controlled elections were held in 2000 (Hasić & Sijamija, 2018).

<sup>1</sup>The Law on Political Organizations of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, published in the Official Gazette of SR BiH, no. 27/91.

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BiH's process of democratization was interrupted and delayed by war, and it has subsequently been heavily shaped by numerous post-conflict legacies. The system allowed for many actors to operate with an unclear agenda and low levels of coordination (Bougarel, Helms, & Duijzings, 2007). Political parties and organizations in BiH do not precisely fit any known typology, because they have developed in an idiosyncratic way, and were shaped by specific social and economic contexts, embedded in deviating institutional structures (Katz & Mair, 2002, p. 129). Their establishment and functions are not addressed in the Dayton Constitution of BiH or any state-level *lex specialis*. The only state-level regulations addressing the matter are the Law on Party Financing (2000) and the BiH Election Law (2001).<sup>2</sup> The classic cleavages as the circumstances of their formation cannot be described as a programmatically ideological orientation. Most of the dominant parties are socially rooted, and have strong and active local organizational structures directly linked and accountable to the central leadership.

Party leadership in BiH is rarely founded on personal-professional leadership qualities, one's ability to promote or maintain certain basic values, integrity or competence. Legally, party leadership and public posts leaders occupy do not have to be separated, which has enabled strong party leaders to carry out top public positions without having to renounce their party positions. As a result, elections in BiH have become increasingly leader-centered. While voter support is still based on the electoral appeal of parties, average voters are progressively focused on individuals representing the party and not so much on the essence of party programs or ideologies. Over time, strong leaders have solidified central positions within party organizations. Their names have become key for party identification among voters, their personalities outweighing the ideological persuasion of voters who are influenced by the personal appeal of candidates at the top of the voting ballot.

<sup>2</sup>There are no uniform criteria for political party registration or a registry of political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Political parties in the Republika Srpska entity can be registered in 5 municipal (basic) and in one district court (in East Sarajevo), or in 10 municipal courts in the Federation entity, or in the municipal court of Brčko District. The laws regulating the registration procedure are: the Law on Political Organizations of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (for FBIH) and the Law on Political Organizations (for RS), and the Law on Political Organizations (for Brčko District).

This chapter analyzes two party leaders from BiH: Milorad Dodik (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats—SNSD) and Dragan Čović (Croatian Democratic Union—HDZ BiH). They both influenced and shaped the past and contemporary party politics ethno-homogenization through the explicit political embodiment of collectivized nationalist agency of the ordinary people they represent, and implicit preservation of palpable self-serving rival mass sentiments. It dissects the complex formulation of their leadership styles and their evolutions within the party structures and public spheres.

The reasons for this comparison are multifold. Both leaders are described as devout and authentic members of their ethnic groups. They preside over ‘traditionally’ governing parties, and both are perceived as trustworthy and have remained unchallenged by other party members for over a decade. They both firmly control the party structure and organization, interact well with media that support their policies, and appoint only loyal members to the executive offices. They direct party behavior in representative bodies, and their opinions play a crucial role in defining party policies. Their charisma is based on perceived capabilities, having delivered multiple (perceived) benefits to their own ethnic electorate. Over time, they have created a network of ‘vulnerable followers’—loyal masses employed in public institutions through party-based politics of informality (known colloquially as *štela*).

## A HISTORY OF THE TWO LEADERS

The party system in BiH is multilayered, and the cleavages within party competition scheme are formed around firmly defined party lines that follow either ethnic or civic identification of the voters (cf. Emerson & Šedo, 2010, p. 13).<sup>3</sup> The largest nationalist party within the Serb ethnic-party corpus is the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). Like the majority of Serb-dominant parties in BiH, SNSD

<sup>3</sup>For the Bosniak electorate, the dominant parties are SDA (Party of Democratic Action), SBB (Alliance for Better Future), and the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Stranka za BiH, SBiH). For the Bosnian Croat electorate, HDZ BiH (Croatian Democratic Union of BiH), NHI the New Croatian Initiative, and HDZ-1990 (Croatian Democratic Union 1990) are dominant. For the Bosnian Serb electorate, predominantly voting in the Republika Srpska entity, these are SNSD (Union of Independent Social Democrats), SDS (Serbian Democratic Party) and PDP (Party of Democratic Progress).

seeks to redraw the BiH Constitution to form a loose federation within BiH, allowing for stronger ties with Serbia (Stojarova & Emerson, 2010, p. 47). Its leadership, chaired by Milorad Dodik since the party's establishment,<sup>4</sup> maintains close linkages with Belgrade and Moscow to protect the autonomy of Republika Srpska entity within BiH, while consistently flirting with reviving the Milošević-era project of secession and/or annexation by Serbia (Mujanovic, 2019).

Dodik started his political career during the first multiparty elections in 1990 when he became a member of the parliament. At the time, he was a member of the Reformist Party and joined the newly formed Assembly of Republika Srpska just before the outbreak of the Bosnian war in 1992. Although Dodik served as SDS' delegate in the RS Assembly during the conflict, after the war, he began to establish a 'moderate' image, to appeal to international actors who ultimately supported his rise to power. In 1996, he founded the Party of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) to challenge the dominance of Radovan Karadžić's Serb Democratic Party (SDS). Soon after, Dodik was nominated for Prime Minister of RS, in spite of the fact that SNSD only had two seats in the RS Assembly. Over time, SNSD became stronger than its partners (Šedo, 2007, pp. 223–235). Even though Dodik's party lost the election to SDS in 2001, he reemerged as a viable option for Western political patrons due to his more moderate platform by the time of the political power shift in 2006, when the international community reverted political sovereignty back to BiH officials. Once elected, he reestablished his image again toward a strong nationalist rhetoric and social populism, combined with a cleverly packaged pro-EU stance.

His support for European and NATO integrations and social democratic values diminished over time. For Dodik, it became clear that it is more lucrative to be politically nationalist than moderate and cooperative and he gradually upgraded his rhetoric to fit his newly formed goals of consolidating his power within Republika Srpska and his own party (Hooper, 2015). After realizing that entities lost huge chunks of their decision-making power over time, and that further dismantling of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) by the Office of High Representative

<sup>4</sup>Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata (SNSD) was founded in 1996 following the cooperation of the Independent Members of Parliament Caucus in the National Assembly of RS (Klub nezavisnih poslanika u Narodnoj Skupštini Republike Srpske), which was in opposition to the SDS during the war (Tomić & Herceg, 1999, p. 268).

(OHR) and Bosniak political forces would inevitably lead to complete loss or suspension of power, Dodik took it upon himself to safeguard the DPA in hopes it would not only preserve RS as a separate entity, but that it would eventually allow it to gain enough political and institutional independence to secede from BiH. His appeal among the Serb electorate rose proportionately by antagonizing calls of the Bosniak leaders for RS' abolition as a 'product of genocide' (Clark, 2014, p. 104).

On the other hand, the dominant Croat nationalist party, the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ BiH), initially set its political success by ideologically emerging from and maintaining close ties with Croatia's HDZ and the late Croatian President Franjo Tuđman. The party developed as one of ethno-nationalist political options founded to accommodate societal divisions created before and during the war in BiH. Later on it continued to act to defend the interests of Bosnian Croats 'deprived of their own autonomous entity', weaving a narrative of their continued struggle to achieve equality in political representation.<sup>5</sup> With Zagreb's blessing, the HDZ BIH leadership openly advocated for improvement of relations both within the regional and European fora while constantly maintaining an eye toward carving out a similar degree of ethnic autonomy in BiH, as their Serb peers led by SNSD (Mujanovic, 2019).

After turbulent political developments in the first few years of post-Dayton BiH,<sup>6</sup> the idea of the third entity in BiH was clearly articulated in 2001 by HDZ's party president, Ante Jelavić, the Croat member of the BiH Presidency at the time. Once he called for a public boycott of the DPA, and expressed public disobedience toward national authorities and institutions of FBiH, Jelavić proclaimed a temporary 'self-government' (Grandits, 2016, p. 121). The High Representative at the time, Wolfgang Petritsch, removed Jelavić from all public posts for directly

<sup>5</sup> Variations in population size are in direct correlation with the inability of Bosnian Croats to influence the decision-making process as one of the country's three constituent peoples. This is closely linked to calls for establishing a third, 'Croat' entity. Variations in identity explain the establishment of the subnational entities and considerable differences between their internal designs. These variations, supported by those in the political landscape, explain the ethno-territorial compositions of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly. For more information, please see Sahadžić (2019, p. 69).

<sup>6</sup>The HDZ BIH leadership has been the target of multiple investigations and indictments by the ICTY for war crimes committed in Central Bosnia and Herzegovina (Subotić, 2016, p. 126).

violating the constitutional order of the Federation of BiH and of BiH by attempting to establish illegal parallel structures (Office of High Representative, 2001). HDZ BiH continued to pursue this goal, and in response, the OHR ordered the seizure of ‘Herzegovina Bank’ located in Mostar by soldiers of the international mission SFOR and froze the party’s financial resources (Hladky, 2005, p. 314). After a short period of readjustment, and the unsuccessful candidacy of Božo Ljubić for the party presidency of the HDZ BiH, Dragan Čović took on a more prominent position within the party in 2005 by becoming its chairman. Soon after, Ljubić left HDZ BiH and founded the Croatian Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ 1990) to counter Čović’s leadership. HDZ 1990 won fewer votes than the HDZ BiH led coalition in the 2006 elections, as Croat voters remained more lenient toward HDZ BiH and Čović’s stewardship (Šedo, 2007, p. 223). In time, he consolidated his power not only by hardening his position within the HDZ BiH hierarchy, but also through the Croat National Assembly (Hrvatski narodni sabor—HNS), a platform of political parties with Croat-based ethnic affiliation, formally registered as a non-governmental organization.<sup>7</sup>

Before taking over the party leadership, Čović, then acting as the Minister of Finance in the Government of the Federation of BiH, was indicted for demanding and accepting bribes, gifts or other forms of benefits from ‘Lijanović’ meat-industry companies. The state prosecutor’s indictment alleged for the issuance of unlawful instructions relating to the imposition of exemptions on taxes and levies on goods imported by ‘Lijanović’ companies, contrary to the laws of BiH and the Federation of BiH, thus securing unjust profits and business advantage in the market. The main proceedings commenced in October 2005. On November 17, 2006, the Court of BiH rendered its decision, finding Čović guilty of abuse of office and of official authority. He received a five-year prison sentence. However, the Appeals Court revoked the initial verdict on September 11, 2007 and ordered a new trial. In June 2008, Čović was freed of all charges due to a lack of jurisdiction of the Court of BiH in the matter (Court of BiH, 2008). He was acquitted of all charges in 2013 due to a statute of limitations. Since his revival in mainstream

<sup>7</sup>Registered at the Ministry of Justice of Bosnia and Herzegovina, no. RU-1635/14, officially represented by Dragan Čović, the association president.

**Table 2.1** The List of the Party Leaders for SNSD and HDZ BIH

<i>Parties and their Leaders</i>	<i>Start of the term in office</i>	<i>End of the term in office</i>
<i>SNSD</i>		
Milorad Dodik (party leader since 1996) <sup>a</sup>	10 March 1996 1 May 2002 28 June 2003 29 September 2007 8 October 2011	30 April 2002 27 June 2003 28 September 2007 7 October 2011 25 April 2015
<i>HDZ BIH</i>		
Davorin Perinović	18 August 1990	6 September 1990
Stjepan Kljujić	7 September 1990	2 February 1992
Milenko Brkić	15 March 1992	23 October 1992
Mate Boban	24 October 1992	9 June 1994
Dario Kordić	10 June 1994	2 December 1995
Božo Rajić	3 December 1995	17 May 1998
Ante Jelavić	18 May 1998	4 May 2002
Bariša Čolak	5 May 2002	4 June 2005
Dragan Čović	5 June 2005	Currently in office <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The First SNSD Assembly was held in Banja Luka on May 1, 2002, The Second SNSD Assembly was held in Banja Luka, on June 28, 2003, The Third SNSD Assembly was held in Banja Luka on September 29, 2007, The Fourth SNSD Assembly was held in Zvornik on October 8, 2011, and The Fifth SNSD Assembly was held in East Sarajevo on April 25, 2015

<sup>b</sup>Re-elected 3 times: May 12, 2007, May 14, 2011, and April 25, 2015

politics, he faced two other indictments before the Court of BiH, again for misuse of public funds and trading favors.

Table 2.1 outlines the party leadership positions both Čović and Dodik occupied in the past.

Aside from holding the most prominent party leadership positions, both Dodik and Čović have occupied prominent public posts. Dodik was Prime Minister of Republika Srpska from 1998 until November 2010 when he was elected to serve as President of Republika Srpska (for two terms), until November 2018, after which he was elected to the BiH Presidency from Republika Srpska. Čović served as Minister of Finances of the Federation BIH from 1998 until 2001, when he ran and won the Croat seat within the BiH Presidency (2002). In 2005, he was removed from the post by the OHR for abuse of power and his official position, after the Court of BiH confirmed the indictment of the State Prosecutor's Office. However, he was reelected to the same post in 2014 until 2018, when he lost his reelection to Željko Komšić.

Both Dodik and Čović have been at the forefront of their respective parties for over 15 years. Even though Dodik has served as the unchallenged leader of SNSD for almost a decade longer than Čović, they have both managed to strengthen their powers within the party structures quite efficiently. Both leaders became very close and worked together during the Prud negotiations on the constitutional reconstruction of BiH, in 2007 and 2008.<sup>8</sup> Since, both leaders have worked together relentlessly to create a destabilizing political atmosphere in BiH, with very few opportunities for inter-ethnic or 'supraethnic' identities to materialize. Dodik has continuously expressed his strong support for Čović's leadership and his struggle for establishing the 'third' Croat-dominated entity in BiH, but only on the territory of the Federation BiH.

### THE CHARACTER TRAITS OF MILORAD DODIK AND DRAGAN ČOVIĆ

Though democratic rule was conceived to restrain the influence of powerful individuals, party leaders have become dominant figures in shaping public life (Lobo & Curtice, 2015). In multiethnic states, when ethnic divisions are translated into ethnically based parties, politics become polarizing, and revolve around identities and competitive elections that spur ethnic mobilization (Moser, 2005, p. 108). There are two basic groups of contemporary party leaders recognized in the post-conflict political party system in BiH. The first group involves those that emerged as transformed socialist-communist politicians and slowly managed to adapt to a multiparty system in transition, habitually operating within the parties positions on the left side of the political spectrum, propagating civic and non-ethnic principles in politics. The second group consists either of former dissidents or new-fangled nationalists, occupying space in parties belonging to the right-wing political spectrum, advocating and actively fighting for collective ethnic-based representation and a society founded on such principles.

<sup>8</sup>There were several attempts to reconstruct and remodel the current constitutional set-up of BiH. Most notable ones are April Package in 2006, the Prud Agreement of 2008, and the Butmir Process of 2009. All attempts failed, and effectively reinforced the existing decision-making structures based on ethnic frameworks (Leydesdorff, 2011).

Although they both started their political careers in communist Yugoslavia as members or supporters of the Yugoslav Communist Party, Dodik and Čović belong to the second group, interest-driven nationalists seeking to maximize their own powers through advocating for ethnic-based collective rights. For both leaders, it has been easier to convert ethnic group loyalties into stable party loyalties than to create fresh party loyalties among the uncommitted majority of voters (cf. Birnir, 2007, p. 9).

There are two distinct features of the political party leadership styles of the two analyzed leaders: *celebritization* (Bartoszewicz, 2019) of both inner-party leadership and their own individual interpretation of politics and society that synthetically reflects the interests of their own constituents; *populocratic party and conservative public governance* (cf. Fieschi, 2019) founded on the ability to identify and mobilize party members around ideas of ethnic-based in-group identity combined with strong feelings of incongruity with post-Dayton BiH as a country and polity, and their respective party’s prerogative to protect and defend ‘its people’s’ ‘ethnic-based vulnerability’.

Both Dodik and Čović are extremely self-confident politicians who have repeatedly utilized wartime master-frames and inflammatory rhetoric in their public appearances. They managed to forge their leadership competencies around narratives that propagate a ‘culture of denial’ and relativize historical and court-established facts about the past, especially in relation to the 1992–1995 BiH war. Their leadership is conceived through promotion of inner-party unity and constant party membership enlargement based on strict respect for the established hierarchy and leader’s integrity. In an effort to consolidate their own power, each claims near exclusive ethnic legitimacy within their respective electorate, and then acts to prevent potential change that might jeopardize the fragile system supporting the interests of their corresponding ethnic group. They actively work on creating an image of socio-political *dysfunctionality* of the BiH multiethnic polity model in order to mobilize wider support for greater independence in the decision-making processes that would allow them both to maintain exclusive rule and establish leadership supremacy. Table 2.2 summarizes the two leaders’ personality traits.

### *Milorad Dodik*

During his first mandate (1996–2002), Dodik’s leadership style was flexible and open to reform, but he remained fairly cautious and reactive

**Table 2.2** The Character Traits of Milorad Dodik and Dragan Čović

	<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for Power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Milorad Dodik	First (1996–2002)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
	Second (2002–2007)	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
	Third (2007–2011)	High	High	Low	High	Medium	Medium
	Fourth (2011–2015)	High	High	Low	High	Low	Medium
	Fifth (2015–present)	High	High	Low	High	Low	Medium
Dragan Čović	First (2005–2007)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Second (2007–2011)	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
	Third (2011–2015)	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
	Fourth (2015–present)	High	Low	Low	High	Low	Low

toward political pressures. He was a member of the Assembly of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina and later became one of the political opposition leaders in Republika Srpska, openly criticizing Karadžić's SDS majority government. Dragan Kalinić, a member of the SDS's party leadership and the President of the RS National Assembly at the time, repeatedly portrayed Dodik as a 'conforming Serb ally' serving the interests of the International Community in their attempts to destabilize Republika Srpska (ONASA, 1997). Indeed, Dodik worked constantly to reaffirm his party leadership status, while simultaneously appearing cooperative and open for compromise with other political actors. After he was unexpectedly appointed as PM in the RS (1998), he began to strategically utilize available resources to strengthen its relations with the international community, especially the US government and USAID, and elected non-Serb political elites. He openly advocated property return to its pre-war owners, and called Bosniak and Croat refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes in RS. At the same time, he also actively worked on building inner-party structure and consolidating his power, and party's public disapproval toward persisting wartime narratives, nationalist and isolationist policies of previous RS governments. In only

one year, his party membership grew from 4900 to almost 22,000 members (Grebenar, 2016).

Dodik's second mandate as SNSD's leader (2002–2007) is characterized by his instinctive, somewhat hostile, and predominantly goal-oriented behavior to establish himself as the most powerful political actor in the RS. His policy orientation and approaches significantly changed. Dodik's earlier declared assertion of supporting BiH's aspiration to join the EU have been put in question on many occasions as he has frequently and openly rejected EU conditions, highlighting that Republika Srpska will only agree to and respect solutions for BiH problems imposed by the international community, while realizing that solutions would be almost impossible to reach on the domestic level due to the many existing decision deadlocks in the DPA (Burg, 1997). Dodik's nationalistic and anti-interventionist stances further solidified his self-confidence and leadership position within the party. His public influence grew stronger with his displays of disobedience and ignorance of all rules and norms he deemed counter-effective in his pursuit to stalemate decision-making processes related to the EU. He actively worked on strengthening visibility for irredentist or pro-Russian narratives. In essence, this has allowed him to easily and flexibly navigate the system and to pursue particularistic ethno-nationalist goals, which brought him more votes. Dodik continued to actively work on strengthening his power locally by defending entity's institutional capacities and positions within BiH. Later on, his public statements were charged with negative sentiments, vulgar language, and borderline hate speech toward nonconforming journalists and political opponents. This resulted in a further rise of SNSD's membership, stronger public support for SNSD and consolidation of power within the RS Assembly, as well as stronger inner-party support for Dodik's public appearances within an election cycle.

SNSD and Dodik's popularity peaked during the 2006 elections, owing greatly to its populist platform, which called for a referendum on the secession of RS entity from Bosnia and Herzegovina and invoked widespread sense of external threat among Serbs directed by Bosniak elites (Džananović & Karamehić, 2017, p. 266). The party gained a strong majority in the RS Assembly occupying all key positions in the RS government and in the BiH Council of Ministers. The SNSD leadership continued to spearhead obstructionist policies toward pending police and defense reforms in BiH. Within a couple of months, Dodik's public appearances gained wider popularity among the Serb electorate in RS

as he embodied his party stances by popularizing them through his personal nationalist and pragmatic political flexibility.

Dodik's polarizing and relentless public behavior continued in his third mandate (2007–2011). He maintained his steadily divisive, openly provocative and aggressive attitudes. Additionally, Dodik demonstrated his competence in shifting toward promoting publically destructive discourses in BiH, and reinforced his divisive narratives on the 'negative' role of the international community in BiH. RS level policies were designed to work for inner-group members and irritate the opposition, while BiH level policies were disintegrative and served the same purpose. Dodik and SNSD continued to use their position in both RS and BiH government structures as a strong veto player. Party members cemented their influence within the judiciary system, and slowly expanded patronage networks of followers and loyal voters. Consequently, the party had an exponential rise of its membership and gained even stronger public support.

Dodik's party-based and public leadership strategies were reinforced by his constant dogmatic and explicit politicization of post-conflict transitional justice initiatives and a reiteration of his predominantly negative positions toward the ICTY, along with his general characterization of it as 'dysfunctional and ineffective'. He cognitively built his image around arguments about the ICTY's imprinted patterns of inconsistent rulings against Bosnian Serb and Serbian leadership, and disproportionately favorable judgments for Bosniak and Croat wartime leaders. Dodik frequently used words such as 'terror' and 'falsification of history' to clarify his positions, and habitually equated them with the negative role the international community had in the post-conflict reconstruction of BiH. He publicly spoke about his intentions to counter mainstream narratives of the 'exclusive Bosniak victimhood' and Bosniak political leadership's attempts to 'hijack' the Srebrenica genocide to validate the existence of the Bosnian state. The tactic of 'relativization and equalization' helped Dodik maintain his 'genuine Serb' image, a person who belongs with his people, a person close to his own electorate. His statements clearly reflected a wider context of the societal ideology based on the notion that reconciliation will come with numerical proportions of the established victims or through everyone's shared guilt for events that happened during the war. Unlike the government of Serbia, which issued two vaguely phrased formal apologies for their involvement in the past atrocities in BiH, Dodik established the Centre for the Investigation

of War of Republika Srpska in 2008. He also defended the former RS President Radovan Karadžić ahead of ICTY sentencing hearing, and opened a student dormitory in Pale named after him in order to incite further reactions and to solidify his image.

In short, Dodik intentionally tried to establish a narrative of Republika Srpska as a 'state' and his voters' support increased as this narrative gained a foothold within the RS. He backed this up with frequent pleas for Serbian Government support for the Bosnian Serb entity, which he repaid by repeatedly condemning and opposing the review of the ICJ ruling against Serbia. Dodik and the SNSD led the Government of Republika Srpska by following the lead of the government in Serbia, regardless of who was in office. Among other things they promoted international cooperation in various areas, which usually contain an 'exclusivity clause', noting it did not spill over to official institutions of BiH as Dodik and SNSD leadership were interested in containing this within ethno-national cooperation frames, and thus, under their control (Hasić & Dedić, 2019).

His third mandate (2011–2015) was equally inconsistent and opportunistic. He used subversive and systematic political attacks on the systems and against his political opponents, along with multiple threats of referenda. His homogenously adverse political action was aimed at political fragmentation of the system and BiH as a state. He combined this with a stronger party propagation of advanced RS-Serbian and RS-Russian relations. Dodik worked to create an authoritarian type of rule in RS and further strengthened his position locally. SNSD was not willing to compromise and pushed for strong destructive policies in BiH.

In spite of Dodik's exhaustive efforts to concentrate power in his hands, SNSD ultimately lost its position at state-level government and parliament, as well as its position in the BiH Presidency (in the 2014 elections), while maintaining a strong local presence in RS and in most Serb-dominated local communities throughout the country. To mitigate declining voter support, Dodik tightened his control of the public broadcasting service of Republika Srpska (RTS). In a highly concentrated political setting, he worked in tandem with local institutions to establish strong monolithic self-serving narratives of the past. He employed a similar strategy during the 2014 protests, when he pre-emptively undermined the influence of opposing narratives advocating for change, mainly by 'absorbing, reshaping, and bouncing back the narrative of how the initial protests in the FBiH were unfolding to the

population in the RS, thus reinforcing ethno-national political narratives and stoking divisions' (Hasić & Karabegović, 2018, p. 8). Dodik effectively controlled the editorial board of the Radio Television of Republika Srpska and influenced them not to cover the protests in the rest of BiH.<sup>9</sup> He used the same approach in the most recent case of the 'Justice for David' protests and campaign. His strategy is simple. Its essence is to redirect focus on ethno-identity issues to distract voters from multiple high-level corruption cases including the plunder of several public companies.

His authority and leadership within SNSD at the last party congress (2015) was unchallenged, despite diminishing public support and many emerging political crises in RS. Dodik won the party elections with his antagonistic and destructive public statements of 'untouchable' leader, the only person that can confront the domestic political changes and foreign interventions. Dodik took extra steps in promoting his irredentist politics in BiH and in Serbia, where he constantly sought support and validation of his policy approaches. As a result, the US government imposed strong sanctions against Dodik, which enable US authorities to block him to access any of his property or assets under US jurisdiction (Richman, 2018). In spite of the sanctions, SNSD managed to maintain control and the decision-making leverage over almost all key issues in RS (i.e. referendum on Day of RS) and some important ones in the state-level structures (i.e. EU coordination mechanism). Party leadership simultaneously worked intensely to smear the reputation and work of the opposition parties, PDP and SDS, that were in the government coalition on the national level.

One of the most prominent recent examples of Dodik's obstructionist approach in politics is the activation of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) for BiH's NATO accession. In spite of the fact that it has been identified as one of the main foreign policy goals of BiH in the Law on Defense and the National Strategy on Foreign Policy 2018–2023, Dodik scored many points on frequent politicization of the matter and blocked its activation. He accused the NATO leadership of interfering in BiH's

<sup>9</sup>For example, RTRS: 'Dodik za RTRS: Protesti u FBiH politički motivisani' (Dodik for RTRS: Protests in FBiH are politically motivated), <http://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=106894> and 'Dodik za RTRS: Važno je da Srpska sacuva stabilnost' (Dodik for RTRS: It is important for Srpska to maintain its stability), <http://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=106224>.

internal matters. Additionally, he repeatedly threatened to declare a referendum on accession to NATO<sup>10</sup> and he has persisted in resisting the fulfillment of certain conditions attached to obtaining NATO membership status, under the excuse that as long as Serbia remains neutral, Republika Srpska will follow its lead and thus will not allow BiH to become a full member of the Alliance. This bypasses the formal Decision his party colleague and former member of the BiH Presidency Nebojša Radmanović signed in 2009. In addition, he has repeatedly argued that BiH’s participation in international military and peace missions represents a disproportionate cost within the existing budget without any tangible benefits. Such criticism gives Dodik enough fuel to indirectly challenge the continuous enactment of the national foreign policy role of BiH as an international security contributor (Domi & Petrić, 2019).

### *Dragan Čović*

After he was removed from his position as a Member of the BiH Presidency by the Office of High Representative after being indicted with severe criminal charges, Čović began his first mandate as president of HDZ BiH (2005–2007) with firm and consistent managerial policies aimed to establish a strong party-leadership hierarchy. Čović’s communication style was confident, relatively flexible and oriented toward inner-group alliance, affirming HDZ BiH as the only legitimate representation and the integrative tissue of Bosnian Croats in BiH.

Čović’s approach to party developments, combined with growing external pressures, led to HDZ’s political split in 2006. A new party, HDZ 1990 was registered, with the goal of bringing HDZ’s core values of ‘tradition and Croat identity’ back into the political sphere. In spite of these two heavy setbacks, Čović managed to maintain political and policy cohesion among those who decided to remain in HDZ BiH and follow his leadership and continued to be influential among the Croat electorate in all Croat-dominated areas of the Federation entity.

<sup>10</sup>Under Dodik’s patronage, the Assembly of Republika Srpska approved the referendum on the Bosnian State Court in April 2011, which was interpreted by many as a direct attack on the fragile state institutions. A similar thing happened with the referendum in September 2016, when Dodik used his position to mobilize representatives in RS institutions and organized a referendum on RS national day (January 9), thus ignoring the decision of the Constitutional Court of BiH that declared the celebration of this day unconstitutional.

Despite efforts to preserve the image of strong unity and coherence, HDZ's candidate for the Croat member of the BiH Presidency, Ivo Miro Jović, lost the election to Željko Komšić, a Bosnian Croat candidate elected by a majority of Bosniak votes, and considered illegitimate by HDZ and who could not contain the 'ethnic hysteria' resulting from Komšić's victory. Čović worked to establish himself as the dominant and undisputed Croat 'ethnic crusader', with strong roots in family and Christian values, who would unify the party leadership and membership under common ethnic goals. HDZ BiH resisted external pressures and preserved its dominance among the Croat voters, in spite of Čović's corruption scandals and ongoing trial, HDZ's 'political schism', and Komšić's election victory (2006). The party continued to emphasize its leader's outsider appeal, his innocence, and his commitment to fighting corruption.

After he had been reelected for his second mandate as HDZ BIH's President (2007–2011), Dragan Čović carefully led a campaign to sustain his political influence. With diminished capacities in FBIH and national government bodies, and with no significant external support from Croatia, HDZ BiH and Čović fought to establish a narrative of subjugation and unequal treatment of Croats in BiH to further unify their electorate in Croat majority cantons. Such populist rhetoric helped HDZ BiH to unify, but Čović was careful in his public engagements, especially in ongoing reform negotiations and EU-NATO integrations process.

His approach suggested a pragmatic and strong orientation toward particular political results. He kept warning the general public and his electorate of the unjust election system, and aimed to generate more support for his campaign. HDZ BiH leadership also attempted to spread out and fuse Čović's power within Croatian National Assembly (HNS), and their engagement was focused primarily on carefully selected micro locations, with few exceptions of foreign outreach toward Croatian PM Ivo Sanader and his HDZ-led government.

After Komšić won his second mandate as the Croat member of the BiH Presidency (2010), HDZ BiH and Čović reverted to polarizing and strictly ethnic homogenization of the Croat electorate under 'one legitimate' party by continuing to delegitimize Komšić as a genuine Croat candidate. Čović's third mandate as party's president (2011–2015) was marked by low competence and integrity, as well as his strong push for a 'third entity', this time without significant direct support from Croatia,

whose government was focused on completing its EU accession process. The HDZ BiH leadership managed to win the majority of Croat ethnic votes, and Vjekoslav Bevanda became the Chairman of the BiH Council of Ministers (by ethnic rotation). Čović used this opportunity for frequent party visits and exchanges with the leadership of Croatia’s HDZ, and to issue joint statements on reform ed political arrangements in BiH. He actively lobbied for external pressure of the Sarajevo government to instigate reforms that would advance the current status of Croats in BiH. Such party politics were inconsistent with Čović’s public advocacy for more independent Bosnian foreign policy governance (Andjelić, 2019). Čović’s newly forged leadership style was conceived by creating an image of socio-political sustainability and overall *dysfunctionality* of the current BiH multiethnic polity model. He dynamically worked to mobilize wider political support of Croatian government with the intention of accumulating greater autonomy and power in the decision-making processes within party structures and in the public sphere, to maintain exclusive rule and establish leadership supremacy.

Čović’s present mandate, beginning in 2015, was shaped by a more relaxed political atmosphere. In the 2014 general elections, he was elected as the Croat member of the BiH Presidency as Komšić was unable to run for the same post for the third time in a row. As a member of the Presidency, he continued to undermine Komšić and other civic-oriented political campaigns in BiH and insisted on the importance of ethnic representation. He continued to build on the narrative of the need to instigate constitutional changes that would allow Croats to have their own entity.

In the BiH Presidency, Čović reformulated parts of his policy approach and began strengthening his party leadership coherence by presenting EU accession as a relatively consistent policy orientation aimed at the overall stabilization of BiH. He steadily, but qualitatively weakly, called for consensus-seeking processes, and he wanted to depict his propensity toward inter-ethnic cooperation on this matter. However, his conception of BiH’s integration in the EU was only considered as realistic through the ‘Croatian gates’, i.e. allowing Bosnia’s western neighbor to facilitate the entire process according to its own guidance. In Čović’s view, this pathway undeniably implies several improvements of the current institutional position of Croats in BiH, primarily through changes of the Election Law that would boost equal representation, and then through clear positioning of Croat political agents within the BiH

administrative and political system (Čović, 2017). Čović occasionally prioritized distinctly different policies from those of the Croatian government, a NATO and EU member, that help him leverage his own position in BiH, such as advocating for constitutional (institutional) status for Croats in BiH, even if that would essentially mean blocking the country's Euro-Atlantic progress (Domi & Petrić, 2019).

Čović's leadership record in the past two mandates was tarnished by his public support of convicted for war criminals, including his former party colleagues Dario Kordić and Slobodan Praljak, both military commanders of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO). Even though Čović considered his public support an act of strong leadership promoting his vision of societal reconciliation rather than conforming to people he claims to legitimately represent, just like Dodik, he implicitly labels the ICTY's role as an institution rendering selective justice, at the expense of Croats. His persona and 'reformed moderate leadership style' help to attract voters, and thus his gesture to meet Kordić upon his release from prison was seen as a sign of courage and strong leadership. Nonetheless, Čović still openly calls for systematic and just punishments for all perpetrators of all ethnic groups, just like Milorad Dodik, which can be rationally construed as an attempt to neutralize the narrative of overblown Croat involvement in mass atrocities of the past.

## ANALYSIS OF CONSEQUENCES

Dodik and Čović's personal traits had a vast impact on the electoral performance, inner-party cohesion and in some ways the party memberships, as outlined in Table 2.3.

While welfare, EU, or NATO accession processes were at the forefront of the election discourses among their own ethnic electorates, Dodik's and Čović's aggressive nationalism, combined with fluctuating rhetoric on securitization of ethnic issues, dominated their election campaigns. Both leaders tended to portray themselves as 'Europhiles' publicly while simultaneously sidelining the country's overall progress and developing parallel relations with Russia, and neighboring countries, which grant them flexibility to pick and choose which aspects of EU integration to pursue. They called 'for an entity-level EU agenda separate from the Bosnia and Herzegovina state', due to the perceived lack of capacity of the central state to function as a country (Čepo, 2019).

**Table 2.3** The consequences of Dodik’s and Čović leadership styles for their parties

	<i>Term in office</i>	<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Milorad Dodik	First (1996–2002)			
	Second (2002–2007)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Third (2007–2011)	Lower	Higher	Higher
	Fourth (2011–2015)	Lower	Higher	Higher
	Fifth (2015–present)	Lower	Higher	Higher
Dragan Čović	First (2005–2007)	Lower	Lower	No effect
	Second (2007–2011)	Higher	Lower	Higher
	Third (2011–2015)	Lower	Higher	Higher
	Fourth (2015–present)	Higher	Higher	Higher

Since BiH is not a candidate country and has yet to start accession negotiations, the EU only enforces and motivates transformative changes in BiH but does not have the capacities or political will to directly do so. This happens mainly because the perceived readiness of local leaders in BiH toward accepting EU norms is dependent on sensitivities to historical and present domestic power imbalances. That is the reason why Dodik and Čović openly come into conflict in how best to conceptualize how international and EU affairs should be dealt with. This is further amplified by their diverging and inconsistently evolving perceptions of international norms from which they benefit as a result of these blurred lines and ‘flexibility’. Such an inability to reach a compromise on preset questions helps them to avoid full domestication of international norms, and at the same time protects their political integrity since ‘they’ tentatively ‘accept’ the framework, but do not play by the rules (Hasić & Dedić, 2019). A similar pattern of strengthening their own electoral performance (Fig. 2.1) can be seen through consolidation of foreign policy relations toward governments in Belgrade and Zagreb respectively.

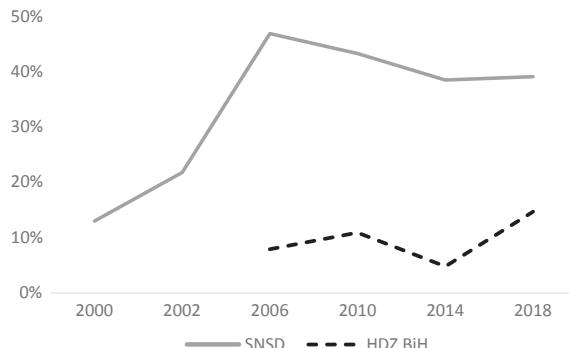


Fig. 2.1 The electoral performance of SNSD and HDZ BIH

While the official government in Sarajevo has intensified, deepened, and expanded bilateral relations and cooperation with the neighboring states, as well as with its extended neighbors Albania and North Macedonia, Dodik and Čović have actively worked to undermine the sovereignty of the Bosnian state.

On the other hand, the consistency in and toward developing strong party cohesion within their respective parties by Dodik and Čović is mainly characterized by a monocratic principle of political action—a firm control of party structure and influence on governmental activity. Both leaders exercise these powers by establishing and controlling organizational structures, and by appointing loyal members to executive offices, thus directing party-friendly behavior in representative bodies. Another feature of their horizontally concentrated power configuration is the personalization of party politics aligned with centralized internal party decision-making frameworks, which encourages voters to associate the entire party stance with their respective personalities.<sup>11</sup> Both leaders are heavily involved in micro-managing the party organization, outlining its key political strategies and reforms that reaffirm their own positions, and personally maintaining relations with the general public. They articulate their views in media reports as if these are *a priori* party-approved. Thus their messages are crafted to appeal to large masses, and the clear and

<sup>11</sup>SNSD added ‘Milorad Dodik’ or ‘Dodik’ to its public name-tags and displays on all recent elections and all social media, so that voters could identify the party with its leader.

unambiguous vocalization of their ethnic-based protectionist policies is designed to bring the voters 'closer to their leader's vision', while concrete policies and the party's issue orientations remain secondary.

The outlined strategies are further enhanced by exerting high levels of control over editorial politics in public broadcasting, and utilizing public structures and resources for private ends or trading favors, locally known as *štela*. The two leaders have successfully crafted their party membership growth rates by creating and expanding 'patronage networks' with a wide web of vulnerable followers. They encourage fragmentation of Bosnian society along ethnic lines, and the absence or weakness of state institutions, and a lack of control 'from above' or 'from below' have all contributed to full institutionalization of this process (Meyer, 2006; Paris & Sisk, 2009). Over time, both leaders have successfully structured their respective parties by subordinating party membership and tying loyalty to party-sponsored jobs at all levels of government. The established connections are in turn used to manipulate how public money and influence are allocated. As these networks have grown and developed over the past two decades, public permits for construction, or even to start a company without the political blessing from loyal party members occupying various public service posts has become near impossible. As a result of the threat losing job security, citizens routinely vote for the same parties because they know they control jobs and level of access to public services, and thus help to maintain the faulty status quo (Hooper, 2015). In order to mold, further solidify, and sustain their ideological 'warrior-leader' images within the party and in the public, both Dodik and Čović have also used this patronage model to develop strong relations with various media outlets that support their ethno-nationalist narratives. Each deems this as a politically 'efficient strategy', as it helps them to 'reinvent' new forms of keeping the nationalism in the public and among party leadership.

## CONCLUSION

Most political parties within the segmented BiH party system operate on ethnic premises. The post-conflict transformation of the system contributed to a reaffirmation of hybrid nationalist-charged formations. As a result, a large number of smaller parties has emerged from pressure by the international community, especially in the second half of the 1990s. With the decline of partisan loyalties and distinct party platforms

becoming less relevant for the voters, the strongest political parties in both BiH entities diverged completely from one another. Hence, parties inherently worked on sustaining themselves by increasing their electoral performance and membership, and by encouraging strong leadership that promotes inner structure and functionality.

This system has created space for the emergence of inner-party autocratic leadership structures and strong party leaders. This chapter has analyzed Dodik (SNSD) and Čović (HDZ BiH) who are representative of this. By design, their *modi operandi* are reductionist and appeal to their constituents. They have achieved and strengthened their respective party leadership through successful public outputs, adapting and balancing policies, and weakening their opposition for over 15 years, while heavily micro-managing the party organization and functions. Moreover, they have created a network of ‘vulnerable followers’, party loyal masses employed in public institutions through party-based politics of informality, locally known as *štela*. As a result, their predominantly ethnic electorates identify both party leaders as authentic ethnic group members, and as trustworthy and capable of delivering multiple benefits to their ethnic electorates. This only solidifies their control on the respective party and ultimately, power within the country.

The analyzed empirical examples indicate their leadership standing remains stable. Their evolving *alliance* is designed to achieve their own inner-party cohesion and outer politically disintegrative goals. They have managed to achieve this by firstly establishing relatively high levels of leadership autonomy and decision-making power within their parties and absorbing much of the party’s political marketing to their own personal advantages. Both are perfectly aware of the shrinking partisanship trends, and exponential crude growth of personalized, candidate-centered, leadership styles among their electorate. This is why they are willing to flexibly bypass strengthening party leadership based on long-term campaign strategies or instill needed inner organizational reforms.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# The Fireman's Ball in Bulgaria? A Comparison Between Sergey Stanishev and Boyko Borisov

*Petar Bankov*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of a democratic regime three decades ago Bulgarian politics remain an arena of fierce competition between parties on the center-left and center-right. This was particularly pronounced during the 1990s, when a 'bipolar model' (*drupolynsen model*), a two-and-a-half party system, involving the center-left Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), direct successor of the communist party, and the center-right Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), a loose coalition of organizations of the democratic opposition. The end of the bipolar model came by the turn of the century when parties on the political center, particularly the centrist liberal National Movement for Stability and Progress (NDSV), and on the fringes, in the face of the radical right Ataka, squeezed out

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the two major poles. Yet the past decade saw a moderate return to bipolarity: while on the left, BSP retained its position of fundamental political force, the political and organizational disintegration of SDS and the electoral demise of NDSV saw the rise of the populist conservative Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) as the main party on the center-right.

Party leaders were particularly influential for both the downfall of the bipolar model and its moderate return. Existing studies emphasize their instrumental role in the rise of populism and personalization of Bulgarian politics (Cristova, 2010; Ghodsee, 2008; Gurov & Zankina, 2013) that replaced the clear-cut policy-based divide of the bipolar model with questions of competency and pace of reform implementation or in the fight against organized crime and corruption (Zankina, 2015, p. 10). While such a perspective signals the potentially vital contribution of party leaders to the electoral fortunes of Bulgarian political parties, it rather neglects their relationship with their party members. Such a relationship is more than important given that Bulgaria has one of the highest party memberships as a percentage of the electorate in Central and Eastern Europe (van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012, p. 28). This, therefore, requires a study on the ways the Bulgarian party leaders shaped not only the electoral performance of their parties, but also their internal party dynamics.

This chapter focuses on two persons that were central in the return to bipolarity in the past decade: the leader of BSP, Sergey Stanishev (2001–2014), and his counterpart from GERB, Boyko Borisov (2010 onwards). As will be seen in this chapter, their six character traits generally account for the electoral fortunes of their parties, and the levels of internal party cohesion and party membership. The two cases show that the more centralized the party is around its leader, the more dependent the consequences are on the leader's character traits. This suggests that the ability to step back and share party authority can also have positive consequences for political parties. The structure of this chapter is as follows: the following section will look into Stanishev's and Borisov's personal backgrounds and political rise to their respective party leaderships. The third section moves onto their leadership terms by evaluating the changes of their six character traits and their sources. The fourth section focuses on the consequences of these changes on GERB and BSP. Finally, a conclusion summarizes the main findings and theoretical implications of this chapter.

## HISTORY OF STANISHEV AND BORISOV

The personal and political origins of the two leaders could not be more different. Stanishev was born in 1966 in Kherson (USSR, nowadays Ukraine), the younger son of a Sofia University professor and a Secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP) in charge of the party international relations. Stanishev followed the professional path of his parents, graduating in History from the Moscow State University, and after a short stint as a journalist, in 1995 he began working at the Foreign Policy department of BSP. A year later he became its head, signaling his stellar rise through the party ranks. In 2000 he was elected by the party congress as a member of the BSP Executive Bureau (former Politburo), taking the position his father once had in BKP—secretary for international affairs. The following year he became an MP at the Bulgarian parliament. In November 2001 the then BSP leader, Georgi Parvanov, won the presidential elections and had to resign from any party posts. At an extraordinary session of the party congress, held in December 2001, Stanishev was elected as his replacement, sweeping off any competition due to Parvanov's personal endorsement of his candidacy (Marinov, 2001).

Stanishev became leader at an important juncture of the party's history. During the 1990s BSP went through a rather indecisive transformation process, where it aimed to simultaneously maintain its existing social base as communist successor and to broaden its electoral appeal. The internal party factions made a significant contribution to this indecisiveness. At Stanishev's arrival in the mid-1990s, the party was split into three major groupings: a social democratic wing demanding a rapid break with the authoritarian past and transformation into a social democratic party; a centrist reformer wing that sought a middle-of-the-road solution that combined the ideas of left socialism and Marxism with those of social democracy; a neo-communist wing that criticized the authoritarian past of the party from a Marxist–Leninist perspective (Karasimeonov, 2010, p. 80). Their infighting, especially surrounding the debates over the new party program, led to a compromise solution in 1994, in which BSP declared itself as a 'modern left party of democratic socialism', paying dues simultaneously to social democracy, socialism, and communism (Karasimeonov, 2010, p. 221).

In 1994 the party officially returned to power, being led by the centrist reformer, Zhan Videnov. His attempt to postpone the privatization of state enterprises, coupled with a highly liberalized monetary and banking

policy led in 1996 to a major economic crisis in Bulgaria that brought down his government (Bideleux & Jeffries, 2007, pp. 103–108). This was not only a major blow to his wing, but, more importantly, for any further attempts at maintaining the existing indecisive stance. Correspondingly, BSP elected Georgi Parvanov who embarked on a major reform effort to move BSP into a social democratic direction. Through his successful presidential bid in 2001, he laid the ground for this. Particularly telling in this respect was the radical reversal of the BSP position from opposing toward supporting NATO membership in 2000, just a couple of years after leading major anti-war protests against the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia. In such a context, Stanishev had the task of completing the transformation of the party and bringing it back to power.

Stanishev seemed the right person for the job given his consensus appeal within the party. On the one hand, his personal background—his close affiliation with BKP due to his father and his education in Russia—was an important factor among the more traditionalist party members and voters in giving him an initial credit of trust. On the other hand, his close affiliation with the social democratic wing of the party, his short research visit at the London School of Economics in 1999–2000, and close contacts with the Socialist International and the Party of European Socialists, due to his long-standing work as BSP international secretary, highlighted his reformist credentials, and created the image of a modern, open-minded leader. Yet his marginal work experience outside of the party, his close links to Parvanov, and his youth<sup>1</sup> were seen as a disadvantage, prompting doubts of his abilities to handle the job (Mandzhukov, 2001). As will be seen in the following section, he grew into his leadership, evident in noticeable changes in his personal traits.

Borisov was a clear opposite to Stanishev in both his personal background and path to party leadership. Born in 1959 in Bankya, a small town near Sofia, he comes from a working-class family of a primary school teacher and an officer at the Sofia police department. Borisov graduated as a firefighter from the national police academy in 1982 and worked at the Sofia police department until 1991. After the collapse of the authoritarian communist regime he entered the security business, founding his own company, Ippon, which grew by the turn of the century into one of the biggest providers of protection services in Bulgaria, being responsible for the personal security of, among others,

<sup>1</sup> He was 35 when he became party leader.

the former communist leader Todor Zhivkov and the former Bulgarian king Simeon Sakskoburggotski (Aleksandrova, 2018). During that period he was also closely affiliated with one of the major organized crime groups in Bulgaria, SIK, having established joint companies with some of its leaders (Lazarov, 2013).

Borisov came somewhat surprisingly into politics. In 2001 he was appointed by the NDSV-led centrist government as a Chief Secretary of the Interior Ministry, the highest non-political post in the law-enforcement system. Occupying the post until 2005, he quickly developed a recognizable and highly publicized image of a tough, straight-talking policeman with a clear anti-system rhetoric, epitomized by his catchphrase: 'We catch them [the criminals], but they [the judicial courts] set them free'. In 2005 Borisov was elected as a NDSV deputy in the Bulgarian parliament, but he never took the post (Darik Radio, 2017), opting instead to stand as an independent candidate for Sofia mayor in the by-elections later that year, which he won comfortably (Darik Radio, 2017). Under his new position Borisov resumed his anti-system talk, directed mainly against the Bulgarian political system, entering into regular well-publicized conflicts with the BSP-led center-left coalition. His political rise in the mid-2000s could not be more suitable for the Bulgarian center-right. While SDS took power after the fall of Videnov's government in 1997, the party pursued successfully a policy of rapid reforms that stabilized the Bulgarian economy and oriented the country clearly westwards, aiming toward EU and NATO membership. Yet the regular corruption scandals and somewhat authoritarian style of governance of pushing reforms through despite major public concerns led to the electoral demise of SDS in the 2001 parliamentary elections (Bideleux & Jeffries, 2007, pp. 108–111) and its split shortly afterwards. Being squeezed out from the center (NDSV) and the fringes (Ataka), there was a clear demand for a Bulgarian center-right party that could replace the several minor SDS offshoots by providing clear support for a market economy and reaffirming pro-Western attitudes among the center-right electorate (Karasimeonov, 2010, p. 153). In this context, as seen in Table 3.1 that contains all party leaders of the two parties since 1990, the period since mid-2005 marks Borisov's dominance in the Bulgarian center-right given his omnipresence in the GERB leadership since its inception.

Borisov played a pivotal role in filling the existing gap in the Bulgarian center-right, as he paved the way toward an organization that addresses

**Table 3.1** The list of the party leaders of BSP and GERB (1990–2018)

<i>Parties and their leaders</i>	<i>Start of the term in office</i>	<i>End of the term in office</i>
<i>Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)</i>		
Aleksandar Lilov	30 January 1990	25 September 1990
	26 September 1990	19 December 1991
Zhan Videnov	20 December 1991	5 June 1994
	6 June 1994	23 December 1996
Georgi Parvanov	24 December 1996	4 May 1998
	5 May 1998	7 May 2000
	8 May 2000	15 December 2001
Sergey Stanshev	16 December 2001	9 June 2002
	10 June 2002	5 December 2005
	6 December 2005	22 November 2008
	23 November 2008	19 May 2012
	20 May 2012	27 July 2014
Mihail Mikov	28 July 2014	8 May 2016
Korneliya Ninova	9 May 2016	Nowadays
<i>Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)</i>		
Tsvetan Tsvetanov	3 December 2006	10 January 2010
<i>Boyko Borisov was referred to as ‘informal leader of GERB’ during Tsvetanov’s term</i>		
Boyko Borisov	11 January 2010	16 February 2014
	17 February 2014	26 November 2017
	27 November 2017	Nowadays

the popular demand in this respect. Using his personal popularity and independent status, in July 2006 Borisov established an informal group of independent mayors, named Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), that was transformed into a party with the same name by the end of the year. GERB may seem ideologically amorphous from the outside (Smilov, 2008, p. 19), but it successfully blended a clear conservative profile with pro-European positions and anti-establishment appeal (Karasimeonov, 2010, pp. 173–174), thus fitting to a large extent Borisov’s ideological views and communication style. While GERB emerged around Borisov, the party elected as first leader his right-hand man, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, given that Borisov was ineligible to take party posts during his mayoral term. Only after GERB formed a minority government in 2009 did Tsvetanov step down in Borisov’s favor. However, even during Tsvetanov’s tenure Borisov was regularly referred to as the ‘informal leader of GERB’ by the Bulgarian media in recognition of his central role in the party.

## THE CHARACTER TRAITS OF STANISHEV AND BORISOV

Table 3.2 contains the assessment of the character traits of the two leaders, elaborated in this section. Stanishev's first term as party leader (2001–2002) lasted a few months, but it was important for his confirmation as a central figure in BSP. While he clearly declared the desire of the party to return to power, he lacked the confidence to decisively criticize the NDSV-led centrist coalition, evident in his rather ambiguous position on the participation of two BSP members as technocratic ministers in it (Marinov, 2002b). This suggests a lack of competence in doing the job. In such a context, he was not much in need of power in this initial period given that up until the regular party congress, he mainly balanced out the different party wings. A sign of this was his decision to keep the majority of the existing executive bureau. What secured his position within the party was his external image. The party was still perceived by the public as an old-fashioned and unreformed organization, given its recent legacy of government failure and opposition to the Euro-Atlantic orientation of Bulgaria.

Yet Stanishev's clear statements in favor of a limited state involvement in the economy and more outspoken support for EU and NATO membership provided him initially with external integrity (Daynov, 2010). More importantly these positions were also a sign of the ideological flexibility of the new leader, open to suggestions not only from within, but also from outside the party. Given his presence in the party executive even prior his rise to party leader, Stanishev was well aware of the internal situation, evident in his speech at the 2002 party congress, where he highlighted the need for party unity and improving party activity of the sub-national party structures (Stanishev, 2002). BSP itself seemed well prepared for this: end of faction struggles seemed in sight given that the majority of the neo-communist wing left the party in the spring of 2002 to join a minuscule communist party (Marinov, 2002a).

During his second term (2002–2005) Stanishev showed clear signs of growing out of Parvanov's shadow and to develop a more independent leadership style. His initial indecisiveness was replaced by a clear opposition style, evident in his regular calls for votes of no confidence against the government and staunch opposition to the Bulgarian military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan (Angarev, 2004). More importantly, since the beginning of this term, Stanishev increased his influence in the party executive: while some of his main political opponents, such as

**Table 3.2** The character traits of Sergey Stanishev and Boyko Borisov

	<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Sergey Stanishev	First (2001–2002)	Medium	Low	High	Low	Medium	High
	Second (2002–2005)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Third (2005–2008)	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Fourth (2008–2012)	Medium	High	Medium	High	Low	Medium
	Fifth (2012–2014)	Medium	High	Low	High	Low	Medium
	First (2010–2014)	Medium	Medium	High	High	High	Low
Boyko Borisov	Second (2014–2017)	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Third (2017–)	High	High	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium

Rumen Ovcharov and Rumen Petkov, remained in the executive bureau, Stanishev replaced almost half of it with new faces as part of his policy of promoting young party talent. These changes brought major electoral fruits: following an improved performance in the 2003 local elections, in 2005 BSP won the plurality on the parliamentary elections and returned to power as the major coalition partner in a three-way center-left coalition (also known as the 'triple coalition'), comprised of BSP, NDSV and the representatives of the Turkish minority, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), with Stanishev becoming Prime Minister.

Despite this clear improvement of his character traits and its positive results, Stanishev also faced significant challenges that questioned his leadership abilities. The most noticeable of these occurred in early 2004, when an Iraqi newspaper revealed that BSP was among foreign organizations that obtained oil barrels from Saddam Hussein's regime in exchange for regime support. While Stanishev's name or those of his close circle were not involved, his reaction to the scandal was more than questionable, as a rapid internal party investigation threw the blame on a former party MP affiliated with Georgi Parvanov (Mandzhukov & Nikolov, 2004). While this episode reveals Stanishev's improved leadership competence in his decisive reaction to the scandal, it rather questioned the political trustworthiness he established during his first term. Furthermore, his grown position within the party ranks also questioned his flexibility and cognitive complexity. The integration of the party in worldwide and European social democratic networks provided Stanishev with enough confidence to declare his desire for a new, social democratic program of BSP (Stanishev, 2005). Yet he also seemed to lose his touch with the party, as his 2005 congress report, for example, dealt mainly with government policy and devoted very limited space to party matters (Stanishev, 2005).

Such a turn away from the party was clear during Stanishev's third term (2005–2008), marked by his political zenith as Prime Minister and dominant party leader. His self-confidence remained high, as for the first time he was re-elected unopposed as party president. More importantly, Stanishev proved himself as an experienced politician, successfully navigating the triple coalition throughout a complete term, something that only he, Ivan Kostov (SDS, 1997–2001) and Simeon Sakskoburggotski (NDSV, 2001–2005) succeeded to do in the Bulgarian post-communist history. Despite these positives, this term was not without its challenges. Firstly, Stanishev's political integrity suffered a major blow. While he was genuine in his desire

to successfully ensure Bulgaria's EU accession, his government was marred by regular corruption scandals, leading to the introduction of an EU monitoring system over the state efforts to implement judicial reform and to fight organized crime, and the freezing of a large portions of EU accession funding. Despite these scandals, Stanishev refrained from resigning, even showing clear contempt to any such calls, epitomized in his referral to opposition leaders as 'buffoons' (Dachkov, 2008). In doing so, he projected an image of a person, interested in holding onto power rather than taking responsibility for his government record.

Secondly, his strengthened positions led to a loss of intra-party cohesion. Stanishev's executive domination in BSP allowed him to change fundamentally the party program and rulebook, completed on the 2008 party congress. The new party program emphasized the social democratic catch-all profile of BSP, whereas the party rulebook aimed at increased centralization (Karasimeonov, 2010, p. 222). While such internal changes were generally supported by the party, there were also noticeable voices of discontent. For example, the left-wing opposition to the new program led to the creation of an organized radical left faction within the party, the Alliance of Left Socialists (Dnevnik.bg, 2006), and a minor party split, as some left socialists chose to leave the party and form a new radical left party. Further discontent came from the remnants of the centrist reformist wing that disagreed with Stanishev's liberal policies as Prime Minister that saw the introduction of a flat tax, for example. Symbolic in this respect was the decision of the previous BSP prime minister, Zhan Videnov, to leave the party in 2009 (Sega, 2009). Electorally, these policies were not popular either: while Georgi Parvanov was re-elected as president in 2006, BSP suffered major losses in the 2007 European and local elections to the newly formed GERB.

The start of Stanishev's fourth term (2008–2012) deepened the mounting challenges to his leadership. Re-elected unopposed again and stating in a self-assured matter that 'we don't need this [second] mandate, but the [Bulgarian] people need it' (Stanishev, 2008, p. 15), Stanishev did not lack in self-confidence. Yet this self-confidence was shattered in the second half of 2009, as BSP lost heavily the 2009 parliamentary and European elections. As a result, Stanishev's position within the party came under heavy scrutiny, signified by a surprising BSP leadership election held during the party conference in October 2009. While Stanishev won comfortably, he faced, for the first time since 2002, direct challengers to his post (Duma, 2009). More importantly, he increased

his need for power within the party by removing his internal opponents Rumen Ovcharov and Rumen Petkov from the party executive bureau, surrounding himself with personal loyalists. Rather than ensuring intra-party cohesion, this had the opposite effect.

Since 2010 his internal position has been further challenged by the formation of organized internal factions around his former mentor, Georgi Parvanov, and his consistent opponent Tatyana Doncheva. Rather than responding to their criticisms, Stanishev sought again external support for his fragile leadership, as he became a president of the Party of European Socialists (PES) in 2011 (Euractiv.com, 2011). His new post gave him enough credibility among the party ranks to prevent any further contests. Pivotal in this respect was the 2012 party congress, where neither Parvanov, nor Doncheva ran directly against Stanishev for the party leadership (Duma.bg, 2012). While these internal developments revealed his lasting skillfulness as party leader, Stanishev's actions rather question his flexibility and ability to fully grasp and tackle the ongoing malaise and division within the party.

Externally, Stanishev's position could not be worse. The mounting discontent with his government reached its peak in early 2009 when a mass protest in front of the parliament building was dispersed by the police (Lalov & Bozukova, 2009), further fueling a widespread sense that he and his government were out of touch. Following his loss of premiership, BSP was left rather isolated in the new parliament due to the electoral meltdown of NDSV and rather strained relations with DPS. Not having any significant political partners, Stanishev framed himself as the sole leader of the opposition to the GERB minority government, entering into regular direct clashes with Borisov. Yet, more often than not, these backfired, as Borisov successfully presented any issues of lingering corruption and government mismanagement as a heritage of Stanishev's triple coalition. Further problems for Stanishev were two major scandals during that period, related to an alleged confidentiality breach with documents from the national security agency in 2009, and the affiliation of his wife with the Telekom political scandal in Austria in 2012. In such circumstances, while Stanishev built up some integrity as recognizable opposition to GERB, he still lacked popular support.

Stanishev recognized this lack of popularity, as his actions since his re-election for fifth term in May 2012 put him outside of the limelight. Rather than continuing the direct personality battle against Borisov and his government, he decided to apply pressure in a more organized way.

In the second half of 2012 BSP successfully politicized the issue of building a new nuclear power plant by gathering enough signatures to call a national referendum on the matter. Held in early 2013, the referendum resulted in a resounding support for the project, but it failed to pass the turnout threshold to make it legally binding. This, however, was irrelevant for BSP, as it marked the first successful electoral campaign for the party since 2007, thus re-igniting the party and preparing it for a return to power. Furthermore, despite the rise of a major protest wave against the GERB minority government in February 2013, Stanishev refrained from affiliating himself with it, preferring to continue with his parliamentary opposition. Such restraint had mixed results: on the one hand BSP failed to capitalize on the early elections held as a result of these protests, as the party remained second to GERB in the polls; on the other hand, Stanishev held his campaign promise that he will not be a Prime Minister should BSP form a government (Paunova, 2013b), promoting instead the BSP-affiliated technocrat Plamen Oresharski as leader of the BSP-DPS coalition government.

These moderate successes were, however, short-lived. In June 2013 Oresharski's government installed the controversial media mogul and DPS deputy, Delyan Peevski, as chief of the national security agency. Stanishev was instrumental in this decision by enforcing it on the BSP parliamentary faction with his words that 'either you support Peevski's nomination, or the government resigns' (Rilska, 2013). Beyond the resulting mass protests directed against him, a bigger challenge came from inside BSP. Already disillusioned with the promotion of BSP-affiliated non-party members at government positions, the party elite became increasingly critical to Stanishev, providing much-needed wind to his internal opponents. The culmination of these internal battles came in March 2014 when BSP expelled Georgi Parvanov and his internal faction, the Alternative for Bulgarian Revival (ABV), as the latter attempted to file an alternative electoral list to BSP for the upcoming European elections. While these actions highlight Stanishev's significant need for internal power, they also completely eliminated any illusions of his personal integrity and flexibility. Their result was a further decline in the intra-party cohesion, evident in the increasing criticism from the radical left party wing despite the presence of its leader, Yanaki Stoilov, in the party executive, and major electoral decline on the 2014 European elections. In the aftermath of this electoral failure Stanishev declared his decision not to run for re-election during a party conference in

July 2014 (Rilska, 2014), effectively ending his 13-year reign over the party.

In contrast to Stanishev's gradual growth as leader, Borisov arrived into GERB's leadership as an effective leader. While officially he took the position in early 2010, his central role within the party was evident since GERB's inception in 2006. For example, during the European and parliamentary elections in 2007 and 2009, most campaign materials carried his name and image, leaving the official leader, his right-hand man, Tsvetan Tsvetanov, out of the limelight. This, however, does not mean that Tsvetanov's leadership was not important for the party, as it had significant effects on Borisov's personality traits during his first term (2010–2014). Tsvetanov was particularly instrumental in developing the organizational network of the party and for organizing its electoral campaigns (Tsekov, 2019), so much so that Borisov was not involved in the day-to-day party leadership until that moment, thus limiting his awareness of the internal party situation.

In fact, Tsvetanov remained responsible for implementing Borisov's decisions on a daily basis and handling any internal party matters, as evident in series of open letters and public announcements from several GERB founders accusing Tsvetanov, among others, of the mounting internal party issues following their loss of power in 2013 (Focus-news.net, 2013; Mediapool.bg, 2013). Furthermore, any internal party decisions were taken by Borisov in a very top-down order, leaving little room for internal debate on possible alternatives. For example, the party national council (the top executive organization of GERB) is regularly appointed as a block based on Borisov's personal proposal to the party congress. His dominance in the party was so significant that during a speech at the 2010 party congress he even declared that 'if you start behaving like any other parties, I will dissolve you' (Gospodinova, 2010).

Despite his dominance within the party, Borisov's self-confidence has not translated completely into his premiership. Policy-wise, his minority government was prone to regular U-turns, for example, on its stance on the nuclear power plant question discussed above. Central for these U-turns was Borisov's reluctance to push through a particular decision when facing open public backlash. For example, a mass environmental protest against the government in 2012 brought Borisov to personally interfere and reverse the decision that allowed a GERB-affiliated businessman to build ski lanes in a national park (Enchev, 2012). While this

highlights Borisov's significant flexibility, it also questions his competence as a decisive leader. Where Borisov really revealed his political skills was in his coalition policy. Whereas a minority government may seem vulnerable to external influences in order to pass legislation, Borisov skillfully and regularly changed GERB's political partners, thus successfully ensuring government stability. During his first premiership (2009–2013) GERB relied at different periods on the parliamentary support from the SDS center-right offshoot, the Blue Coalition, the radical right Ataka, and the conservative populist Order, Law, and Justice.

What really challenged Borisov's leadership was the gradual decline of his integrity during that period, as his anti-system rhetoric and regular justification of any government failures with the legacy of the triple coalition rang increasingly hollow. For example, his regular defense of the heavy-handed tactics of the Interior Ministry, headed by Tsvetanov, as a fight against corruption and organized crime, became increasingly disingenuous, as his government simultaneously pursued the concentration of media ownership around the infamous Delyan Peevski in expense for government-friendly media reports and aggressive attacks against government critics (Reporters Without Borders, 2019). Furthermore, Borisov's government embarked on a heavy austerity program under the guise of economic stability.

This, however, came at a heavy social cost, evident in the mass protests in February 2013 due to the major increase of electricity prices that ultimately brought down Borisov's government. Such abrupt end had major negative consequences for his position within the party. For example, his rapid distancing from the agricultural minister, Miroslav Naydenov, when the latter was accused of corruption led to a first noticeable party split, when Naydenov formed a GERB-critical protest party. Borisov's failure to form a government despite GERB topping the vote on the 2013 early parliamentary elections further intensified the internal criticism of his seemingly authoritarian methods of governance, as evidenced in the abovementioned open letters and public announcements against Tsvetanov's work as party manager.

In the first months of his second term (2014–2017) Borisov restored some of his integrity by stepping back from the limelight. During the 2013 summer protests against the BSP-DPS coalition, he refrained from catching the protest wave, preferring instead to rebuild the coalition potential of the party. Pivotal in this respect was a widely publicized

meeting between him and the DPS leader, Lyutvi Mestan, in March 2014 (Darik Radio, 2014) that signaled the increasing closeness between the two parties. More importantly, Borisov embarked on a lengthy tour across GERB party structures to personally restore the internal order (Paunova, 2013a) with noticeable success. In May 2014 GERB recovered electorally, as they improved their results in the European elections. This was further confirmed when GERB again topped the polls in the 2014 early parliamentary elections, held following the resignation of the BSP-DPS coalition. This time around GERB was able to form a coalition government with the Reformist Bloc (RB), the reincarnation of the Blue Coalition, and the Alternative for Bulgarian Revival (ABV), a minor social democratic party led by Georgi Parvanov. The success of these coalition talks can be attributed, among other factors, to Borisov's limited involvement, as he was able to delegate these responsibilities to an all-female high-ranking team.<sup>2</sup>

Borisov's increased decisiveness was coupled with limited flexibility. Despite being restrained in his top-down approach to decision-making due to his coalition involvement, Borisov showed noticeable resolve to push forward or prevent certain policies. This was particularly visible in the radical judicial reform, pursued by RB. While Borisov supported judicial reform, he was clearly in favor of a more limited scope (Kapital Daily, 2015), resulting into the passing of a watered-down version, leading to the political marginalization of RB. Yet Borisov's limited flexibility was not always of benefit for GERB. In 2016 he significantly delayed the party choice for presidential candidate, opting for the uninspiring, but loyal Tsetska Tsacheva. Her loss in the 2016 presidential elections to the BSP-backed Rumen Radev marked the first occasion when GERB loses a major election, prompting Borisov to again resign and call early elections. This time around, however, the loss has not prompted any internal party turmoil. On the contrary, it served as a source to mobilize the ranks for the upcoming elections. In such a spirit of internal unity, Borisov was re-elected as party leader in early 2017.

His current term (2017 onwards) started similarly to his second one. Borisov refrained from major public appearances during the electoral campaign, opting instead to mobilize support among GERB core voters.

<sup>2</sup>The main coalition negotiators of GERB were the members of the Executive Committee, Tsetska Tsacheva, Rumyana Bachvarova, and Menda Stoyanova.

This restraint, however, has not brought about significant improvement of the party's electoral performance, as GERB's vote share remained virtually the same as in 2014. The GERB has not been prevented from forming a government, however, as Borisov was able to quickly forge a coalition agreement with the radical right electoral alliance, United Patriots (OP). The ease of switching political partners from the liberal and left-leaning support for his second government toward the right-wing backing of his third cabinet highlights his lasting political skills and self-confidence. Yet such a switch seems to question Borisov's remaining integrity, emphasizing his interest in staying in power. In such circumstances, Borisov rather amplified his reliance on external sources for reaffirming his authority, particularly his close connections to the leadership of the European People's Party (EPP). For example, despite the formation of a coalition with the radical right, the current European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, regularly refers to Borisov as a 'good friend', showing no signs of criticism.

Despite this apparent stability of Borisov's position within government and party, his third term is not without lasting challenges that he refrains from addressing. For example, at the inauguration of the Bulgarian presidency of the European Council in 2018 he was heavily criticized by the European Parliament group of the Greens/European Free Alliance for the lingering corruption in Bulgaria, relating particularly to the new series of environmental protests in the autumn of 2017. His reaction showed both his fragility and obliviousness on the issue, declaring that 'there is corruption everywhere [in Europe]' and accusing the protests of being organized by his former liberal right coalition partners (Milanova, 2018). Furthermore, in its latest monitoring report the European Commission reaffirmed its concerns regarding the deteriorating state of media freedom in Bulgaria, prompting a classic Borisov outburst declaring that 'it is not possible that we are besieged for weeks and [...] cabinet members are being called "scrags" and "cruds" and [...] say that there is no media freedom' (Sega, 2018). Similarly, despite the eruption of regular scandals around his radical right coalition partners, Borisov refrains from taking any clear position on these matters. While this may be a strategy for maintaining the stability of his government, it also signals his lack of flexibility and ability to grasp and address pressing issues related to his government and party.

## THE CONSEQUENCES FOR BSP AND GERB

Table 3.3 summarizes the consequences for the two parties from the above-discussed changes in the Stanishev's and Borisov's personal traits. The consequences for BSP from the changes in Stanishev's character traits throughout his leadership generally confirm the three hypotheses of this comparative work. His improved abilities to lead during his second term (2002–2005), coupled with his flexibility and reasonable integrity enabled the party to mobilize its ranks and abandon its internal disputes. More importantly, this personal improvement not only contributed to the improved electoral performance of BSP (Fig. 3.1) in the 2005 parliamentary elections and its return to power. During his third term (2005–2008) his dominance within the party re-ignited the party membership. Furthermore, Stanishev's political decline following his fall out of power also provides a confirmation for the hypotheses. His fourth term (2008–2012) was marred by internal conflicts and a failure to pose a solid opposition to the GERB minority government. This was a product of not only of Stanishev's loss of self-confidence, but also of his declining flexibility and ability to grasp the external and internal situation of the party. Similarly, his limited flexibility, seen in his imposition of a controversial decision to the BSP parliamentary faction during his fifth term (2012–2014), was instrumental in the further decline of intra-party cohesion and membership and facilitated his political demise in 2014.

**Table 3.3** The consequences of Stanishev's and Borisov's leadership for their parties

	<i>Term in office</i>	<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Sergey Stanishev	First (2001–2002)	No effect	No effect	No effect
	Second (2002–2005)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Third (2005–2008)	Lower	Lower	Higher
	Fourth (2008–2012)	Lower	Lower	Lower
	Fifth (2012–2014)	Higher	Lower	Lower
Boyko Borisov	First (2010–2014)	Lower	Lower	Lower
	Second (2014–2017)	Higher	Higher	No effect
	Third (2017–)	No effect	Higher	No effect

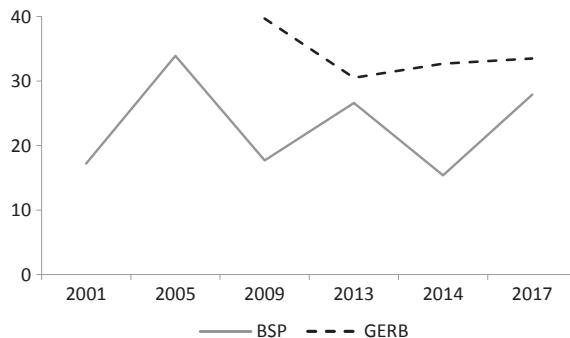


Fig. 3.1 The electoral performance of BSP and GERB, 2001–2018

In contrast to Stanishev's case, the changes in Borisov's character traits during his leadership had counterintuitive consequences for GERB. While his first term (2010–2014) was to this date the highlight of his personal dominance within and outside the party, it ended with GERB losing power with a declined electoral performance, a fragile intra-party cohesion, and exodus of party members. Important reasons for this were his major flexibility, evident in his regular policy U-turns when facing public backlash, coupled with his significant need for power, as seen in his top-down method of governance as party leader and Prime Minister. While his improved competence during his second term (2014–2017) and self-confidence during the third one (2017 onwards) certainly played a role in the improved electoral fortunes of GERB, as well as the limitation of any internal party conflicts, it was his declining flexibility and a restrained desire for power that had a central role in this respect. More interestingly, Stanishev's case also highlights some deviations from the expectations set in the hypotheses. Despite his dominance within BSP during his third term (2005–2008), the party still suffered major electoral defeats at that time, evident in the major loss in the 2007 European Parliament and local elections, as well as showed signs of intra-party conflict around the program discussions. Furthermore, while Stanishev lacked political integrity during his fifth term (2012–2014), he managed to improve the BSP electoral performance in the 2013 early parliamentary elections before crashing in the European ones the following year.

These deviations have two main explanations. Firstly, the personality traits of both leaders and the consequences for their parties were closely

interlinked, not only with their roles as party leaders, but also as office-holders. As seen in the previous section, Stanishev and Borisov improved the levels of intra-party cohesion prior to and during their premierships, whereas both of them experienced significant internal challenges once they were out of power. Similarly, the levels of their parties' electoral performances were to a large extent dependent on their functions as opposition or government leaders. In this context, while their behavior as party leaders may have highlighted their strong political abilities and competence, their roles as officeholders also influenced their character traits, as many of their personality weaknesses were illuminated by these positions. These include the declining flexibility and integrity in Stanishev's case and Borisov's major flexibility and indecisiveness. In other words, their officeholder positions are also an important element in understanding their character traits and the consequences for their parties.

Secondly, and more importantly, the experiences of the two leaders suggest that, counterintuitively, it was the periods when their parties were less centralized around them that brought significant improvements in terms of electoral performance, intra-party cohesion and party membership. As seen in Stanishev's case, his inclusion of party opponents in the party executive, as well as his ability to step away from the limelight in favor of other persons was accompanied with noticeable electoral success and internal balance. In contrast, Stanishev faced internal and external challenges only after he attempted to increase his influence within BSP by side-lining opponents and by imposing his will, as evident in his attempt to push forward a new party program and rule book in 2008 or to ensure parliamentary support for Peevski's controversial candidacy as chief of the national security agency. Borisov's case suggests a similar pattern. His internal and external dominance during his first term ended in lessened electoral strength for GERB, an open intra-party discontent and membership exodus, whereas the restraint of Borisov's abilities to dominate his government and being forced to share power with others allowed the party to mobilize its ranks and quickly recover from its brief period in opposition. Overall, the Stanishev's and Borisov's experiences suggest that while intra-party cohesion, active and improved party membership, and electoral success may be a product of the strong political skills of a party leader, centralization around the leaders' personality may have rather negative consequences for their political parties.

## CONCLUSION

The case of Bulgaria is important in order to understand the impact of personality traits of political leaders on their parties, given the high levels of party membership in the country, coupled with the increasing personalization of Bulgarian party politics. This chapter focused on the central figures of the two main Bulgarian political parties in the past decade, Stanishev and Borisov. While the former was never far away from politics given his personal background, he experienced a complete trajectory as a leader of the center-left BSP, as he grew into the position during his initial terms, reached his zenith during the third term that saw him lead a BSP coalition government as Prime Minister, and faded away afterward. Central in this respect was Stanishev's character traits: whereas he rose to be an experienced and decisive leader, he simultaneously lost much of his flexibility and integrity.

In contrast, Borisov came into politics very much by chance, yet he became president of the center-right GERB as an established leader that guided the party through three (as of 2018) government periods. The electoral fate and internal dynamics of GERB were very much a product of Borisov's character traits. His self-confidence within the party has not translated completely into his premiership, as he showed to be very indecisive and flexible when facing backlash or when in need of obtaining external support. Yet there has been a significant change in these traits with him becoming less flexible and more decisive, not only within the party, but also outside of it. Whether these changes will lead to his political downfall, as in Stanishev's case, seems to depend on whether and how Borisov addresses the lasting internal and external challenges to his party leadership and official position.

The insights of this chapter offer two important theoretical implications for the analysis of this collaborative project, as the evidence from both cases confirmed and, simultaneously, challenged the three main hypotheses. Firstly, while their roles as party leaders were essential for the development of their character traits, it was their positions as office-holders that mainly illuminated the changes of their personalities and the effects on their parties. Particularly, Stanishev and Borisov's cases showed that the electoral performance of their parties had a direct impact on intra-party cohesion and vice versa. This suggests that future analysis should avoid separating the role of a party leader from that of an office-holder given their mutual influences. Secondly, the two cases revealed

that significant centralization around the leader's figure may not be of benefit to the party. As Stanishev's and Borisov's experiences pointed out, it was the periods when they were not necessarily dominant internally and remained open to external and internal influences that allowed them to improve the electoral chances of their parties and to facilitate intra-party cohesion. In contrast, the centralization of power and the limited flexibility of Stanishev and Borisov closely entangled the fate of their parties with their personalities, providing room for the rise of internal and external discontent in their leaderships. This suggests that the more centralized the power around a party leader is, the more the consequences of her leadership depends on her character traits.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# Party Leaders in Croatia: Comparing Ivo Sanader and Zoran Milanović

*Marko Kukec*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the pluralization of political competition in Croatia at the beginning of the 1990s, the main Croatian parties maintained a great amount of continuity in their leadership. This is particularly evident for two largest Croatian parties, Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), whose first leaders both died as party chairmen. Franjo Tuđman was selected as HDZ president in 1990 and led the party to victory at the first democratic parliamentary elections held in the same year. In 1992, Tuđman was elected as Croatian president and remained in the office until his death in December 1999. Ivica Račan assumed the presidency of the Communist Party of Croatia in 1989, reformed it into a modern social democratic party, and remained its leader for 17 years.

These two party leaders set the foundations of the Croatian party competition, by politicizing the historical cleavage which can be traced to the role of Croatia in the Second World War. Tuđman adopted an apologetic stance toward the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945),

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maintaining that despite its fascist satellite regime, it was ‘an expression of the historic aspirations of the Croatian people for an independent state of their own’ (Čular & Gregurić, 2007). Ivica Račan defended the role of the partisan resistance movement against this regime and called out HDZ for their ‘dangerous intentions’ of rehabilitating the Ustasha regime. While the scope of issues attached to the cleavage varied over time, the basic division politicized by these two leaders structures the political competition in Croatia until present times (Dolenec, 2012; Henjak, 2007, 2011).

Yet, this is not a story of Tuđman and Račan, but rather of their successors, who faced the challenge of filling the offices long-held by founding fathers of the two parties, but with a strong impetus to adapt the profile of their parties according to their personal preferences. These leaders are Ivo Sanader, president of HDZ between 2000 and 2009, and Zoran Milanović, president of SDP between 2007 and 2016. Similar to their predecessors, Sanader and Milanović left a strong personal mark on different aspects of their parties, shaping their programmatic, organizational and electoral profile, despite the deeply entrenched positions of their parties within the two opposing blocs of Croatian society. In addition, they were the most recognizable Croatian political leaders in the last 15 years and operated under the circumstances of increasingly personalized political competition. Therefore, a systematic analysis of the personality traits of these two party leaders, together with the outcomes that these traits produced, is highly warranted. Another advantage of comparing the two party leaders is that both started their party chairmanship as leaders of the opposition, before becoming prime ministers.

The chapter adopts the common theoretical framework developed in the introduction to this edited volume, by rating the personality traits of flexibility, integrity, competence, need for power, self-confidence and cognitive complexity for Milanović and Sanader across their four terms as party chairmen. Nevertheless, the observable implications of these traits are highly dependent on the context in which party leaders operate. It proceeds with a broad overview of the political careers of Sanader and Milanović, which sets the background for the presentation of their personality traits. For each leader, this presentation is divided between opposition and government period, and each period includes two distinct party chairmanship terms (Table 4.1). The analysis then links the character traits of leaders with outcomes for their parties, before offering some concluding remarks.

**Table 4.1** The list of HDZ and SDP party leaders

<i>Parties and their leaders</i>	<i>Start of term</i>	<i>End of term</i>
<i>HDZ</i>		
Franjo Tuđman	25 February 1990	15 October 1993
	15 October 1993	15 October 1995
	15 October 1995	22 February 1998
	22 February 1998	10 December 1999
Ivo Sanader	30 April 2000	22 April 2002
	22 April 2002	24 April 2004
	24 April 2004	26 April 2008
	26 April 2008	4 July 2009
Jadranka Kosor	4 July 2009	20 May 2012
Tomislav Karamarko	20 May 2012	28 May 2016
	28 May 2016	17 July 2016
Andrej Plenković	17 July 2016	–
<i>SDP</i>		
Ivica Račan	1990	1993
	1993	1996
	1996	2000
	2000	8 May 2004
	8 May 2004	29 April 2007
Zoran Milanović	2 June 2007	10 May 2008
	10 May 2008	12 May 2012
	12 May 2012	2 April 2016
	2 April 2016	26 November 2016
Davor Bernardić	26 November 2016	–

### BACKGROUND OF SANADER AND MILANOVIĆ

The political careers of Sanader and Milanović share several characteristics, providing important background for the comparison of the two party leaders. Their political careers originate in the ‘incubator’ of top-tier Croatian politicians, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their tenures as high-positioned civil servants in the Ministry earned them the reputation of pro-European and moderate politicians, distant from the messy Croatian political reality, allowing them to emerge as fresh faces at the outset of their party chairmanship. The similarities continue into their terms, as both were leaders of the opposition before assuming the PM position. Once in power, they dominated their parties and broader political environment, and both stepped down from party chairmanship voluntarily.

### *Ivo Sanader*

Sanader started his political career outside Croatia, by founding a branch of HDZ in Tirol (Austria) in 1990, and shortly thereafter returned to Croatia. He entered high politics first as the Minister of Science and Technology in January 1992, and later as deputy foreign affairs minister between 1993 and 2000. After Tuđman passed away in 1999 and HDZ lost elections in January 2000, Sanader secured his first term as the president of HDZ, with the support of 70% of party delegates (Nikić Čakar, 2015). At these elections, he represented a more moderate and pro-European faction of HDZ, against the old HDZ guard associated with the authoritarian tendencies of the first president Tuđman (Lamont, 2010, p. 1691). However, the following intra-party elections which were held in April 2002 were far more dramatic, as the nationalist faction grew stronger.<sup>1</sup> Sanader won by a very narrow margin, receiving 51% of delegate votes and resumed to prepare the party for 2003 parliamentary elections.

At these elections, HDZ won the largest number of seats (Table 4.1<sup>2</sup>) and formed a government with the support of smaller parties and ethnic minority representatives. Sanader became the PM, a position which he kept after 2007 elections, and held until July 2009. In parallel, he remained the leader of HDZ, facing no competition at intra-party elections in 2004 and 2008 (Nikić Čakar, 2010). His political career ended abruptly on the 1 July 2009, when he stepped down both as PM and as HDZ president, stating that he refused to take Croatia into arbitration process in a border dispute with Slovenia, which he presumed would have a negative outcome for Croatia.<sup>3</sup> As his successor in both positions, Sanader installed Jadranka Kosor, one of his closest allies.

This was, however, not the last of Sanader, and his life after July 2009 casts a new light on his tenure. Unhappy with the results of the first round of presidential elections held in December 2009, Sanader gathered some of his closest former associates and staged a mini-coup against the new leadership of HDZ. In the role of the honorary president of

<sup>1</sup><http://arhiva.nacional.hr/clanak/print/10799>, accessed 26 January 2019.

<sup>2</sup>The vote shares of individual parties within pre-electoral coalitions were estimated based on the share of seats.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/pismo-ive-sanadera-iz-remetinca-zasto-sam-zapravo-dao-ostavku-na-mjesto-premijera/386143/>, accessed 26 January 2019.

HDZ, he criticized Kosor's lack of strong party leadership and particularly the agreement which she made with the Slovenian PM Borut Pahor over the arbitration of border dispute. On the next day, HDZ presidency decided to expel Sanader from the party (Čakar, 2010, p. 21). Nevertheless, he joined the parliament as an independent MP. The true reason behind his return to parliament would soon emerge, as he faced charges of receiving bribes from the Hungarian oil company MOL, and the state attorney sought to strip Sanader of his parliamentary immunity. On the same day (9 December 2010), Sanader escaped to Austria, but was captured by the Austrian police several days later, and extradited to Croatia in July 2011 (Lamont, 2011, p. 477). Currently, he is on trial for corruption in six different cases (Koprić & Škarica, 2016, p. 198).

### *Zoran Milanović*

In 1993, at the age of 26, Milanović joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after Sanader, who served as deputy foreign minister, confirmed that the young lawyer successfully passed all the tests. Milanović stayed at the ministry for a year, before joining a short peace-keeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. Upon his return to the Ministry in 1996, Milanović was reassigned to Brussels as an adviser to the Croatian mission in NATO and EU. Shortly after his return from Brussels, Milanović joined SDP. His skills in diplomacy were needed as SDP assumed government in 2000, and Milanović was promoted to the position of the national coordinator for NATO. He stayed in this position for the next three years and in the final year of the Račan government, he was promoted to the position of assistant to the minister of foreign affairs. After SDP lost the 2003 parliamentary elections, Milanović moved to work in party headquarters, first as the member of the party executive committee, and then shortly as the party spokesperson. Milanović was not really the person for the job, and he was reassigned as the party coordinator for the 4th electoral district. From this position, he launched his bid for the presidency of SDP after Račan was diagnosed with cancer and died in April 2007.<sup>4</sup>

In June 2007, Milanović became the president of SDP, defeating his opponent in the second round, Željka Antunović, by 10 percentage

<sup>4</sup><https://poslovnipuls.com/2011/12/05/zoran-milanovic-biografija/>, accessed 26 January 2019.

point margin (Nikić Čakar, 2015). His main task was to prepare the party for the 2007 parliamentary elections, the only ones where Sanader and Milanović confronted directly. Although the poll rating of SDP grew substantially, elections gave HDZ the edge in the coalition formation process, which the PM Sanader successfully completed (Antić & Dodić Grujičić, 2008, pp. 754–755). Despite SDP remaining in the opposition, Milanović was reelected as SDP chairman in regular intra-party elections in May 2008. As the corruption charges loomed over Sanader and HDZ in the course of 2010 and 2011, SDP entered the 2011 elections as a clear favorite, and together with its partners (Croatian People's Party-HNS, Croatian Party of Pensioners-HSU and Istrian Democratic Assembly-IDS) achieved a decisive victory (Kasapović, 2011).

Milanović became PM in January 2012 and held the position until the parliamentary elections in November 2015. As a prime minister, he faced no competition at intra-party elections in May 2012, the first ones where the direct election of party leader was applied (Nikić Čakar, 2013). Grappling with the economic crisis in the first three years of his term, SDP and Milanović lost a substantial degree of public support, while the HDZ under the leadership of Tomislav Karamarko managed to consolidate organizationally and made a strong right-wing turn (Cipek, 2017), which led to an even result between the two major parties (coalitions) at the 2015 parliamentary elections. However, the new party named Bridge of Independent Lists (MOST) was pivotal in deciding on the new government, and after nerve-breaking coalition negotiations with both parties, MOST decided to form a coalition government with HDZ (Nikić Čakar & Raos, 2017, p. 52). Despite the loss of premiership, Milanović was reelected as the leader of SDP in April 2016. He finally stepped down later in 2016, after a defeat at the 2016 early parliamentary elections, and was replaced by Davor Bernardić (Nikić Čakar, 2015).

## PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIOR OF PARTY LEADERS

### *Sanader 2000–2003: Dropping the Nationalist Baggage*

After the death of Tuđman in 1999, HDZ was in a state of disarray. Without their founder and symbol, the party lost national office in the aftermath of 2000 elections, and the internal party rift, which Tuđman successfully managed, suddenly surfaced (Longo, 2006, p. 37). The party was divided between the nationalist faction, which advocated continuity

of semi-authoritarian and isolationist policies of Tuđman, and the moderate faction, with a focus on liberalizing the economy, dampening the nationalist rhetoric and fast-tracking Croatia's EU accession. As Tuđman did not leave an apparent successor to his position, the two factions entered a fierce feud over the party leadership (Bellamy, 2001, p. 22).

Before the nomination process began, Sanader did not figure prominently as the leader of the moderate faction, as his earlier conflict with Tuđman left him marginalized within HDZ. Nevertheless, after several candidate names were unsuccessfully floated within the faction, Sanader sensed the opportunity to establish himself as the faction leader. His nomination met approval within the faction, as he represented a new face within the party and was free from allegations of corruption. Together with his absence from the power struggles within the previous regime, his novelty and clean past earned him a reputation of a person of high *trustworthiness and integrity*. Yet, the way Sanader secured the nomination testifies his extraordinary *competence in rallying support for his goals*. He pieced together a support coalition made from the group of HDZ early initiators, regional barons, as well as party senators who were influential within the party, but lacked broader electoral appeal and leadership potential (Longo, 2006, p. 37). This coalition was sufficient to defeat his opponent from the nationalist faction, as he received 70% of party delegate votes at the party congress in 2000 (Kulenović & Petković, 2016, p. 122).

Upon assuming party leadership, Sanader's high *need for power* became visible and would remain his trademark until his fall in 2009. Within the party, he acted swiftly to disempower the leaders of the nationalist faction, which controlled the party on the ground and a more traditional HDZ electorate. His tactics ranged from expulsion of prominent individual members to disbanding the disloyal local branches (Nikić Čakar, 2010, p. 36). Despite his intra-party efforts to eliminate the proponents of continuity in politics of ethnic animosity, non-cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and authoritarian practices, Sanader nevertheless often resorted to nationalist rhetoric when this was opportune for attacking the government or keeping the support of the traditional party base. The most memorable instance of such rhetoric was Sanader's speech in Split in 2001, at a protest against the ICTY indictment of a wartime Croatian Army general Mirko Norac, and his transfer to The Hague. With that speech, he assured the nationalist voters of his intentions to keep HDZ firmly on the right side of the Croatian value conflict (Lamont, 2010,

p. 1691). Analytically, in such instances, Sanader displayed a high degree of *flexibility on the value conflict*, as this speech fell outside of his stated goal of guiding the party toward the center-right position.

The culmination of Sanader's efforts to purge the nationalist faction from HDZ happened at the 7th party congress in 2002, when he narrowly defeated Ivić Pašalić himself in the party leadership contest. The elections are widely perceived to have been rigged in favor of Sanader, but apart from some testimonies of disgruntled former HDZ members, few concrete evidence of such rigging exists (Nikić Čakar, 2010). Nevertheless, the alleged vote manipulation at intra-party elections cast a shadow over the *integrity* of Sanader, who repeatedly promised that such practices in HDZ would become a matter of the past. The final act in Sanader's showdown with the Pašalić group was the expulsion of Pašalić and his associates from HDZ (Longo, 2006), which reinforces the perception that Sanader sought complete domination over the party.

Emboldened by the new constellation of power within HDZ, Sanader started preparing the party for the 2003 national elections. Sanader centered the campaign on himself, frequently stating that HDZ would win a relative majority of parliamentary seats and he would become the next PM,<sup>5</sup> radiating high degrees of *self-confidence* (Grbeša, 2010, p. 61). He often 'personally guaranteed' for specific policy measures to be implemented, and even offered a 'warranty card' which included his signature. Despite his insistence on personalizing the campaign, Sanader was aware of the wider intra-party context in which the elections were taking place. He understood the demographics of HDZ voter constituency, which remained rural, traditional and personally attached to the Croatian war for independence (Glaudić & Vuković, 2016). On the other hand, he worked on expanding his network of foreign contacts, which included prominent EU officials and western heads of governments, attempting to soften the skepticism of external observers about HDZ returning to power. Operating in this complex environment, Sanader displayed a respectable degree of *cognitive complexity*, as he led party politics on several fronts. When polls indicated falling electoral support, Sanader would resort to nationalist rhetoric, particularly concerning the issue of ICTY. When abroad, Sanader would portray himself as a moderate politician with a clear ambition of leading Croatia into the EU.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/sanader-hdz-na-iducim-izborima-pobjedjuje-s-relativnom-vecinom/143896.aspx>, accessed 26 January 2019.

### *Sanader 2004–2009: ‘Christ Is Born!’*

Upon assuming PM office after November 2003 national elections, Sanader sought to reinforce the latter image (Jović, 2011, p. 13). In a surprising move, Sanader participated in a traditional celebration of Orthodox Christmas in the beginning of 2004, organized by the Serb National Council, where he used the greeting ‘Christ is born!’ (*Hristos se rodi*), which was until then considered unthinkable to be uttered by any HDZ politician (Longo, 2006). In pursuing reconciliation with Croatian Serbs, Sanader also pledged to ease the return of Serbian refugees who escaped the operation ‘Storm’, and worked to distance HDZ from the WWII Ustasha movement.<sup>6</sup> With that, he reaffirmed his *flexible approach towards the Croatian value conflict*, as HDZ was now clearly a party of the center-right. Despite the new political course of HDZ, Sanader did not face any opponents at the 2004 party congress, and easily secured his third term as the party leader.

With the same flexibility he approached the most salient issue in Croatian politics at the time: the relations with ICTY, particularly the arrest and transfer of general Ante Gotovina to The Hague. The transfer was a condition for Croatia to begin the accession negotiations with the EU, but the majority of HDZ membership opposed it, as Gotovina enjoyed the status of a war hero (Pavlaković, 2010). In another display of his *cognitive complexity* and excellent understanding of political circumstances, particularly within HDZ, Sanader devised an entirely new Croatian strategy toward ICTY, knowing that his position within HDZ is strong enough to sustain any pressure from the party right-wing. In contrast to the previous governments, who stalled the transfer of Croatian war crime suspects, Sanader facilitated the transfer, while promising that the Croatian government would actively dispute the indictments at ICTY and defend the legitimacy of the Croatian war for independence (Lamont, 2010). Despite the U-turn from his statements as the leader of the opposition, Sanader correctly predicted that he would face no significant intra-party backlash.

Nevertheless, Sanader continued to solidify his grip on HDZ in parallel to repositioning the party, thus feeding his immense *appetite for power* (Kulenović & Petković, 2016, p. 123). After a group of HDZ MPs from

<sup>6</sup><https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/ivo-sanader-od-vrha-do-dna/439891.aspx>, accessed 26 January 2019.

the eastern Croatian region of Slavonia and Baranja expressed discontent with the alleged negligence of the region by the central government and organized a regionalist platform, Sanader swiftly purged them and their associates from the party.<sup>7</sup> Sanader approached the HDZ parliamentary group, as well as government ministers, in the same manner. Strict party discipline was imposed upon party MPs through monitoring of their attendance rates and parliamentary behavior, as well as minimizing their involvement in decision-making, which marginalized the role of parliamentary party group (Nikić Čakar, 2010). Within the cabinet, Sanader sought to control the affairs of individual departments, often contradicting the statements of cabinet ministers, and relied on a small circle of trusted associates in leading the cabinet.

The first cracks in Sanader's political apparatus started to appear in 2006, after revelations of multiple corruption cases involving HDZ ministers and HDZ appointees within state institutions and state-owned enterprises (Kasapović, 2011, p. 6). One such institution was Croatian Privatization Fund, whose vice-presidents accepted bribes for favoring certain bidders in the process of privatization of state assets (Ateljević & Budak, 2010). In another case, the director of state-owned Brodosplit shipyard was suspected of laundering \$4.7 million, and the Minister of Economy, who also served as the head of the supervisory board, faced criticism for failing to notice any criminal activity. Initially, Sanader successfully shunned his involvement in emerging corruption cases. Nevertheless, the 'Verona' case,<sup>8</sup> where Sanader was suspected of making secret arrangements to sell the state-owned pharmaceutical company Pliva, and his failure to disclose an expensive collection of watches, increasingly eroded the perceived *integrity* of Sanader.

Despite the emerging contours of the corruption scheme operated from highest levels of government and HDZ, Sanader remained in power after the 2007 national elections, largely thanking his undeniable *competence to secure support for his goals*. Under the newly elected leader Milanović, SDP was neck and neck with HDZ in the final months before the elections. Although the actual electoral results gave HDZ a slight advantage over SDP and other left parties, the government formation

<sup>7</sup><http://arhiva.nacional.hr/clanak/9948/branimir-glavas-izbacen-iz-hdz-a>, accessed 26 January 2019.

<sup>8</sup><https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/zasto-je-sanaderu-put-u-veronu-bio-vazniji-od-proslave-dana-drzavnosti-u-vukovaru/326362.aspx>, accessed 26 January 2019.

Table 4.2 The character traits of Ivo Sanader and Zoran Milanović

outcome ultimately depended on the negotiating skills of the two leaders. As a relative electoral winner, Sanader entered the government formation process with his usual *self-confidence*, claiming the right of the first offer in the negotiations, as any other scenario would damage the people's trust into the electoral process. After protracted negotiations, Sanader received the support of Croatian Peasants Party (HSS) and Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLS), offering them a more coherent government and more favorable distribution of cabinet seats compared to the potential center-left government (Antić & Dodić Gruičić, 2008, pp. 754–755).

Shortly after the elections, Sanader retained the leadership of HDZ in another uncontested race, but the pressure of the financial crisis and emerging corruption cases was mounting, and Sanader became visibly more nervous in public appearances. Two high-profile assassinations in late 2008 (Asal, Krain, Murdie, & Kennedy, 2018, p. 27) lowered the *self-confidence* of Sanader, as for the first time in his tenure, he showed signs of uncertainty and hesitation. The last year and a half of his rule were marked by frequent replacements of ministers (Kasapović, 2011), arguments with neighboring countries (mostly Slovenia), and a growing detachment of Sanader with the HDZ base. The procurement of an expensive BMW by the party amid financial crisis was just one example of the decreasing *integrity* of Sanader, who, sensing his political end, increasingly tended to use HDZ for his private gains. Eventually, he resigned as PM in July 2009 (Kulenović & Petković, 2016, p. 126). Table 4.2 presents the overview of Sanader's personality traits.

### *Milanović 2007–2011: 'Little Sanader' Against the Original*

Although becoming the party leader under similar circumstances as Sanader, by inheriting the position from a deceased first party president, the rise of Milanović to SDP chairmanship in 2007 was far less dramatic and controversial, as he defeated three other candidates in a fairly democratic and peaceful party leadership contest. Nevertheless, few people at that time could have predicted that Milanović would leave such a profound personal mark on SDP. Starting with the party ideological profile, and similar to Sanader, Milanović realized that the voter pool of SDP could be expanded by moving the party closer to the center, particularly on the value cleavage dominating Croatian politics. On the one hand, Milanović clearly emphasized his atheism and argued against any

influence of the Catholic Church in the domains such as women reproductive rights, education or minority rights. In addition, he did not hesitate to label himself as a ‘left-winger’, and cite the commitment of Croatian social democracy to social justice, minority rights and freedom of the press.

On the other hand, his *flexibility on the value conflict* was demonstrated even before the 2007 elections, when his stance toward the Ustasha movement was seen as somehow apologetic. Together with some members of SDP leadership, he visited Bleiburg (Austria), the site where the members of the Ustasha movement were tortured and killed by the members of the communist resistance. In another instance, Milanović stated that many of the members of the Ustasha movement were simply carried by the historical circumstances, unaware of the wider implications of their involvement.<sup>9</sup> Because of these attitudes, he was met with criticism from the left-oriented voters, while right-oriented voters saw these attitudes as non-genuine.

Despite the criticism for his flexible approach to the value conflict, it was not the foremost reason why Milanović failed to meet the expectations of electoral polls and bring SDP into government after the 2007 elections. Crucially, Milanović lacked the *self-confidence* of Sanader, as he supported an economist and former minister in Račan cabinet, Ljubo Jurčić, as a PM candidate (Grbeša, 2010), while remaining vague about his potential political role if SDP wins the elections. During the coalition negotiations, Milanović eventually sidelined Jurčić and asserted himself as the PM candidate, but the potential coalition partners and the public remained unconvinced.

While being a party employee almost from the outset of his party membership, Milanović never held an elected office before becoming the president of SDP. The lack of experience and *competence to organize support for his goals*, particularly compared to PM Sanader, became visible during coalition negotiations when Milanović failed to attract HSS and HSLS into his coalition and negotiate an SDP-led government. On the election night, Milanović assured party members and the public that SDP will form the new government.<sup>10</sup> The outcome of coalition

<sup>9</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Yjkj5PTk\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Yjkj5PTk_Y), accessed 26 January 2019.

<sup>10</sup><http://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/nakon-pocetne-suzdrzanosti-atmosfera-u-sdpu-iz-politicke-presla-u-estradne-vode/366085.aspx>, accessed 26 January 2019.

negotiations would eventually prove him wrong (Antić & Dodić Gruičić, 2008). In a well-known scene, when the two leaders briefly met at the office of the Croatian president, Sanader mockingly asked Milanović: ‘Did you form the government?’.<sup>11</sup>

After the 2011 elections, Milanović would be the one to laugh. As the leader of the opposition, his *competence* became visibly higher, particularly in intra-party politics, as he easily secured another term as SDP chairman in 2008. Milanović successfully wrestled off several party heavyweights and solidified his hold of SDP by winning almost 80% of delegate votes (Nikić Čakar, 2015). In redefining intra-party relations, Milanović started to display a high *need for power*, reviving the nickname ‘Little Sanader’ allegedly coined by his predecessor Ivica Račan. Milanović abandoned the 2007 election rhetoric of ‘SDP team’, and confidently began to centralize the party. Milanović controlled the process of candidate selection for 2009 presidential elections, where he effectively restricted the choice of candidates to two of his favorites, Ivo Josipović (who later became Croatian president) and Ljubo Jurčić (Antić, 2010, p. 527). During the process, Milanović successfully eliminated a highly ambitious and powerful mayor of Zagreb, Milan Bandić, who was later expelled from the party for running as an independent presidential candidate (Grdešić, 2010). Although at times appearing elitist and remote from the SDP base, Milanović had a solid *understanding of different tendencies* within SDP, particularly of the fact that Zagreb party branch was crucial for his position as party chairman. Since Bandić enjoyed influence within Zagreb SDP branch even after the expulsion, Milanović supported Bandić by passing his budget, as part of the effort to resume domination over the largest SDP local branch.<sup>12</sup>

In preparation for the 2011 elections, Milanović attracted three other leftist parties and formed a pre-electoral coalition, with him as PM candidate. By securing support for his PM candidacy before the elections, he foreclosed the need for extensive government formation negotiations. In the campaign, as opposed to deeply discredited PM Jadranka Kosor, Milanović maintained the reputation of an *honest politician with no*

<sup>11</sup><https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/video-i-jesi-sastavio-vladu-sjecate-se-sanaderovog-pitanja-milanovicu-2007.-i-znate-li-koliko-mu-je-tada-trebalo-da-formira-vlast/185944/>, accessed 26 January 2019.

<sup>12</sup><https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/milanovic-je-najveci-bandicevac-20100125>, accessed 26 January 2019.

*corruption cases behind him*, and not using the party for his private gains. The left coalition eventually secured a decisive victory at 2011 elections, and with a backing of 89 MPs and (out of 151), Milanović became the next Croatian PM.

### *Milanović 2012–2016: Alienating the Faithful SDP Voters*

As PM, Milanović remained unchallenged at SDP presidential elections in 2012, the first ones held under the ‘one-member-one-vote’ principle. Rather than reflective of intra-party pluralism, the uncompetitive elections reflected the continuous *need for power* of Milanović. The elections solidified his dominance over the party, as he could claim a direct mandate from the broadest range of party membership (Nikić Čakar, 2013, p. 15). Direct party presidential elections are potentially a risky move, yet Milanović correctly predicted that his leadership would either remain unchallenged or he would win by a landslide. Another important instrument of maintaining power within the party were frequent dissolutions of local party branches.<sup>13</sup>

In addition, Milanović skillfully eliminated some of his greatest opponents in government, for example, Minister of Finance Slavko Linić, who not only held the most powerful ministry but was one of the leading people of the party branch in Rijeka, a major bastion of opposition to Milanović. In *securing support within the party*, Milanović had a good understanding of who his allies are, and skillfully handled the inner circle of party leadership. While needing to satisfy various interests within the party during the initial selection of ministers, throughout his term, he managed to replace most of unfavorable SDP ministers with his closest associates (replaced Linić with Lalovac; Komadina with Hajdaš-Dončić; Holy with Zmajlović). However, SDP was far from cohesive, as opposition to Milanović was growing steadily throughout the term, but could not seriously endanger the authority of Milanović within the party.

In parallel to the consolidation of power within the party and cabinet, Milanović further developed the ‘elitist’ image toward voters and party members. Compared to his time as the opposition leader, he became more inaccessible to ordinary people and supposedly preferred to spend time in his favorite restaurant, meeting some of the most important

<sup>13</sup><https://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/dalmacija/split/clanak/id/311836/milanovic-raspustio-splitski-sdp-baldasar-vise-nije-sef-ogranka>, accessed 26 January 2019.

people of Croatian politics and business. Nevertheless, the cases of corruption were rather sparse during his premiership, and Milanović *did not use the party in power for his personal enrichment*. He maintained high moral standards of his ministers, which he tested on the environment minister Mirela Holy, who resigned after writing a morally doubtful e-mail aiming to protect one state railway company employee.<sup>14</sup>

Empowered by the direct mandate, but insulated from the party base, Milanović continued to shift SDP toward the center, showing *continuous flexibility on the value conflict* dividing the Croatian society, despite the growing dissatisfaction of the party base. In a series of statements and government policies, SDP under Milanović undermined its social-democratic credentials (Dolenec, 2014). Amid long-term protest of war veterans, the government decided to retain their material benefits, while the protest nevertheless continued. Another set of issues which Milanović failed to address concerns the rights of the Catholic Church, a powerful institution within predominantly Catholic Croatia, such as influence over school curricula and financial opaqueness (Dolenec, 2014).

The feud with Serbia was only one of several which Milanović started with other countries and the EU, displaying a high level of *self-confidence*, in addition to signaling his sovereignist tendencies to right-wing voters. When Germany requested extradition of former Yugoslav secret service agent suspected of assassination of a Croatian emigrant, Milanović firmly refused to comply, going against both EU regulations and diplomatic practices around the time when Croatia was entering the EU.<sup>15</sup> He also did not hesitate to call out Hungarian PM Orban for putting up a fence along Croatian border, thus further escalating the conflict with Hungary. However, neither the self-confidence of Milanović nor the rightward turn of SDP helped the party at the 2015 national elections. The opposition HDZ recovered from the defeat in 2011 and emerged as the winner of the elections, as well as of the lottery of coalition negotiations with the new party MOST (Bridge) (Nikić Čakar & Raos, 2017, p. 52; Rešetar, 2016, p. 57).

Despite the electoral defeat, Milanović was reelected as SDP chairman in early 2016 and led the opposition against the HDZ-MOST

<sup>14</sup><https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/ministrice-holy-podnijela-ostavku-nepromislijenim-mailom-nanijela-sam-stetu-vladi/1530744/>, accessed 26 January 2019.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-croatia/croatia-clashes-with-eu-over-extradition-law-idUSBRE97P0K420130826>, accessed on 26 January 2019.

coalition government headed by technocrat PM Tihomir Orešković. This proved to be an easy task, as the coalition infighting resulted in HDZ withdrawing their confidence from the government, triggering early elections in September 2016 (Nikić Čakar & Raos, 2017). During the campaign, Milanović *resumed his flexible strategy* of appeasing right-wing voters, from bringing up his ‘Ustasha grandfather<sup>16</sup>’ during a televised debate, to bashing Serbian leadership in a meeting with war veterans.<sup>17</sup> While Milanović was without any doubt still sharp and very knowledgeable about politics, the single-sided campaign illustrates the *decrease of cognitive complexity* as conceived in this chapter, as he failed to realize the repercussions of his electoral strategy for the support of left-wing voters. Eventually, right-wing voters stayed loyal to HDZ, which was consolidated by the new president Andrej Plenković, while left-wing voters stayed at home, dissatisfied with the continuation of the flexible approach to value conflict pursued by Milanović. After another electoral defeat, Milanović refused to seek reelection as SDP chairman and eventually withdrew from politics.

## CONSEQUENCES OF LEADER PERSONALITY TRAITS

The following section systematizes the consequences of leader personality traits and is organized around their effect on party electoral performance, cohesion and membership. Table 4.3 provides a summary overview of the effects in each of the four terms of Sanader and Milanović as party leaders.

### *Electoral Performance*

The personality traits of Sanader and Milanović had a tangible impact on the electoral performance of their parties. In the context of value conflict dividing the Croatian society and structuring the vote choice, any shift of party position regarding this conflict is highly salient and bears electoral consequences. As discussed in the previous section, both Sanader and Milanović attempted to expand the electorates of their parties by shifting

<sup>16</sup><https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/tko-je-milanovicev-djed-ustasa-kojeg-je-teksada-otkrio/4612676/>, accessed 26 January 2019.

<sup>17</sup><https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/ekskluzivno-jutarnji-u-posjedu-tajne-snimka-s-sastanka-milanovica-i-branitelja/4640180/>, accessed 26 January 2019.

**Table 4.3** The consequences of Sanader's and Milanović's leadership for their parties

	<i>Term in office</i>	<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Ivo Sanader	First (2000–2002)	No effect	Higher	No effect
	Second (2002–2004)	Higher	Higher	No effect
	Third (2004–2008)	Lower	Higher	No effect
	Fourth (2008–2009)	Lower	Higher	No effect
Zoran Milanović	First (2007–2008)	No effect	No effect	No effect
	Second (2008–2012)	Higher	Lower	No effect
	Third (2012–2016)	Lower	Lower	No effect
	Fourth (2016–present)	Lower	Lower	No effect

them toward the center, which was a result of their flexibility in attitudes concerning the value conflict. While both leaders were highly flexible in these attitudes, the electoral consequences of such flexibility were very different.

PM Sanader actively promoted the arrest and transfer of indicted Croatian war crime suspects to the ICTY, a U-turn from his statements as the leader of the opposition. Moreover, the relations with Croatian Serb minority reached a new high during his tenure, visible both in discourse and concrete political actions of HDZ and its government (Kulenović & Petković, 2016; Longo, 2006). The strategy of moderating HDZ was crucial in the party's return to power in 2003, as the party lost the nationalist and isolationist stigma from the 1990s and became an acceptable choice to voters outside of its traditional voter base. The strategy continued to bear fruit at the 2007 national elections, as Sanader stressed his achievements in speeding up the EU negotiations and improving inter-ethnic relations.

Coming from the other side of the aisle, Milanović similarly tried to abandon the firm social-democratic profile of SDP, and shift the party toward the center. His mildly apologetic statements on Ustasha movement, and particularly, revelations of his 'Ustasha grandfather', as well as his quarrels with neighboring countries and the EU, were intended to win over a portion of center-right voters (Dolenec, 2014). Milanović, however, never succeeded to convince a comparably large portion of the center and the right-wing electorate to abandon HDZ and support the

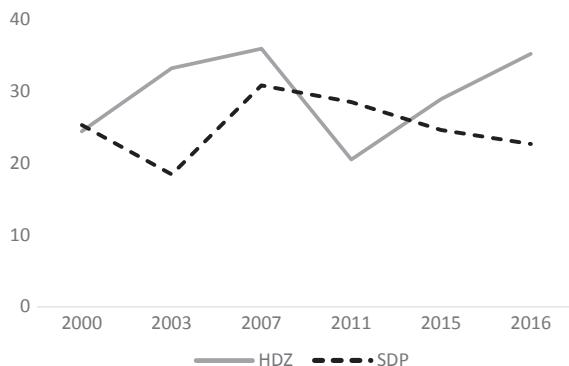


Fig. 4.1 Vote share of HDZ and SDP

reinvented SDP. While the flexibility of Milanović was not a major factor during 2007 and 2011 national elections, it was one of the major reasons behind the poor electoral showing of SDP in the 2015 and 2016 elections (Nikić Čakar & Raos, 2017, p. 51) (Fig. 4.1).

The mixed electoral consequences of the two leaders' issue flexibility can be partially attributed to their cognitive complexity and understanding the vote elasticity of party base and voters. Left-wing voters in Croatia are more volatile in their party choice, switching between different parties within the left bloc. On the other hand, voters of HDZ remain very loyal to the party, irrespective of its shifts in ideological orientation (Henjak, 2011, p. 31). The centrist drive of Milanović, and particularly his actions during the 2011–2015 PM tenure, alienated a sizeable portion of left-wing voters. The alienation was the result of increasing single-mindedness and drop in cognitive complexity of Milanović during the third and fourth terms as party leader. While Milanović attempted to retain his social-democratic credentials by declaring his liberal social values and family history of involvement in partisan resistance during WWII, this did not appease the left-wing voters, who either abstained from elections or voted for new entrants on the left side of the political spectrum. In comparison, Sanader could moderate the image of HDZ knowing that his support among right-wing voters will remain stable, and may be easily mobilized by nationalist rhetoric before the elections.

What eventually led to the collapse of voter support for Sanader and HDZ was the complete absence of integrity during his term as

PM (Kasapović, 2011). While the full extent of the corruption scheme established by Sanader was revealed only after his resignation in 2009, it was becoming increasingly evident even before the 2007 elections that Sanader was using HDZ and its position of power for his private gains and the gains of the top tier of party leadership. Nevertheless, the electoral punishment came only at the 2011 national elections, when HDZ recorded their worst result ever and was soundly defeated by the left coalition led by SDP and Milanović. For Milanović, on the other hand, these elections were the only ones where his integrity and non-involvement in corruption made a difference in voting behavior. Voters were eager to punish HDZ for the numerous corruption scandals during Sanader cabinets, and with his integrity intact, Milanović presented himself as a credible alternative.

### *Party Cohesion and Membership*

Milanović and Sanader established firm control over their parties, reflecting their need for power and competence in securing the support of key party actors and local branches (Nikić Čakar, 2013). The need for power of the two leaders, however, had a differential effect on the party cohesion of HDZ and SDP. While Sanader succeeded in containing much of the initial intra-party resistance to his centralization and led a highly cohesive party throughout his four terms as HDZ chairman, Milanović faced an increasingly factionalized intra-party environment.

Already during the second term as HDZ leader, Sanader expelled the rebellious nationalist faction headed by Pašalić and pacified the remaining members of the old guard. Given that Pašalić symbolized the discredited old regime, Sanader was actually applauded for this move both within the party, as well as by the general public. With this expulsion, Sanader greatly enhanced the intra-party cohesion at the elite level, as remaining challengers preferred to support Sanader, as long as the party secured the perks of the national office. In addition, Sanader had the final say over the composition of candidate lists and exerted influence on the selection of inner circle of the party leadership, which further impeded the rise of meaningful intra-party opposition. On the other hand, the relations between party leadership and party base became considerably more strained, as the party base retained its traditional and conservative character, particularly in rural areas (Longo, 2006).

The looming dissatisfaction of the party base with Sanader's moderate party course erupted during the 2012 party leadership contest when two nationalist candidates entered the runoff.

The SDP elites are in general less hesitant to voice their concerns with party leadership compared to the HDZ elites, and the efforts of Milanović to concentrate power and shift the party toward the center led to strong party factionalization. The opposition against Milanović started to appear already during his second term as SDP leader when he sought to impose control over the Zagreb SDP branch. However, factionalization culminated during his time as PM. The most visible manifestation of this factionalization was the conflict between Milanović and finance minister Slavko Linić, a member of the powerful local party branch in Rijeka, the center of intra-party opposition to Milanović.

Linić lost the confidence of Milanović after allegations of corruption within the finance ministry. While the corruption allegations did not incriminate Linić directly, Milanović nevertheless dismissed the minister, citing the minister's political responsibility for the wrongdoings (Koprić & Škarica, 2016). The conflict escalated when Milanović subsequently initiated expulsion of Linić from SDP, fully disclosing the intra-party rift. The debate on the expulsion of Linić turned into the debate on leadership style of Milanović, and as much as 47 out of 100 members of the SDP main committee opposed the expulsion.<sup>18</sup> However, only after Milanović refused to seek reelection as SDP leader in 2016 did the opposing faction win the party leadership contest.

The available data on party membership during the terms of the two leaders indicate only minimal fluctuation of membership and no discernible trend of membership increase or decrease. Throughout the 2000s, HDZ reported 220,000 members, while the number of SDP members varied between 35,000 and 39,000 in the period for which the data are available (2011–2017).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, despite the growing dissatisfaction of the party base in both parties, their party memberships remained constant and do not seem to be affected by the personality and leadership style of the two leaders.

<sup>18</sup><https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/slavko-linic-tijesnom-vecinom-iskljucen-iz-sdp-a-20140607>.

<sup>19</sup><https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/otkrivamo-zanimljive-podatke-o-stranackom-clanstvu-20140711>.

## CONCLUSION

Sanader and Milanović will not be remembered merely as the successors of iconic leaders (Tuđman and Račan), but as party leaders who profoundly transformed HDZ and SDP, and left a lasting imprint on Croatian politics. The two politicians steered their parties through a highly complex political environment, characterized by the EU accession process, economic crisis and persisting social conflict dividing the Croatian society. Nevertheless, both of them sought and succeeded in actively shaping their political environment and the parties they were heading, warranting the actor-centered approach to studying their tenures as party leaders. In line with the theoretical framework adopted by the edited volume, this chapter set out to evaluate the personality traits of Milanović and Sanader, and in an exploratory manner, ascertain their effect on party electoral results, intra-party cohesion and party membership.

Despite being arch-rivals during their time as PM and leader of opposition between 2007 and 2009, Sanader and Milanović had remarkably similar career paths. They started their political careers at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, silently ascended party ladder, and became party leaders on a promise of new energy, integrity and reassuring self-confidence. Partly based on their diplomatic background, both initially appeared as modern, pro-European, well-educated, and distanced from corruption cases that continuously surfaced in both parties. For the most part, Milanović kept this integrity throughout his tenure as SDP chairman, but Sanader's integrity was shattered upon revelations of several corruption cases happening with his full knowledge or even involvement. The analysis showed that the diverging integrity of the two leaders had real electoral consequences for their parties, as HDZ faltered at 2007 elections, before being swept from power in the 2011 elections in a protest vote against the widespread corruption within their ranks.

The two party leaders were also similar for their highly flexible approach toward the value cleavage, attempting to expand their voter pool with moderate voters at the center. The strategy worked better for Sanader, who knew that HDZ right-wing voters are disciplined and would not defect to smaller radical right parties, and additionally kept them at bay with occasional nationalist rhetoric. On the other hand, Milanović lacked a more complex approach to his left-wing voter base, who eventually became disillusioned with SDP's drift to the right. While

moderating their parties' ideology, the two leaders were highly divisive figures within their parties. Their need for power led them to centralize internal decision-making processes and limit the powers of competing party factions and notable individuals. As the elites of HDZ are less wary of authority, the intra-party cohesion within HDZ elite actually increased. The similar efforts of Milanović within SDP had a completely opposite effect on intra-party cohesion, as the party was effectively split in half, particularly during his tenure as PM.

The analysis underlines the importance of party leader personality traits and their evolution for both internal and external life of a party. However, the chapter also emphasized the relevance of the political environment in which party leaders are embedded, which amplifies or curbs the potential of their personality to produce relevant political outcomes. In broad terms, Sanader faced a more permissive intra-party environment to accomplish his ideological goals and establish dominance within the party, while Milanović was constantly challenged by more demanding party elites and voters. Therefore, the personality approach and the approach based on the institutional and political context of party leaders are best applied in conjunction, illuminating complex interactions between leaders and their environment, something that future studies should address in a more coherent and theoretically driven fashion.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# From Ideology to Interest-Driven Politics: Václav Klaus, Andrej Babiš and Two Eras of Party Leadership in the Czech Republic

*Tomáš Cirhan and Petr Kopecký*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes two prominent Czech politicians and party leaders—Václav Klaus and Andrej Babiš. While Klaus was one of the most prominent politicians in the 1990s, Babiš is his equivalent in contemporary Czech politics. Since the Velvet Revolution, that marked the fall of the communist era in the country's politics, a number of prominent (party) leaders have emerged. The widely known trio of Václav Havel, Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman defined the initial years of democratic transition. Although Havel never participated in party politics—the Civic Forum movement party he co-founded disintegrated fairly shortly after the 1989 revolution—he wielded his considerable political and public influence from the presidential post, which is largely ceremonial in

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the Czech parliamentary system of government. Unlike Havel, Zeman and Klaus were the main faces of parliamentary politics in the first decade after the fall of communism: between them they held a number of governmental and other key political positions.

Klaus undoubtedly formed Czech politics in the first two decades after the Velvet Revolution. The Civic Democratic party that he established has for long been the main party on the liberal/conservative right. Klaus used the party to launch his own career, spanning the posts of finance minister, president of the chamber of deputies, prime minister and later president of the country. As the first minister of finance after the Velvet Revolution (of what was then Czechoslovakia), he was a mastermind of the transition to a free market economy, advocating neoliberal reforms that were opposed by Zeman and his social democratic party. Klaus oversaw the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, and later prepared the independent Czech Republic for the accession to the European Union, although his reserved Eurosceptic approach to European integration affected the relationship of Czechs to the EU in years to come.

In 2003, after Klaus succeeded Havel as president and Zeman withdrew from politics (to later return as president), a new generation of party leaders succeeded them. The most charismatic and publicly known were Jiří Paroubek and Mirek Topolánek, who took the place of Zeman and Klaus, respectively, and led the country's two strongest parties. However, perhaps the most prominent in that new generation of party leaders is Andrej Babiš, currently the most successful politician in the country. Unlike Klaus who came to politics from academia, Babiš enters politics as a leader and owner of the largest conglomerate of companies in the country. This corporate empire provided him and his political project with vast economic power; his ownership of major mass-media outlets secured media access that cannot be matched by any political competitor. His position as a leader of the political party which had quickly built one of the strongest presence at all constituency level translates to repeated electoral success.

By analyzing various traits of their leadership, our chapter will show that the two party leaders symbolize two eras in Czech politics: one represented by Klaus, which can be characterized as an era of ideology driven amateur politics and another represented by Babiš, which can be characterized as an era of interest-driven professional politics. Where Klaus' era was defined by an ideological struggle between two opposing views on country's politics and economy—with Klaus's right-wing

neoliberal ideology promoting free market and Zeman's social democratic left-wing ideology promoting social justice, Babiš' era can be characterized by an ideologically amorphous contest whose protagonists compete against each other on various issues within the context in which political activity is largely shaped by marketing experts. In that sense, our analysis of the two party leaders will also provide insight into the changing nature of party politics and party competition in Czechia, and specifically to a shift from a bipolar pattern of party competition between two blocs of ideologically defined political parties in a relatively non-fragmented political landscape, toward a more multi-polar competition of ideologically non-descript parties in a more fragmented political landscape.

### BACKGROUND OF KLAUS

Klaus is one of the most influential politicians in the history of the Czech Republic. As a minister of finance, prime minister and later president, he had an impact on the economic and political development in the first post-communist decade like no other individual; his opinions and views have been widely discussed in the media and are known to the public. Educated as an economist, Klaus briefly studied in Italy and in the United States (Klaus.cz., 2018). In 1970, after the purges that followed the events of Prague Spring, Klaus was forced to leave academia and worked in unimportant positions at the State Bank. Only after 1987, he returned to academic work as an economist, when he started his career at the prognostic office of Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (Klaus.cz., 2018). He has maintained his links to academia during his entire political career, publishing academic texts and lecturing. He also obtained an academic degree at the Charles University and later became a full professor at the University of Economics in Prague (Klaus.cz., 2018).

As an economist and politician, Klaus eschewed free market ideology in the spirit of Hayek and Friedman (see Adams, 2006; Caldwell, 2018). It made Klaus a famous figure among the like-minded intellectuals, politicians and organizations all over the world and he was often invited to give lectures and participate in discussions at various levels. He was, for example, a distinguished senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a renowned American libertarian think tank (Cato Institute, 2014), before losing membership because of his support for Putin during the Crimean crisis (Kirchick, 2014) and his negative stance toward homosexuality (Bělka, 2014).

**Table 5.1** The list of ODS and ANO party leaders

<i>Parties and their Leaders</i>	<i>Start of the term in office</i>	<i>End of the term in office</i>
<i>ODS</i>		
Václav Klaus	21 April 1991	14 December 2002
Mirek Topolánek	14 December 2002	13 April 2010
Petr Nečas	20 June 2010	17 June 2013
Petr Fiala	18 January 2014	Currently in office
<i>ANO</i>		
Andrej Babiš	1 August 2012	Currently in office

However, Klaus's academic work was always perceived more as a hobby. His academic achievements were clearly overshadowed by his political career. Klaus's long political career started in December 1989, when he was sworn into the post of federal minister of finance. At that time, still largely unknown political figure, Klaus also achieved his first victory in the arena of party politics when he became leader of the then strongest political movement called Civic Forum (Klaus.cz., 2018). In 1991, Klaus helps the disintegration of Civic Forum and forms a new political party called Civic Democratic Party (ODS) from its remnants. He leads the party between 1991 and 2002. The ODS becomes one of the most successful Czech political parties and stays so long, even after Klaus cedes his party leadership to others (see Table 5.1).

The ODS won its first parliamentary elections in 1992 (see Table 5.1) and Klaus became prime minister, a position from which he oversaw the process of dissolution of Czechoslovakia, as well as the introduction of major economic reforms that he himself, in no small part, master-minded. Among the notorious economic measures introduced was the so-called voucher privatization (Česká Televize, 2016), a grand scheme devised by Klaus and his close associates Ježek (Gallistl, 2017) and Tříška (Novinky.cz, 2016), by which the ownership of state-owned companies was transferred in the form of shares to private hands. This complex process of ownership transfer of more than 2000 companies with an estimated value of more than 450 billion CZK was criticized from the outset for a lack of legal regulation that allowed for financial mismanagement and for corruption. However, it was pushed through by Klaus and his party because it was a policy that allowed the fastest

possible privatization of property. The speed came at a price: it is estimated that tens of billions of CZK disappeared during the process by various asset stripping schemes (e.g. Doležálek, 2006; Němcová, 2011), colloquially referred to in Czech as “tunnelling”.

ODS nevertheless won another parliamentary election, in 1996, and Klaus became prime minister for the second time. However, this time the coalition government over which Klaus presided was short-lived. The government fell victim to the internal crisis within ODS, which was caused by revelations of murky campaign financing from suspicious sources in Switzerland and other unknown donors in the total value of over 200 million CZK (Kmenta, 2000; Respekt, 2011). In 1997 the government fell as a result, which led to early elections in 1998. This time Klaus and his ODS were pushed into opposition. However, Klaus had managed to keep a strong influence on the executive power by signing a so-called opposition agreement with his main political rival Miloš Zeman, tolerating the minority government of the Social Democratic party (ČSSD) in exchange for numerous parliamentary posts for ODS (Klaus himself took the post of the President of the Chamber of Deputies) and for several constitutional changes (Kopeček, 2015; Roberts, 2003).

In the next parliamentary elections that took place in 2002, ODS lost to ČSSD again and Klaus decided not to run for re-election as party chairman of ODS. He withdrew from party politics and announced his intention to run for president, a post to which he was elected in 2003 and re-elected in 2008, in both cases by indirect elections by parliament (Klaus.cz., 2018). As president, Klaus became renowned for his strong anti-EU stances; also ODS is one of the most Eurosceptic parties in the Czech Republic (e.g. Kopecký, 2004). Although the country made a very large part of EU-accession negotiations and preparations under Klaus' premiership, he admitted that he voted against the membership in the EU-accession referendum (ČTK, 2014). He was also the last political representative in the EU to ratify Lisbon Treaty, repeatedly warning the Czech public that he signed it under pressure and that the country will lose sovereignty as a result (Wirnitzer & Procházková, 2009). After withdrawing from politics in 2012, Klaus founded a think tank called Václav Klaus's Institute, aimed at publishing and conference organizing on various themes including Euroscepticism (see Institut Václava Klause, 2018).

### *Andrej Babiš*

Andrej Babiš, a Slovak born billionaire, is the second wealthiest Czech (and richest Slovak) with wealth worth USD 4.6 billion (Forbes, 2018). As the son of a senior communist official who served as Czechoslovakia's trade representative in Geneva (Tait, 2018), Babiš started to build a successful career in the communist regime. His first important job was at the state firm Petrimex, trading chemicals in Morocco, where he learned business practices and established connections that later helped him to build his current corporate empire. According to the findings of a court in Bratislava, Babiš was not only member of the Communist party, but also knowingly cooperated with Czechoslovak secret police (Tait, 2018). After the Velvet Revolution, Babiš's journey to economic power took a quick turn. Using his networks from the past, he gradually managed to build Agrofert, an agricultural, food processing and chemical group, which is the country's third-largest company by revenue, largest by number of companies, as well as the largest employer in the country (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018).

Although keeping close connections with politicians of the main parties, Babiš did not personally participate in politics in the first two post-communist decades. This changed in 2011, when he decided to form ANO. ANO started as a civic movement in November 2011, ostensibly motivated to channel popular dissatisfaction with the state of politics and economy. The movement's purpose is included in the abbreviation of movement's name—ANO in Czech stands for Action of Dissatisfied Citizens. Babiš's public appeal was based on his scathing critique of post-communist political and economic developments, and chiefly of high levels of corruption and managerial incompetence of political establishment. ANO incorporated this perspective into its public proclamations and quickly gained thousands of supporters.<sup>1</sup> Next major step in ANO's history took place in May 2012 when Andrej Babiš registered the movement as an official political party. Although ANO operates as a political party, its leadership insist on referring to the organization as a political movement. It is reminiscent of the tactics of Civic Forum, and of the anti-politics of Havel, who also chose to operate as a movement

<sup>1</sup>Nineteen days after forming ANO 2011 civic movement, over ten thousand citizens signed its public proclamation supporting the movement (derived from ANO website—[www.anobudelip.cz](http://www.anobudelip.cz)).

rather than a party. However, Babiš's anti-party sentiment is more the result of his desire to distinguish his party from the competitors, rather than of the more fundamental anti-party positions that were typical for Havel and some other anti-communist dissidents (e.g. Buštíková & Guasti, 2018; Tucker et.al., 2000).

Just months before entering elections for the first time, the leader of ANO purchased a media group called MAFRA, which controls two nation-wide daily newspapers, a radio station and a music TV channel (Surmanová, 2017; Ťopek, 2017). This gave him a nickname Babisconi, to demonstrate similarity with Italian former minister Silvio Berlusconi (Cichowlas & Foxall, 2015). Indeed, similarly to Berlusconi in Italy, ANO succeeded in its first electoral contest, making an electoral breakthrough in the October 2013 (early) legislative elections, directly gaining historically the highest number of votes of any new Czech party. ANO gained 18.7% and 47 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, finishing second behind the CSSD. In the EU parliament elections in May 2014, ANO received the highest number of votes in the country (16.13%) and repeated the same in October 2014 municipal elections with 14.59% of votes. The 2016 regional elections were again dominated by ANO, which gained 21.05% of votes and became the largest party in 9 out of 13 regions. In 2017 parliamentary elections ANO won 29.6% of votes and Andrej Babiš became the country's Prime Minister, after serving as the finance minister in the CSSD-led coalition government between 2013 and 2017.

## ANALYSIS OF THE LEADERS

We now turn to discuss the six personality dimensions and behaviors of Václav Klaus and Andrej Babiš during their terms in political office. The overview is presented in Table 5.2.

### *Consistency*

Klaus was clearly an ideologically driven politician. Although his views on economy, civil society, European integration and ecology evolved over time, at the core he remained quite consistent on most of them. Support for unregulated free market economy represents the key to Klaus's political perspective. Functioning economy, according to Klaus, is based on the effective corporate governance, "which can never result from state-controlled ownership, because effective corporate governance

**Table 5.2** The character traits of Klaus and Babiš

	<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Consistency</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Václav Klaus	1992–1996	High	High	Medium	High	Medium	Low
	1996–1997	High	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Low
	1998–2002	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Andrej Babiš	First (2013–2017)	Low	Low	High	High	High	High
	Second (2017–now)	Low	Low	High	High	High	High

*Note* The traits for competence and integrity are for the political dimension. The evaluation looks differently for the managerial and business dimensions

is created spontaneously and only under the pressures of free market processes” (Klaus, 2007, p. 196). Building on the academic work of Hayek (Caldwell, 2018) or Friedman (Adams, 2006), Klaus always propagated unregulated free market capitalism and spontaneous market forces, which he saw as a better solution to economic and social problems than regulation and state intervention. He staunchly rejected all types of third ways/middle ways between capitalism and socialism, and was strongly opposing policies of social welfare state (Klaus, 2007, p. 46), though the latter more in theory than in political practice. When he left ODS and the party moved economically somewhat toward the center, Klaus’s ideological stance was championed in Czech politics by Svobodní (Party of Free Citizens), a libertarian political party led by Petr Mach.

Klaus’s view on the role of civil society in general, and on environmental groups in particular, goes hand in hand with his view on free economy. His polemics with Havel on this topic were famous (see Havel, Klaus, & Pithart, 1996). Where Havel defended civil society actors as a fundamental part of a free society, Klaus referred to them as “anti-liberal syndicalist interest groups that use pressure representing interests of small number of individuals against the free society of sovereign citizens” (Klaus, 2007, p. 27). The role of politician according to Klaus is to confront such groups and not allow them to “redistribute state funds to their advantage, suppress competition, delegate political power of the state” (Klaus, 2007, p. 45). Where Havel declared his political preference for the green parties and movements, Klaus answered with climate change skepticism, referring to environmentalism as “radicalism, absolutism in opinions, irrationality, arrogant moralizing, anti-scientific defiance

to data, intellectual elitism and nearly religious zeal" (Klaus, 2007, p. 17). Similar to communism and fascism, Klaus sees ecology as another attempt to attack human freedom. Klaus found the topic of environment and climate change so serious, that he published a book about it (see Klaus, 2007).

Strong anti-EU sentiments have been another cornerstone of Klaus' ideological profile, though in this respect his views evolved perhaps most dramatically, from a mainstream Eurosceptic toward a Euro-reject position (see Kopecký & Mudde, 2002). It is fair to point out that Klaus has from the very beginning been one of the most vocal critics of the EU. Even before the Czech Republic joined the EU, he repeatedly opined that the accession would mean a significant reduction of Czech sovereignty. He also doubted the EU's institutional architecture and economic policies, including the euro. However, he was broadly supportive of European integration and led the country into the EU. It is only after he moves to the post of president and later when he leaves politics altogether, that Klaus criticizes anything even remotely associated with the EU, referring to the EU as to "the world of politically-correct, mono-ideological, moralistic, post-democratic institutions acting against the will of European citizens" (Klaus, 2018). He not only objects to the adoption plan for the common currency (Klaus, 2018) and fiercely rejects the quota system for relocation of refugees (Vlčková, 2017), he also starts to support Czexit (Institut Václava Klause, 2017).

Unlike Klaus, Babiš has no outspoken ideological background and, in that sense, it is hard to discuss consistency in his opinions. Babiš has managed to build an image of a person who is everything but consistent in his public appeals and opinions on various topics—he has acted as an opportunist on most important issues, seamlessly downplaying or changing his positions in order to maintain his political support. His changing stance to the refugee crisis is an example here. Before it became clear that a vast majority Czechs do not agree with accepting relocation of refugees onto Czech territory, Babiš claimed, in 2015, that accepting refugees would not be problematic and would even help the country to fill in those job positions that Czechs do not want to do (Simindr, 2017). However, as the mood in society evolved, so did Babiš's rhetoric. In 2016, he repeatedly argued that he does not agree with accepting any refugees at all (Brožová, 2016). Moreover, tweeting in 2017, Babiš referred to himself as a leader of anti-immigration agenda in the country (Simindr, 2017). He went even further in the same year (months before

the general elections) when he was interviewed by a Czech equivalent of a far-right Breitbart news called Parlamentní Listy emphasizing that he does not want even a single refugee in the country, not even on temporary basis, because unsuccessful asylum seekers murder clergymen and rape pregnant women (Štěpán, 2017).

Babiš's political stance on the EU is similarly unclear and ambivalent. In the past, especially before the 2014 European elections, Babiš profiled his party as strongly pro-European, building on the importance of the EU and positive message (Válková, 2014). Babiš also selected a strongly pro-European Pavel Telička, former EU commissioner and lobbyist, as the main face of the party in the 2014 campaign (Lidovky, 2013). However, Babiš's approach and rhetoric toward the EU did not stay consistent for long and, as result, his relationship with Telička fell apart as his main Euro MP left the party altogether (Janáková, 2017). The main reason behind the dispute was party leader's change of opinions on European integration and role of the Czech Republic in it. Babiš for example supported Brexit and claimed if he would be British, he would vote leave in the referendum (Kulidakis, 2017). ANO also first supported adoption of the euro (Černý, 2017), only for Babiš to later change his mind claiming that he does not want to adopt the Euro to not lose a tool against financial crises (Eurozprávy, 2017; Pecák, 2017). During the Czech (direct) presidential elections in 2018, Babiš supported pro-Russian and pro-Chinese presidential candidate Zeman, while at the same time he referred to himself as the only hope that the EU has in Czech politics against Czexit (Echo24, 2018; Mánert, 2018).

### *Competence*

It is crucial from the outset to distinguish two types of competence—political and managerial. Political competence refers to how the party leader negotiates with other politicians, with the opposition, and what is his contribution in terms of forming policies and setting political agenda and country vision. Managerial competence on the other hand refers more to the actual everyday tasks of controlling the party organization, the ministerial resorts, party secretariat, the presentation of the everyday work to the public and management of personnel involved in this process. The two leaders differ significantly in this aspect. While Klaus was more competent politically than Babiš is, the exact opposite can be said about the managerial competence of the two leaders.

Klaus was a pinnacle of the country's transition from a state-planned to market economy: he envisioned, proposed and carried out the entire transition. The ideological vision with which he led his party helped to structure the party competition into two blocks of parties alongside the left-right dimension defined in economic and social terms (e.g. Deegan-Krause & Haughton, 2010). He also had energy and political skills to defend these dramatic changes in public eyes. While politically a divisive figure, he did so while presiding over two coalition governments, each containing three parties with very weak majorities in parliament, facing constant pressures from the opposition and from the then president Havel. In this respect, Klaus showed himself to be a skilled politician, even though had he had less of ideological zeal and more willingness to compromise, his premiership would have most likely lasted longer.

It is too early to provide a definitive conclusion about Babiš and his political competence. He is a relative novice to politics. Much like Klaus, he has so far shown little pleasure in deal making and compromising that is inherent to Czech government formation and coalition politics. He has nevertheless showed a political resilience and pragmatism that was also typical for Klaus: for instance, in 2017, during the government crisis just months before regular legislative elections, he made the best of the pre-election political maneuvering of the then prime minister Bohuslav Sobotka (Al-Jazeera, 2017; BBC News, 2017), who decided to recall Babiš from his ministerial post for his alleged misuse of EU funds for private purposes. Babiš accepted the dismissal, kept ANO in government for the remaining few months before the elections, and presented himself to the public as a martyr. ANO won the 2017 legislative elections by landslide (Goeij & Lyman, 2017), and formed a new (minority) coalition government, now with a much weaker ČSSD, under Babiš's premiership.

However, with regard to managerial competence, Babiš looks a more competent political leader, thanks to a large part to his managerial past. Klaus did not control ministerial resorts and his own party organization to the extent Babiš has done (see below), he also did not aspire to do so. He was more a big picture politician than a micromanager. In contrast, Babiš proved to be a competent party leader and builder (see below), but also a successful manager of ministry of finance, a post for which he was even awarded a prize as the best minister of finance of countries with emerging markets by Global Markets (ČTK, 2016). Babiš repeatedly prided himself that the national debt shrunk by CZK 60 billion (Euro.cz., 2017), and the collection of taxes increased by 13% (Hovorka,

2017), during his time in office (Kučera, 2016; Novinky, 2017). He became known for his flagship policy of electronic registration of sales, targeting gray economy and tax evasion (Prague Daily Monitor, 2016). The governments in which Babiš and his party participated did not have any major corruption or other scandals, which were more or less a norm in all previous governments, often leading to their fall. For this reason, public polls have repeatedly shown that Babiš has been the country's most favorite politician for several years running (Eurodeník, 2016).

### *Integrity*

Integrity is often put together with pursuit of personal interests in politics and with allegations of corruption. This is certainly so in the eyes of Czech citizens whereby misuse of office for private gains has been a main-stay of politics. Perceptions of integrity of Babiš are problematic because he has played important roles both as a businessman (prior to entering high politics) and as a politician. The post-communist business environment in which Babiš built his vast corporate empire was rough and his behavior was consistent with the rules of this environment. Some morally problematic business practices, now fully revealed to the public, still follow Babiš nowadays and affect his image as a politician. Among these is the fact he knowingly collaborated with secret communist police in order to build his career under communism, or that he agreed with a sophisticated tax evasion scheme which helped him to save CZK 180 million (EUR 7.2 million) for Agrofert at the cost of Czech taxpayers (Info.cz., 2017). But perhaps the biggest scandal to date haunting Babiš is the alleged fraud he committed while financing construction of his farm and convention center.

He was accused of illegally obtaining CZK 50 million (around EUR 2 million) in EU money from subsidies that were designated only for small businesses. He did so by concealing his ownership of Storks Nest; a farm that would otherwise not be eligible for the funding. When the scandal broke out, Babiš was first caught lying on record by saying he did not know who was the owner of the farm's shares, only later admitting under pressure that shareholders included his wife and children as well as his brother-in-law. Czech police requested Babiš' parliamentary immunity be lifted by the Lower House and he is currently being investigated in relation to this case. In the meantime, the EU antifraud office (OLAF) launched its own investigation of the matter and concluded that irregular practice took place in this case, leaving the Czech police to continue with their investigation (Rankin, 2018).

However, since Babiš entered high politics, no examples of corruption scandals surfaced, despite the attempts of part of Czech media to prove otherwise. Indeed, the 2013–2017 coalition government in which ANO and Babiš participated was one of the few governments in the country's history that was not ended by corruption scandals. In addition, unlike the established parties that were renowned for numerous corruption scandals, ANO did not have any; indeed, all individuals associated with ANO who were under slightest allegations of corruption were fired from the party instantly. This was one of the mistakes made by Klaus in his days. Although he never used his political positions to get personally involved in corruption, he often looked over numerous and serious scandals involving members of his own party, including close political associates. During his party leadership (but also after the succession), ODS have gradually grown to a party organization serving as a vehicle for personal enrichment and corruption practices at local, regional and national levels of administration, prompting one observer to call it a “clientelistic party” (Klíma, 2015). It is exactly this face of the party (and the similar practices within CSSD) that has led to the erosion of public trust in established parties, and de facto opened the door to new anti-corruption and anti-establishment projects, such as ANO of Andrej Babiš, to enter the party system.

### *Need for Power and Cognitive Complexity*

Concerning the need for power, although both leaders were authoritative individuals who tried to centralize their closest environment and mute dissent, Klaus never managed to do so to the degree that Babiš has done. As said earlier, this in some sense reflects both substantive interests and professional background of both politicians. Klaus initially paid little attention to the details of party organization and focused more on the ideology, policy-making and reforms while in power. He understood intuitively that a party was a source of political power and, in contrast to anti-political Havel, always defended what he called standard institutions of representative democracy, including political parties. In the early days of ODS, the broader party leadership was also largely composed of like-minded individuals, labelled by one study as “technocratic elites” (see Hadžijsky, 2011). Klaus cultivated these networks politically, of course, but their emergence was more a matter of spontaneous gravitation toward his charisma and his political ideas than a matter of deliberate organizational design.

In terms of Klaus's cognitive complexity, that is his awareness of the problems within the party, it was only after the event known in Czechia as a "Sarajevo assassination" that Klaus actually started to focus closely on the party organization, its issues, and his role in it. In November 1997, when he was on a trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina, part of ODS leadership organized an internal party coup proposing in media that Klaus resigns from the post of party leader because of his inability to explain questionable sources of party funding (e.g. Hrabica, 2016; Strašíková, 2009). The event triggered the demise of Klaus' coalition government and early elections, and de facto opened the way to the government of Social Democrats of Miloš Zeman (Oppelt, 2017). However, after Klaus managed to win the party to his side at the next party congress, it also set in motion internal changes within ODS, with sizeable part of his opponents leaving the party that now looked somewhat more centralized than before. Although Klaus looked stronger within the party than before, ODS had to wait for Klaus to resign from party leadership to regain government power again.

In contrast to Klaus, Babiš was from the beginning interested in the internal affairs of his party, as he was well aware of potential problems that could arise within the party. Therefore, as a very experienced manager when he started his political career, he wanted a political organization that looked more like a business firm than a traditional party (Kopeček, 2016). He also wanted to distinguish himself from other competitors whom he depicted in his campaigns as a corrupt establishment. He therefore created a movement in which he is in the center of all decisions like in a firm. To do so, Babiš has spent vast amount of energy, resources and time to enlarge his movement party while not losing control over it. Perhaps the clearest evidence of Babiš's approach to his own role within the party was given in an interview to *Financial Times*, where he stated that he can never resign or be replaced from the position of party leader, claiming that "the party is connected to my person. The party is me" (Foy, 2016). Some of the most visible control mechanisms that Babiš has at his disposal are integrated in the party statutes, most notably in the rules around the selection of candidates for elections. ANO leader has a sole right to change the order and presence of individuals on any candidate list of the party in any type of election. This measure is highly unusual in Czech party politics: no other party has such clause in their statutes.

Another aspect of party organization which helps Babiš to keep control of his political party is more informal and centers around the composition of party leadership. Babiš controls the party by appointing a number of loyal individuals from his own business corporation into the party organization. In an empirical research on this topic, we found a significant overlap between ANO elite positions and their past and/or present appointments in managerial positions within Agrofert business corporation owned by Babiš (Cirhan & Kopecký, 2017). It is also noteworthy to mention that these Babiš's loyal employees (and party members in the same person) occupy crucial party posts, such as the posts of leader of ANO's parliamentary faction or party head-hunter. Added to this is the fact that Babiš has largely funded the party from its beginning, though now the fact that ANO has obtained large shares of votes in several successive elections means it also obtains a significant amount of money from the state in the form of public party funding.

In contrast to Klaus and the leaders of other main Czech parties, a strong position within his party organization gives Babiš an advantage of being able to react quickly to public opinion or to problems within the party. Where for example Klaus had to set in motion, or await results of, internal procedures in various cases of intra-party conflicts, Babiš promptly dissolved entire local party branches when allegations of unacceptable behavior surfaced (Krutil, 2017). He quickly fired ministers of his own party in order to save the public image of the party when needed (Česká Televize, 2015). Babiš also personally selected a number of key candidates for crucial posts before elections and influenced decisions regarding the formation of coalitions at the regional level of governance. This said, it is clear that ANO is highly unlikely to survive leadership succession. Both ODS and other larger Czech parties like ČSSD, the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) or the Communist Party (KSČM), not to mention various smaller new parties, experienced a fair share of organizational and electoral turmoil following the leadership challenge or resignation. But arguably none of them have been so dependent on the personality of the founding leader as ANO in order to perform and survive.

### *Flexibility*

The last personality trait we consider in our study is the flexibility of Klaus and Babiš. Also, in this respect, we can see a clear difference between the two politicians—between the natural amateur-style

politician Klaus on the one hand, and the professional-style politician Babiš who owes much of his image and ability to react to opinions of the public to carefully orchestrated marketing strategies.

Both leaders displayed zeal in regards to their engagement with public opinions, for instance by their interest in campaigning activities. Like Milos Zeman, his main political opponent at that time, Klaus was a tireless political campaigner. He was willing to travel across country's regions when he felt it was necessary to gain political support, for example following the Sarajevo putsch or during his rein in the presidential office. Babiš is also an effective campaigner, showing perhaps even more appetite for public engagement than Klaus. He has managed to present himself as an ordinary citizen, as one from the crowd, displaying genuine adaptability to public opinions. He regularly visits pubs, concerts, hospitals and cultivates the image of ordinary citizens fighting for the public good against the corrupted politicians. He personally rallies the entire country before every election and even takes members of the public for bus trips and invites them to his farm (Frouzová & Bartoňíček, 2017). He organizes conferences for voters, attends music festivals (Barochová, 2015) and even published a book summarizing his vision for the future (Doležal, 2017). Babiš's willingness to react to public opinions, and adapt the style of political message accordingly, is perhaps best visible on his YouTube channel video series called "come to me".<sup>2</sup> In this blog style series, anybody can send a recorded video message to Babiš, who then video records and posts an answer, in which he directly responds and shares his opinion on the discussed topic online. In this respect, Babiš is far more accessible to the public than Klaus was.

However, and despite lacking access to the tools and technology available to Babiš, Klaus always possessed a far greater degree of authenticity in regard to his ability to react to public opinions and communicate his reactions effectively, also preparing most of his speeches himself. He operated in the last political decade before the onset of social media in politics, when comparably more mass media outlets were also independent (Stetka, 2012). At that time, the communication between parties and the public was already professionalized and to some extent, marketing driven, but these techniques were employed mainly during intensive electoral campaigns, and were more focused on parties than on individual party leaders. In contrast, the tools and resources available to Babiš in

<sup>2</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzbkWvW1hi4>.

regard to reacting to the public are on a completely different level. His party's message is focused only on him as a person, not on the party at all, and it takes place practically 24/7.

Babiš's ability to react to public views differs mainly because he operates in a commercial media dominated political context. He has employed a number of social media experts who constantly look after his image and who devised an excellent communication strategy that helps him to convey his vision on politics to the public. Babiš has certainly invested more attention to this part of the political game than Klaus, but also more than his own political competitors. Indeed, one of the first decisions that Babiš and his close party associates made was to hire the best available team of marketing experts, among them Marek Prchal, the head of ANO's marketing, who previously worked for a number of country political parties and city councils, as well as for the biggest global companies such as Pepsi, Nivea and Snickers (Kabátová, 2017). Since 2013, he has been responsible for the online presentation of ANO and all its electoral campaigns. In addition to hiring experts, ANO also has the biggest team responsible for controlling social media accounts and online marketing of the party leader on Facebook and Twitter, where Babiš has over 377,000 followers,<sup>3</sup> by far the largest following among Czech politicians (Twitter 2018). In addition to his activity on social networks and YouTube, Babiš also has his own online blog titled Diary of non-politician and his own online TV show titled Babiš's cafe,<sup>4</sup> where he discusses different political, economic, social and cultural topics with different moderators. In addition to this day-to-day online marketing, Babiš also posts, on special occasions, commented videos whereby camera follows him all day throughout his various meetings with the public<sup>5</sup>; similarly, all his foreign visits are recorded and their videos are posted online. Lastly, we can mention that ANO, in addition to its normal party website, also registered a special website titled We want better Czechia, which gives the public the opportunity to communicate their ideas and feedback directly to the party leadership.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, Babiš is indeed very receptive of public opinions, using experts in the field to gather data

<sup>3</sup><https://twitter.com/AndrejBabis/followers?lang=cs>.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.anobudelip.cz/cs/videa/babisova-kavarna/>.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.anobudelip.cz/cs/videa/andrej-babis/>.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.chcemelepsicesko.cz/>.

on public opinions in various areas, and he skillfully uses this data as a part of this public opinion-tailored political message. It is noteworthy that Babiš's lack of ideology also helps him to react to public views and adapt quickly to changing public views.

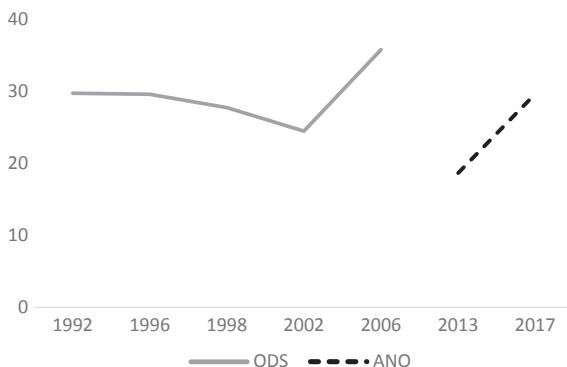
### AN ANALYSIS OF CONSEQUENCES

We will now look at the consequences of party leaders' traits on the operation of their parties and their fortunes in high politics. Babiš' political leadership is clearly dependent on his previous background as a CEO of a large corporation, a manager and a businessman. The same is true for Václav Klaus: his professional background as an economist and an academic strongly imprinted his political views and activities. Both leaders' personalities and backgrounds simultaneously affect the way their parties perform electorally, as well as the way their party organizations function internally. The overview is presented in Table 5.3.

For Babiš, his lack of previous political experience explains his shallow ideological anchoring and frequent inconsistency in political opinions. This is however not seen as a deficit with his voters. Actually, ANO under Babiš has so far achieved better electoral results nearly with every new election in which it competed. Babiš's entrepreneurial experience of building a huge successful corporation translates to his managerial competence which, in turn, helps him to create an image of a competent politician in the eyes of public. Klaus, on the other hand, based his popularity on a clearly presented and consistently argued vision of an economic system of unregulated free market economy, and a system of representative democracy. A large proportion of voters identified with Klaus's policies and reforms until the late 1990s, when first economic problems started to show, financial criminality was on rise and

**Table 5.3** The consequences of Klaus' and Babiš's leadership for their parties

	<i>Term in office</i>	<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Václav Klaus	First (1992–1996)	No effect	No effect	No effect
	Second (1996–1998)			
Andrej Babiš	Third (1998–2002)	Lower	Lower	Lower
	First (2012–2017)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Second (2017–now)			



**Fig. 5.1** The electoral performance of ODS and ANO

Klaus's own party became divided due over suspicious party financing (Strašíková, 2009) (Fig. 5.1).

The managerial background is reflected in Babiš' approach to party organization. All aspects of party life are subjects to control from the party leadership and the party de facto functions as a firm. Babiš' managerial approach also influences the membership strategy of ANO. The number of ordinary members is limited in ANO: the party imposes restrictions on recruitment and prefers forms of membership with no decision-making rights within the party (see Cirhan & Stauber, 2018). On the contrary, ODS strived to build a large party organization and focused on cultivating a large membership base. This strategy went according to the plan until the infamous 1997 coup against Klaus, which led to a sharp decrease in ODS's party membership, also signaling the lack of Klaus's competence in handling the internal party dissent.

When talking about competence, Klaus oversaw a complete economic reform of the country. He appeared as more competent, politically, than Babiš. However, since ANO made an electoral breakthrough, Babiš has proven his political competence by participating in the coalition government led by Social Democrats, skillfully maneuvering in a way that allowed him and his party to take the credit for all successes of that government, while failures were blamed on the Social Democratic Party itself. This has also translated into a strong electoral performance of ANO in the last 2017 legislative elections. Klaus, on the other hand, did not show so much pragmatism in making political alliances and deals,

which together with his lack of managerial competence and lack of focus on the party organization cost him his premiership in 1997. This was the time when the internal party cohesion within ODS was most notoriously threatened by the internal opposition formed against Klaus during the already mentioned coup that took place in 1997 (Hrabica, 2016; Strašíková, 2009).

This event led to the resignation of a number of prominent ODS elite members, the collapse of Klaus's coalition government following his coalition partners from ODA and Christian Democratic party leaving and lastly an establishment of new political party by the former rebellious party elite. Related to his cognitive complexity, Klaus did not pay much attention to the problems within the party and internal party affairs in general, only after the coup, he started to focus on the management of the party. In contrast, the internal party cohesion in ANO is and was from the beginning secured by the existence of extensive corporate network of Babiš's Agrofert, operating within the party organization controlling its operation at its every level. Thanks to this internal party setup of corporate and political intersection, ANO benefits by being cohesive and united as a result.

With regard to flexibility, for Babiš, his ability to adapt to the public opinions is closely linked to reliance on media and communication experts. Without their input and knowledge, Babiš would not have been able to react professionally. We see Babiš gradually becoming more experienced in responsiveness to public views in media appearances. With the possibility to hire best available experts in the field, who assisted Babiš with the partisan and personal marketing necessary to compensate for lack of his political experience, charisma and skill, we see him improving over time since his entry to politics. In addition, Babiš's lack of ideology also helps him to change his political message and adapt it to the changing public views. Klaus on the other hand, was active at the time when the centrality of political marketing for political success was still largely underestimated or absent in Czech politics. Therefore, he did not master his communication style and personal presentation to the level we can see with Babiš nowadays.

## CONCLUSION

Klaus and Babiš represent two types of political leaders who could hardly be more different both in terms of their background and political presentation, as well as with respect to the execution of their political role

and careers. Klaus was an authentic politician with a clearly defined ideology and strong political views which he had elaborated by years in high politics, but were largely stemming from his background as an economist and academic. Babiš, in contrast, is more a product of marketing methods carefully prepared by the best available marketing experts and pollsters in the field, a politician with shallow ideological anchoring. The reliance of Babiš on modern marketing expertise goes hand in hand with his managerial approach to the party organization of ANO, which is structured largely alongside his private business. Klaus and Babiš do not only show different personalities and different approaches to carrying out of both public office and party-political posts, but also symbolize two different eras of Czech politics. While for Klaus this was an era of ideology driven amateur politicians involved in an ideological struggle between two opposing views on country's politics and economy. In Babiš's times the ideological struggle has been replaced by competition between interest driven professionalized politicians. This new era is characterized by competition of newly emerged politicians without any ideological background, and whose whole political profile and program is a product of marketing experts. With Babiš's success in politics, the composition of parties with the party system also changes, from a relatively stable pattern of bipolar competition between two blocks of parties competing alongside a left-right dimension, to Babiš's era of a more fragmented and volatile competition among several smaller parties.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# Different Styles, Similar Paths: Party Leadership in Georgia

*Nanuli Silagadze*

## INTRODUCTION

Georgia as a sovereign country has existed since 1991 when a referendum with over 90% votes in favor marked a new beginning for its independence. Though significant progress has been achieved since then, considerable hurdles still need to be tackled by this young democracy. The social-economic development of the country has remained one of the major challenges: the small nation of around 3.7 million inhabitants suffers from high unemployment rates, especially among the young—almost one-third of whom are out of work—while the average pension is around just 60 Euro per month (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2018). The civil society, although it played an important role during the 2003 Rose Revolution and the subsequent change of power in 2012, continues to be structurally weak, among its vulnerabilities are the lack of domestic funding and its dependence on external donors. This phenomenon is closely related to the underdevelopment or almost

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non-existence of a civil participatory culture, where only 1–2% of the population is member of a socially or politically oriented civil-society organization (Kakachia & Lebanidze, 2016, p. 135).

In the wake of the latest constitutional amendments, Georgia is moving towards a parliamentary system. Consistent with other post-Soviet states, it has a mixed electoral system. Nonetheless, its political landscape is particularly fragmented with a high number of political parties united under various fractions. In contrast to other post-communist countries, the rules for party registration have not been made stricter over the years. As a result, there are around 190 registered parties, only a dozen of which are actively involved in political life (National Integrity System. Transparency International country study, 2011, p. 138). However, only two of these parties were represented in Parliament in the previous legislative period, 2012–2016. Moreover, political parties in Georgia are weakly institutionalized, with ideology playing only a minor role. Instead, parties are built around a strong personality who performs a central role in the decision-making process: “it would be fair to say that, in Georgia, we encounter political groupings that are based more on charismatic leadership and clientelistic approaches than on concrete ideologies and programmatic plans” (Lortkipanidze, 2016). Consequently, the political landscape has been dominated by a single party: Shevardnadze’s Citizens’ Union of Georgia (CUG) from 1995 to 2003, Saakashvili’s United National Movement (UNM) in the period 2004–2012 and from 2012 onwards—Ivanishvili’s Georgian Dream (GD).

This chapter aims at scrutinizing the six personality traits of party chairpersons and their influence on the overall performance of their parties. Taking into consideration the particular focus of the book, the leaders of the following two parties were selected as units of analysis: Shalva Natelashvili from the Georgian Labour Party and Mikheil Saakashvili from the UNM. Both parties are important for Georgian political life. The Labour Party is the most successful left-wing political party in the country’s history; the only party that does not claim to be “centre-right” and has never allied with any blocs (Machaidze, 2012). The UNM in its turn is the only party in the history of modern Georgia that has not disappeared from the political landscape after losing power. On the contrary, it remained the main opposition force, playing an important role, which is acknowledged even by its rivals. Though, vastly

different in their electoral performance, both of these parties have at least one aspect in common—their founders have been their chairpersons for decades.

The chapter provides a brief history of the two selected party leaders, their background, and characteristics of their parties. Next, their performance as chairmen is analyzed with an emphasis on the link between their actions and the six personality traits. The subsequent section evaluates the repercussions of their behavior on the overall party dynamics and examines the hypotheses. The conclusion section summarizes the main findings of the study and discusses their implications.

## HISTORY OF THE TWO LEADERS

The founder of the Labour Party of Georgia (GLP) and its chairman for over twenty years is Shalva Natelashvili. Born in 1958 he is considered to be “Georgia’s veteran oppositionary politician” and described as an “unchallenged and flamboyant leader” (Civil Georgia, December 21, 2007). He graduated with a law degree from Tbilisi State University, served at the Soviet Foreign Ministry’s Diplomatic Academy and held various positions at the General Prosecutor’s Office. He embarked on a political career after Georgia’s independence, being elected to Parliament in 1992 and playing an active role in drafting the Constitution of 1995 (Mikaberidze, 2015, p. 492).

Since its founding in 1995, the GLP has been represented in Parliament via proportional system only once—in 2008 when the party came fourth with 7.44% of votes. Another important achievement was in 2003 when GLP gained over 12% of votes. However, in the wake of the Rose Revolution the results were annulled and in the rerun in 2004, the party failed to overcome the 7% threshold. Still, the most successful performance of the party remains the victory in the local self-governance elections for Tbilisi City Council (‘Sakrebulo’) in 2002 where GLP came first, leaving behind the bloc led by Saakashvili. Despite this modest electoral performance, the party is both unique and important for the Georgian political landscape. First, it is the most successful left-wing political party in the country’s history; though not always represented in Parliament, it has been a relatively consistent opposition force (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006). Second, it is the only party that does not claim to be “centre-right” and instead propagates programs for the poorest voters, such as free health care, education, subsidies for agriculture, etc.

(Mitchell, 2009, p. 38). Furthermore, it is one of the few parties that has never allied with other blocs (Machaidze, 2012). In the media, Labour Party is often referred to as “small but vocal,” “socialist,” and “outspokenly populist.”

Mikheil Saakashvili entered Georgian politics in the mid-1990s. Soon enough the promising young lawyer, educated in Kiev, Strasbourg and New York, became the second most popular political figure in Georgia after President Shevardnadze. In 2000 he assumed the office of Minister of Justice, earning recognition from international observers. However, in September 2001, he stepped down stating: “I consider it immoral for me to remain as a member of Shevardnadze’s government” and subsequently quit the CUG. In December 2001, he founded the National Movement, a centre-right party “with a touch of nationalism” (Georgia: Country Study Guide, 2013, p. 74). The UNM was created through the merger of two parties—the National Movement and the United Democrats—in November 2004 (Ghia Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006, p. 256). Saakashvili’s party had experienced its major success already in the 2002 local elections for Tbilisi City Council where it received the second-largest share of votes. Nevertheless, due to the agreement between the GLP and his party, he became the Council’s Chairman that offered him a new powerful platform for criticizing the government. As Saakashvili, the hero of the 2003 Rose Revolution, became president of Georgia in 2004, he was 37 years old, the youngest national president elected in Europe (Antelava, 2015).

The case of Saakashvili represents an unprecedented example of former president migrating to another country and becoming governor of one of its regions. Though informally a chairperson of UNM, a political party operating in Georgia, Saakashvili himself is wanted there. He left Georgia in 2013 after his presidency and in 2015 he was appointed by Ukrainian President Poroshenko (his companion from early student years) as governor of Odessa and granted him Ukrainian citizenship, which automatically meant losing his Georgian citizenship—ironically the law prohibiting foreign nationals from engaging in political activities inside Georgia was adopted under his presidency. From there on his turbulent fall gained speed. Soon enough he was at odds with Poroshenko. After roughly a year he stepped down as governor, then in summer 2017 he was stripped of Ukrainian citizenship and deported to Poland, having already been sentenced in absentia to three years in his homeland (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1** The list of the party leaders for Labour Party of Georgia and United National Movement (1995–2018)

<i>Parties and their Leaders</i>	<i>Start of the term in office</i>	<i>End of the term in office</i>
<i>Labour party of Georgia</i>		
Shalva Natelashvili	August 1995 1 May 2006 2 May 2014	30 April 2006 2 May 2014 Currently in office
<i>United National Movement</i>		
Mikheil Saakashvili	December 2001 5 October 2013	5 October 2013 December 2015
Honorary Chairperson	December 2015	Currently in office

## SIX PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS

### *Shalva Natelashvili*

The case of Natelashvili, in regard to self-confidence, is fairly clear. He is the one who makes all the party decisions, in fact no other representatives (apart from the political secretary) are known to the public and so far the whole image of the party is synonymous with his own. In this spirit, Nodia (2016) refers to GLP as one of the examples of the “pocket” party of their leaders in Georgia. Curiously, the official party website is merely a collection of videos consisting solely of Natelashvili either addressing the public or meeting a US congressman.

Having one person define the course of the party makes it easier to remain consistent in terms of political placement. Thus, the GLP has remained constant in its political stance, addressing the needs of the poor in the country and advocating free education and health care. Additionally, during his 2008 presidential campaign Natelashvili promised to reduce the cost of gas, electricity and water by half and introduce allowance for the unemployed.

Natelashvili is an eloquent public speaker who knows how to attract the media’s attention and constantly be visible in the news. This is thanks to his showy statements and speeches and their entertaining character. Besides, one of his main skills is, in essence, criticizing everyone in a distinctly populist, provocative and polarizing way: both the ones in government and the other opposition parties.

There has not been a president in the country whose resignation he has not demanded, each under different justifications. This image of his contributes to the party's political profiling by creating and demonstrating evident differences from other parties and political players. Although, his critique is not often followed by any plausible actions. As he had the chance to prove that he is able to implement his own promises, he preferred to elegantly step back and let someone else take charge: after the 2002 local elections Natelashvili surprisingly declared that he would not run for the Tbilisi City Council chairmanship himself, but rather offered this position to Mikheil Saakashvili whose National Movement party came second (Civil Georgia, December 21, 2007). This step can be perceived not only as inconsistent but also brings up speculations that he doesn't want to take responsibility and undermines all further campaigns, making his promises appear less credible. Soon enough he reassumed critiquing Saakashvili. Similarly, though he had always been an outspoken critic of Shevardnadze, during the Rose Revolution of 2003 he chose not to align with other opposition parties. The Labour Party boycotted the presidential election and Natelashvili himself posited that "the revolution was organized against his party and not to overthrow President Shevardnadze's government" (Mchedlishvili, 2003).

Natelashvili has an image of a politician who is fond of exaggerated statements and is "prone to sensational accusations and demagogic" (Mikaberidze, 2015, p. 492). This does not contribute to a serious image of his, nor does it affect the performance of the party in a positive way. For instance, while announcing his participation in the 2018 presidential elections, he not only called the current government "robbers and leeches," but described his motivation for running for the presidency as an act of "self-sacrifice" for the people: "I have been thinking a lot about how to congratulate my people for Christmas and the New Year. There is no better way to congratulate people in our country than an expression of willingness for a self-sacrificing battle... I am ready to return our country back..." (Tabula, December 22, 2017). Earlier, in the 2013 presidential elections, when Natelashvili came fourth gaining 2.88% of votes, he refused to acknowledge the victory of opponents and claimed that he was the one who came first, or at least second. Why a candidate whose party, in the recent parliamentary elections received a marginal 1.24% of votes, would assume having the best chances for victory (in sharp contrast to all the polls) remains unclear.

Furthermore, it is somewhat contradicting when he stated in 2007 being in favor of constitutional monarchy (Civil Georgia, December 21, 2007) but has not missed a single chance to run for presidency (2008, 2013, 2018). By the same token, in 2007 Natelashvili expressed his wish for “the post of the president to be scrapped” (Trend News Agency, September 28, 2007), however, as all the opposition parties in 2008 supported one candidate as a challenger for Saakashvili, GLP was the only party to nominate their own chairman for elections. Already in 2012 the Labour Party’s program manifested a completely different position, stating “we will strengthen the presidency” (Labour Party of Georgia: Internal Policy, 2012).

Shalva Natelashvili is the principal decision-maker in the party and nearly its only representative actively present in the media. Interestingly, the party statute specifies in detail all the functions and responsibilities of a chairman (Art. 6.6), however it only states that in the case of a chairman stepping down, the Congress (the supreme governing organ) elects a new one (Art. 6.7) (ლეიბორისტული პარტიის წესდება). In over two decades, this procedure has taken place twice. Natelashvili, who has been leading the party since its founding, was re-elected as chairman on May 1, 2006, at the 3rd Congress as he was the only candidate running for this position (Civil Georgia, May 8, 2006). Even more spectacular was his resignation on May 2, 2014, when he stepped down from his post for a few minutes for delegates of the 5th Congress to approve him as head of the party (რადიო თავისუფლება, May 2, 2014).

There is no doubt that he is the most, if not the only, powerful person in the party and truly pluralistic decision-making procedures are, in reality, absent: “Labor Party always lacked the pluralistic leadership and is not run collectively by a group of prominent individuals. The Party is dependent on the popularity of the one person - Shalva Natelashvili...” (Civil Georgia, May 8, 2006). A clear demonstration of his unlimited power was his demeanor during the 2012 intra-party crisis when six out of eight members of the political committee (main decision-making body) left the party. Natelashvili commented on the incident only after 100 days and remained as self-critical as before—instead of reflecting on the situation within the party he chose the strategy of blaming others: “We have warned the society more than once that the Prime Minister Ivanishvili is trying to disassemble or discredit the unilateral and disobedient Labor Party with all its resources and special services” (Datuashvili, 2013).

In the Georgian context it is highly difficult to measure party leaders' flexibility in terms of responsiveness to the public opinion changes since no regular public opinion polls take place. In rare cases when they do occur, they are usually conducted by the NGOs under the request of one of the political parties, typically shortly before elections. Moreover, the results of the polls carried out by different institutions of the civil society do not necessarily match, thus, leaving space for interpretations. However, referring once again to the internal events within the GLP, in 2012 when more than two-thirds of the members left the crucial organ of the party, Natelashvili showed no intention of dealing with this issue either by conducting discussions or by elaborating on the possible reasons. He merely ignored the incident and did not even comment on it for over three months. This shows little to no ability of the leader to react to the opinions of the party members or to be accessible to them.

At the other end of the spectrum would be the party's position on the European community, NATO accession and Russia, which is fairly ambivalent. In 2006 Natelashvili stressed the importance of having partnership relations with Russia and favored "many-sided" foreign policy (Civil Georgia, May 8, 2006). However, as time passed the position became increasingly blurry. In 2007 he suggested withdrawal from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a consequence of deteriorating relations (Civil Georgia, June 9, 2007). The same year, as leading political groups signed the pro-NATO declaration, Natelashvili made his signature dependent on whether Saakashvili stepped down or not (Civil Georgia, March 12, 2007). A couple of years later the election program of the GLP was not in favor of NATO membership anymore, stating: "Georgia will actively continue to integrate with the EU. At the same time, relations with Russia will quickly be improved, and economic, transport and other contacts will be restored. We reject Georgia's participation in military alliances" (Labour Party of Georgia: Internal Policy, 2012). In contrast, during his presidential campaign only one year later, Natelashvili declared NATO, USA, and EU to be Georgia's strategic partners (Presidential Candidate's View: Shalva Natelashvili, 2013).

In general, Natelashvili is well known for his blunt and simplistic statements which result in other players using him as a metaphorical equivalent to be applied if someone does not care about the validity of their statements. Due to the space limitation only a few instances of the described behavior are highlighted. To begin with, while introducing the

party's political secretary, Giorgi Gugava, as a candidate for Tbilisi mayor elections in 2017, Natelashvili solemnly assured:

If someone oppresses you, you do not need to do anything, Gugava will come himself. If the bank comes to evict you, Gugava will come. If a water pipe bursts, Gugava will come. If the road is damaged, Gugava will come. If you have any difficulties, Gugava will stand alongside you. (Tabula, September 14, 2017)

As one would expect this statement had little in common with reality, triggering a wave of jokes and mockery videos on social media.

Other examples illustrate his misplaced assertions. In 2006 he accused Saakashvili of “Georgian people’s genocide.” It is needless to say that the term “genocide” is more than inappropriate when used in the given context. Saakashvili himself almost never responded to Natelashvili’s accusations and referred to him as Shaliko—a diminutive form of Shalva—hinting that he does not see him as a serious politician (Civil Georgia, May 8, 2006). Furthermore, Natelashvili declared that Saakashvili was brought into power “with the help of the U.S. and Russian special services” and that “Saakashvili and his dirty gang is financed by two financial-political centers: Washington and Moscow” (Civil Georgia, September 8, 2006). These are rather implausible statements since USA and Russia pursue diametrically different policies and interests in the regions and often act openly adverse. As Mitchell (2008) puts it: “The Russians viewed the Rose Revolution as a negative development from its earliest days,” whereas it “was immediately hailed as a success story for the promotion of democracy and U.S. foreign policy.”

In one of the latest interviews conducted in the course of the presidential campaign he stated that Ivanishvili’s crimes overshadow those committed by all fascists who were convicted during the Nuremberg trials (რადიო თაგონეულება, October 22, 2018). Such a statement is not only shocking, but calls into question whether Natelashvili possesses enough knowledge of history or common sense. In the same imprudent manner, he stated earlier that “there are two criminal regimes on earth, ISIS and Ivanishvili’s Georgia” (Tabula, December 2, 2015). Certainly the comparisons between ISIS and fascism with Georgia’s current government are more than appalling and simply illustrate a great deal of populism and ignorance. Though Georgian political system has its challenges, the

citizens do enjoy a wide range of civil and political freedoms, as well as rule of law.

Apart from fallacious accusations, Natelashvili is not known for offering any viable solutions to existing problems. For instance, during one of the 2012 presidential campaign debates, his answers were merely a compilation of political slogans without any specifics. Thus, among others, the answer to the question of tax and fiscal policies and possible ways for financing social programs, he responded: “It will be financed as soon as a people-loving government comes into power” (Civil Georgia, September 10, 2012).

### *Mikheil Saakashvili*

The November 2007 protests demonstrated the inconsistency between the claimed ideals of democratic governance and the brutal reality, as well as a high level of decisiveness at the end of the standoff. The protests had socio-economic roots: popular expectations of improved living standards were not being met, especially in the provinces. However, in contrast to 2003 events, neither was the opposition united over the goal of the protests—demands ranged from early parliamentary elections to Saakashvili’s resignation, nor was the government discredited. After reaching its peak on 2 November, the number of participants started decreasing sharply from day to day. Despite this, on 7 November, the police violently broke up the remaining demonstrators, several hundred people were hospitalized, a state of emergency was declared, opposition leaders were arrested, and all non-state television and radio stations were forced to stop broadcasting. Why Saakashvili decided to use violence to disperse the demonstrations as they were already tapering off was unclear to many observers.

His messages are not always congruent. For instance, responding to criminal charges against him in July 2014 Saakashvili says:

After failure to find billions misappropriated by me, because I have never misappropriated even a tetri – on the contrary, we increased Georgia’s budget 11-fold; after failure to prove any specific crime, because I have not committed any – on the contrary, we almost brought crime rate to zero, they [authorities] have brought purely political charges against me. (Civil Georgia, July 28, 2014)

A few days later he stressed the lack of time as the main reason why he was not willing to return to Georgia (Civil Georgia, August 7, 2014).

The recent presidential elections in Georgia demonstrated that despite the defeat of UNM's candidate, Saakashvili is "capable of mobilizing the huge financial, political and media resources needed to compete," even while being abroad (Kakachia & Lebanidze, 2018). Similarly, during the 2016 parliamentary elections, Saakashvili, though campaigning from afar, remained the most recognizable figure of the opposition and enjoyed an increase in popularity. Already back in the early 2000s, as Saakashvili promised to "paralyze Shevardnadze's government," his main strategy was "radicalizing the political situation and expanding the political space" by bringing the discontent population back into the active political arena and positioning himself as the toughest fighter against the regime and rampant corruption (Kandelaki, 2006, pp. 4, 8–9). Besides, having staged the bloodless revolution of 2003, he is considered to be a "master of street protests," able to mobilize support. As in 2009, he himself was facing street protests, ironically noted: "They have no idea what to do. If I were in their place I would topple the government in about two weeks" (Sharashenidze, 2016). In general, his rhetorical skills are indisputable.

During his last months in office as president he personally addressed the UNM parliamentarians to support the constitutional amendments directed at cutting presidential powers, suggested by the ruling Georgian Dream coalition. This was a strategically reasonable step, demonstrating that the government was not able to make important decisions without his party's support, thus, highlighting the prestige of UNM as an influential political power.

The fact that the former president of a country opted for losing his citizenship to obtain a governor's post in another country was justly called an "insult" to the Georgian state by former President Margvelashvili. Though Saakashvili contradicted it with an absurd assertion: "We will all together build a new Ukraine. Without a new Ukraine, there will be no Georgia," this step can be viewed as an example of him putting his interests above his party's (Civil Georgia, May 31, 2015). Toward the end of his last presidential term, Saakashvili announced: "Only recently I was thinking about appropriateness of leaving politics, but now it would amount to fleeing" (Menabde, 2013). Shortly after his resignation, he did leave Georgia, stating: "I am Georgian,

I am Ukrainian, therefore I am European" (Civil Georgia, December 7, 2013). His statements over his role in Georgian politics remained contradictory. In one of his later interviews he emphasized having left Georgian politics only "temporarily," signaling the possibility of his comeback (Menabde, 2015a). One year after, while addressing a rally in support of UNM, he pledged to "return to Georgia immediately after UNM's victory" (Kommersant, October 6, 2016). However, two days later, Saakashvili unexpectedly told Ukrainian television that he would not be returning to Georgia "whatever the outcome of the elections" (Interpressnews, October 8, 2016).

Commenting on the arrest of one of the leading UNM politicians, Ugulava, Saakashvili said that "UNM does not stand on separate individual political figures whether it's him, Ugulava or any other UNM leader," adding that "people can replace each other, but this idea of Georgia's progress and development cannot be stopped..." (Civil Georgia, July 3, 2014). This is in sharp contrast with his actions directed at keeping his position as chairman of the party at any possible costs. Interestingly, Saakashvili was also very quick at distancing himself from his Movement of New Forces in Ukraine as it wasn't polling well, stating: "It wasn't me...I am always among the three or four most popular politicians. It's not about my party. It's about me" (Tamkin, 2017b).

Saakashvili has been UNM's leader since its founding in 2001 and was re-elected as the party's chairman in October 2013. Since 2015 when he lost Georgian citizenship, the position of UNM party chairman has remained vacant (Civil Georgia, December 6, 2015). Formally, the statute of the party (Art. 6.2) defines the functions of the chairman, but specifies neither the term of office nor the procedure for re-election ("ერთიანი ნაციონალური მომრაობა' წესდება", 2013). Accordingly, Saakashvili resisted all the attempts by the party leadership to elect a new head, asserting that the process was meant to push him out. The issue of chairmanship served as a reason for multiple splits within the party. The first rift appeared in 2015 as several prominent figures of UNM, along with the executive secretary, left the party, vaguely indicating the need for "renewal." Saakashvili, in response, expressed his disappointment and said that he almost left the party in protest himself (Menabde, 2015b). He did not reflect on the topic of disapproval itself, but rather commented that "a party is a live organism — some cells die out and others replace them" (Menabde, 2015a).

Later instead of electing a chairman, the party moved to team governance: “For 3 years the party has been under team management, there is a political council, chairperson and general secretary of the political council, and these structures are making decisions in the party, so no need and utility in electing a new chairman. The party will continue to be managed by the team,” stated party official Bakradze (New Posts, December 5, 2015). Another intra-party crisis evolved in the aftermath of the 2016 parliamentary elections, resulting in UNM’s defeat to the GD coalition. Saakashvili called for boycotting the results, questioning the legitimacy of elections, whereas most political council members and future MPs preferred entering Parliament. In the end, Saakashvili lost the debate and the political council decided to be represented in Parliament. Another conflicting point was the issue of party leadership: the majority of UNM’s lawmakers were in favor of electing a new chairperson, while others were fiercely for leaving the post vacant (Civil Georgia, January 12, 2017).

In January 2017, after months of intra-party frictions, UNM split as the majority of its famous members declared their decision to leave the party. Ex-Mayor of Tbilisi and freshly released from prison Gigi Ugulava became the head of the new opposition party, stating: “One person is responsible for dismantling the party—the person, who established the party” (Civil Georgia, January 12, 2017). A reality-distant assessment of the situation was provided by Saakashvili: “The party is as united and as strong as it has never been in the last four years...” (Civil Georgia, January 12, 2017). This division in the biggest opposition party was seen with concern by analysts since a divided UNM was predetermined to be politically and electorally weaker. Saakashvili’s ambitions being above party interests were confirmed: “The fundamental issue is that Saakashvili’s personal political agenda is often at cross purposes with that of the party he started” (Cecire cited in Tamkin, 2017a). He currently enjoys the status of Honorary Chairperson of UNM. However, the price for Saakashvili staying the “spiritual” leader of UNM is quite high, since due to this split, UNM lost most of its parliamentary membership (Navarro, 2018).

The mere fact that the president of one country accepts the offer of becoming governor of a province in another country exhibits a decent level of flexibility, judgements set aside. Saakashvili himself elegantly replied: “Former presidents either write memoirs or are forgotten by

all. I became a governor. Is that really a lowering of rank?" (Menabde, 2015a). However, Saakashvili resigned from the governor position after the UNM was defeated in the parliamentary elections. One might see it as a step toward repositioning himself, adapting to new circumstances. He realized that he would not be able to regain power in Georgia in the near future, and thus, viewed the option of entering Ukraine's national political stage with a new opposition party as a reasonable alternative (Rukhadze, 2016). The question of whether one can be an opposition leader in two different countries simultaneously is a different topic.

However, when it came to his position as chairman of UNM, Saakashvili remained determined and unwilling to show any responsiveness toward his fellow party members. Though, once, as a move of political manoeuvring, he offered that UNM should elect a new leader but negated this a couple of days later (Rukhadze, 2016). This obviously did not resolve the issue and the party split occurred. Although, Saakashvili might be criticized for showing little to no flexibility in this matter, others saw the break-up as a natural phenomenon, with or without Saakashvili being chairperson: "political parties that lose four consecutive elections, in this case two for parliament, one presidential and one local election, rarely hold together" (Mitchell, 2017). During the recent presidential campaign Saakashvili struck a conciliatory tone toward his former rivals—the European Georgia—the party that was formed as a result of the above mentioned 2017 split, suggesting that everyone "should forget old offenses" and unify their forces. The two opposition parties agreed to back each other's candidates, if one of them made it into the second round and not to attack each other throughout the campaign (Civil.ge, May 2, 2018).

Saakashvili is known for his dramatic and populist rhetoric. In one of his recent speeches in Brussels he claimed: "We have no time to lose... Soon there will be no people left in Georgia...We need a national government that will put an end to anti-Georgian, anti-Christian...developments...I can act as a regular activist (fighter) if necessary. Georgian people should get their country back" (Rustavi 2, April 9, 2018). What he meant by "soon there will be no people left in Georgia" is unclear, since there is neither a war taking place, nor any kind of ethnic purge. Earlier, when UNM lost parliamentary elections in 2012, Saakashvili announced its "purification, catharsis and renewal" and accused the GD coalition of "populism" (Civil Georgia, October 15, 2012), forgetting the fact that he and his party had been in power for almost a decade

in order to address the issues that the GD promoted in their campaign. Later on, he tried to persuade the public of his popularity in Ukraine saying: “I’m the one who gets most of the selfies” (Tamkin, 2017a).

However, Saakashvili had some innovative ideas for Georgia’s development. During 2018 presidential campaign he expressed his ambition to be a director of the free economic zone in a new port town of Lazika, built on the Black Sea coast not far from Abkhazia. He added: “I want the free economic zone of Lazika to have an English law system with British judges, zero VAT tax, free business environment and guaranteed protection of rights” (Civil.ge, November 27, 2018). Table 6.2 summarizes the differences and similarities of the two party chairpersons in regards to personality traits throughout their office periods.

### ANALYSIS OF CONSEQUENCES FOR PARTIES

The analysis demonstrated that these two party leaders exhibited diverse results in the studied personality dimensions. While the GLP chairperson showed in fact no change in behavior throughout his terms, considerable change was observed in the UNM chairman’s performance. This appears logical since in the case of Natelashvili there were no alterations: he has been the party leader since the very beginning, the profile of his party has remained steady and GLP also stayed constant but marginal force on the Georgian political landscape, with the vote share ranging between 1–7%. In contrast, Saakashvili and his UNM had been ruling the country for almost a decade and unprecedently managed to remain the main opposition force in a country where previously ruling parties would disappear after the electoral defeat. Besides, Saakashvili personally experienced several ups and downs during the same period of time. The parties under scrutiny and their leaders have always had disparate roles in the Georgian society. Figure 6.1. illustrates the electoral performance of GLP and UNM. Although, these parties play in different leagues, there is a common trend visible—the share of votes for both parties has nearly halved in a decade: from ca. 6% in 2004 to ca. 3% in 2016 for the Labour party and from ca. 68% to 27% for the UNM.

Natelashvili has consistently displayed a high level of self-confidence and need for power, a medium level of competence and flexibility, and a low level of integrity and cognitive complexity. His traits and demeanor led to a weakened electoral performance in two subsequent elections, a substantially decreased party membership and a

**Table 6.2** The character traits of Natelashvili and Saakashvili

	<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Shalva Natelashvili	First (1995–2006)	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
	Second (2006–2014)	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
	Third (2014–present)	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low
Mikheil Saakashvili	First (2001–2013)	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	High
	Second (2013–2015)	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Medium
	Third (2015–present) <sup>a</sup>	High	High	Low	High	Medium	High

<sup>a</sup>As Honorary Chairperson

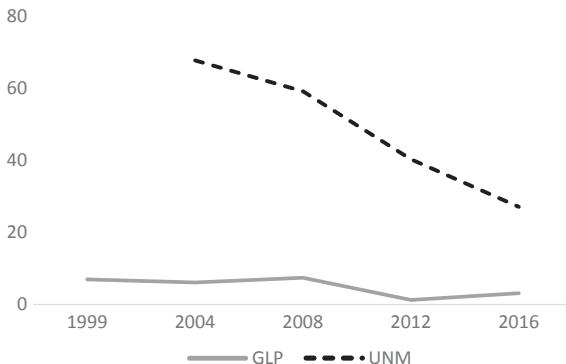


Fig. 6.1 Electoral support for GLP and UNM (1999–2016)

constricted intra-party cohesion during his second period in office. In regards to elections, two concrete events shed light on the dynamics. First, it was clearly a miscalculation on his side not to join other opposition parties during the Rose Revolution as subsequently GLP failed to overcome the threshold and lost a considerable share of its members (around 15–17%) due to the taken position (Nodia & Scholzbach, 2006). Conversely, during the November 2007 events GLP supported the opposition campaign against Saakashvili's government and played a leading role in organizing a massive rally in Tbilisi, which the government violently dispersed. This move was perceived positively by the public and he subsequently came fourth in the 2008 presidential elections, garnering around 6.5% of votes, compared to just 2.9% of votes in the 2013 presidential elections.

In contrast, Saakashvili's impact on the party was somewhat different, namely much better electoral results (though steadily declining), split within the party and no effect on party membership. However, the effect on party membership could be miscalculated since in Georgia no legal requirements for tracking party members exist, neither are there institutionalized mechanisms for the public authorities to verify the numbers. Thus, one is wholly dependent on the statements of the parties about the number of their own members. They are not always accurate—parties tend to exaggerate the number; besides, different representatives of the same party might claim incongruent figures (Silagadze, 2018). In total,

Saakashvili has proven to be a decisive and confident person who is not afraid of new challenges, has no problem moving around the globe, and knows how to stage himself in the media. With undeniable rhetoric skills and an ability to mobilize supporters and resources even from abroad, he is an extraordinary figure in many ways. His competence was assessed as “medium” in the second term due to his strategic mistake of losing Georgian citizenship, though keeping the ambition of staying chairman of the Georgian party. As Ghia Nodia, a recognized political scientist who served in Saakashvili’s cabinet, noted: “He hurt himself politically in Georgia by giving up his citizenship. His decision displayed impatience and lack of strategic judgment: he cannot just wait out for better times and loves to be in the center of action” (Tamkin, 2017b). Conversely, his need for power increased after his resignation as president. Although he built a party with democratic decision-making mechanisms, frictions leading to the split appeared as he insisted on staying the party leader from afar at any cost (even though having founded another party in Ukraine). Throughout his first term as party chairman, which lasted 12 years (8 of them as president), he built an image of a trustworthy and consistent politician, whereas afterwards he made several contradicting and unserious assertions, acquiring an image of a less trustworthy statesman without a state (Table 6.3).

**Table 6.3** The consequences of Natelashvili’s and Saakashvili’s leadership for their parties

	<i>Term in office</i>	<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Shalva Natelashvili	First (1995–2006)			
	Second (2006–2014)	Lower <sup>a</sup>	Lower	No data
	Third (2014–)	Higher	No effect	Lower
Mikheil Saakashvili	First (2001–2013)			
	Second (2013–2015)	No effect <sup>b</sup>	Lower	No effect
	Third (2015–)	Lower <sup>c</sup>	Lower	No effect <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Although the party experienced a slight improvement in their electoral performance in 2008 elections by roughly 1%, it subsequently plummeted to a total percentage of around 1% of votes in the subsequent elections

<sup>b</sup>No elections held in this period

<sup>c</sup>In regard to the parliamentary elections, rather a good result in the 2018 presidential elections

<sup>d</sup>The latest information on the party membership at disposal is from the year 2016

## CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed at analyzing important personality dimensions of the two party leaders and their overall impact on their parties. At first glance these leaders are quite contrasting: Saakashvili being in power for almost a decade, his party being the main opposition force in the country and he himself currently stateless and wanted in Georgia. Contrarily, Natelashvili has never assumed any public office and the best performance of his party was reaching around 7% of votes, but he is a very recognizable figure, constantly in the media spotlight for his sensational statements. In accordance with their distinct roles and political weight, they acted and scored differently. It can be concluded that Saakashvili, who ranked higher on personality traits, also performed better in electoral terms. Though UNM steadily lost votes and experienced party split, it managed to remain the main opposition power of the country.

Admittedly, some traits might matter more than others for the performance of the party. This offers a venue for future research which would address each personality feature separately and connect it with different aspects of a party's ups and downs. Since parties in the Georgian context are built around strong personalities and rarely outlive their leaders, the finding that both chairmen exhibited high demand for power was not surprising, although, they operate within different settings. If Natelashvili is the only one who determines the direction of his party, Saakashvili, though having considerable influence over UNM, is not solely responsible for the decisions taken.

The organizational structure of UNM allows for a real collective decision-making process—for instance, Saakashvili's suggestion to boycott the elections in 2016 was turned down by the majority of the political council. In fact, it was UNM that split, not GLP, thus, would this mean that other features bear more explanation than need for power in terms of party cohesion? Furthermore, the common theories suggest that learning and change occurs through the terms. However, the findings illustrate that there was no change at all in the case of Natelashvili, as opposed to Saakashvili who demonstrated higher competence and integrity, but a lower need for power during his presidency. This suggests that not the nominal sequence of office terms as a party leader is decisive, but rather whether or not a chairperson has held other political posts. Being active in an additional role and acting in a different environment not only fosters one to acquire another perspective, but to increasingly

and inevitably face challenges and conflicts while interacting with other players. Subsequently, the new setting encourages to compromise, learn, stretch and grow as a politician and as a party leader.

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## CHAPTER 7

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# Strong Personalities' Impact on Hungarian Party Politics: Viktor Orbán and Gábor Vona

*Rudolf Metz and Daniel Oross*

## INTRODUCTION

After the democratic transition of 1989–1990, Hungarian politics became more and more leader-centric as parties went through the process of institutionalization and professionalization. As a new democracy, the political arena was open for ambitious political leaders to establish their political movements or parties, to reach governing positions and to determine political processes. Initially, parties dating back to the period of democratization were led based on a form of collective leadership. However, since 1994 the leadership of parties became centralized as all parties have elected a president. While there has been some variation in formal rules (Gherghina, 2014), every party showed a clear

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trend of centralization in internal decision-making and intra-party leadership selection was mostly uncontested (Illonszki & Várnagy, 2014; Kovarek & Soós, 2016). Nonetheless, this process did not stop with the 'oligarchisation' of the top leadership. The growing autonomy of party leaders has been visible during electoral campaigns, within internal party organizations and in governing as well. Strong personalities emerged as the 'head' and the 'face' of the parties. Through these developments Hungarian politics produced the clearest shifts in the process of personalization and presidentialization among the countries of East Central Europe (Hloušek, 2015). Moreover, the populist leaders and messages have increasingly dominated and determined the political game since 2006 (Batory, 2016; Enyedi, 2016a, 2016b; Palonen, 2009; Pappas, 2014). From this perspective, spectators may describe Hungarian politics as a 'leader democracy' (Pakulski & Körösényi, 2012), in which seemingly leaders have parties rather than parties having leaders.

In a context in which 'newborn' political parties went through institutionalization, centralization and sought to develop their own ideological profile, effective and strong leadership was key for political survival and success (Harmel & Svåsand, 1993). This article claims that leaders' personality and character is decisive in steering a party through a transformation. In this sense, it also assumes as a precondition that political leaders are the major agents in party transformation, with greater impact than contextual and institutional factors.

The article focuses on two leaders, Viktor Orbán and Gábor Vona, two party leaders with similar political characters in order to explain how personal attributes and contextual factors determine party transformation. Because of the different length of their career and different political opportunities after 2010, the comparison is strongly asymmetrical.

The career of Viktor Orbán, the longest-serving party leader, provides the best example of this in Hungary. He has not just occupied this formal position since 1993, but his leadership has only been questioned once after the disastrous defeat during the 1994 parliamentary elections. Under his leadership 'Fidesz became the most centralized, most homogeneous and most disciplined party in the country' (Enyedi, 2005, p. 708; see also: Kovarek & Soós, 2016; Körösényi, Tóth, & Török, 2009). This centralization was institutionalized and extended the party leader's authority by providing more control over communication, internal direction, decision-making and selection of candidates. Moreover, Orbán's strong leadership during his most recent four terms

in the office of Prime Minister made his party the 'only' success story in post-transition Hungarian politics. He conquered and transformed firstly his party (beginning in 1994), then the right-wing political community (starting in 2002) (Enyedi, 2005) and finally the Hungarian party system<sup>1</sup> (Horváth & Soós, 2015; Róbert & Papp, 2012) and the political regime (from 2010) (Illés, Körösényi, & Metz, 2018; Körösényi & Patkós, 2017). Thus, he provided not just an example for effective and adaptive party leadership, but the 'best practice' for manoeuvring a party through ideological and institutional transformation. In the recent electoral race, Gábor Vona as the president of Jobbik turned into Orbán's main challenger, who wanted to adopt this best practice. Vona's leadership style was fundamentally similar to Orbán's. He also relied on a highly presidentialized party organization (Hloušek, 2015), personalized campaigning (Kiss, 2016) and right-wing, populist messages (Enyedi, 2016b). Both leaders have driven their party through ideological transformation. But while Orbán was marching to a more right-wing position that increased pressure on Jobbik, Vona aimed to demonstrate his capability for governing and pursued the political mainstream to reach swing voters disillusioned with Fidesz. But Vona's opportunity structure was restricted in the political system as competition was dominated by Fidesz after 2010. This case study will compare these party presidents in order to point out that leaders' personal character and traits contributes decisively to the success of party transformation.

The article is structured in the following way. Firstly, we describe the history of the two leaders focusing on their path to their positions and their previous political experiences. Secondly, we analyze their personal behaviors and traits in six dimensions (self-confidence, competence, integrity, need for power, flexibility and cognitive complexity) during the terms in office. Thirdly, we take account of the effects of leaders' actions and personal character on their parties. Finally, we draw some conclusions and discuss how the Hungarian political context shaped leaders' actual opportunities for success.

<sup>1</sup>Some political scientists (Horváth & Soós, 2015; Róbert & Papp, 2012) described these changes in party system as an emerging 'predominant party system' using Sartori's classic concept (Sartori, 2005, pp. 171–178).

## HISTORY OF THE TWO LEADERS

Without any significant prior political experience, Orbán was socialized in the process of transition by taking active part in shaping the democratic opposition. In spite of the collective form of party leadership, he claimed the position of leader for himself from the moment when Fidesz was founded in 1988. In 1993, he was formally elected party president. Although the positions of the prime minister and the party president were separated between 2000 and 2003, his leadership was never openly questioned since then. Thus, Fidesz became Orbán's political enterprise. In other words: voting for Fidesz equates following and supporting Orbán. While Orbán survived electoral defeats in 1994, 2002 and 2006,<sup>2</sup> the electoral victories in 1998, 2010, 2014 and 2018 are still regarded as his achievements.

The key to his success lies mainly in the ideological and organizational transformation of his party. Fidesz was converted from a bottom-up and horizontal youth movement organization into a highly centralized and top-down parliamentary party during the 1990s. The institutionalization went further with the building a network of collateral organizations, increasing membership and establishing party-related media forums. At the same time, the party was constantly repositioning itself: from radical liberalism to national-liberalism, from national-liberalism to conservatism, from conservatism to radical right-wing populism.

Orbán felt instinctively the opportunity to fill the vacuum after the collapse of national conservative, agrarian Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP) and central-right Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF). Since the mid-1990s, the party got rid of its liberal and anticlerical ideological background and managed to rebuild its political 'hinterland' reaching out to right-wing intellectuals, civil organizations and clergy. He used his first premiership between 1998 and 2002 to stabilize his leading role on the right. After the electoral defeat of 2002, Orbán launched the 'astroturf' national, conservative Movements of Civic

<sup>2</sup> Since the election of 2006, the Christian Democratic People's Party runs on joint party lists with Fidesz. It is not regarded as an independent party (Illonszki & Várnagy, 2014; Kovárek & Soós, 2016), because of the two parties' close institutional (dual party membership) and political (absence of open conflicts on policy and political issues, surplus majority governments) relations. In contrast, MDF, Fidesz's electoral coalition partner in 2002, was more independent. Therefore, in Graph 1 MDF is treated separately from Fidesz, but KDNP isn't.

Circles (Polgári Körök Mozgalma) (Enyedi, 2005) to keep together, reorganize and dominate the right-wing camp. This so-called 'one flag one camp' strategy pervaded nearly every sphere of political and cultural life and strengthened the left/right polarization (Körösényi, 2013; Palonen, 2009). Following the elections of 2006, Orbán could take advantage of Ferenc Gyurcsány's<sup>3</sup> leaking 'lying speech'. Mobilization became permanent, both more extensive and intensive than ever. In 2009, fake grassroots mobilization became centralized by the pseudo-movement the Civil Cooperation Forum (Metz, 2015), which has regularly organized marches and rallies against opponents and enemies of 'Hungary,' such as the IMF or the EU. In 2010, after eight years of oppositional politics and hinterland building, Fidesz achieved a landslide victory and gained an unprecedented two-third 'supermajority'. Since then, he could manage to preserve this winning coalition and so his incumbent role.

The political career of Vona started within the conservative Movements of Civic Circles: in 2002 Orbán invited him to his own circle. He attended events organized for famous conservative intellectuals for almost a year. However he expected a more radical and offensive politics from Fidesz in opposition. The need for more radical actions brought him to Jobbik and he became a founder of the party. Autumn 2006 was a turning point both for Jobbik and for Vona. Following Prime Minister Gyurcsány's Őszöd speech, weeks of street protest strengthened the radical party. In November, Dávid Kovács, the founding president of the party, was replaced by Vona. It was the first and last time he faced a challenger. He won with a great majority (71–29%) and the party gained a great orator and a young, agile leader. Vona aimed to bridge the gap between politicians and voters. The establishment of the Hungarian Guard was his idea and the organization's inauguration events and the media reports about the legal steps that were taken to dissolve it, have provided unprecedented publicity to Jobbik (Karácsony & Róna, 2011). In 2010, Jobbik entered the Hungarian Parliament and Vona as the Leader of the caucus has omitted radical topics that have little interest to the average voter (such as anti-Israel rhetoric and conspiracy theories)

<sup>3</sup>One of his biggest challengers was Ferenc Gyurcsány, whose politics showed a meteoric rise (Körösényi, Ondré, & Hajdú, 2017) by following the trends of presidentialization and personalization. However, his popularity dropped suddenly after his cabinet introduced unpopular austerity measures and his Őszöd speech about them was leaked.

**Table 7.1** The list of the party leaders for Fidesz and Jobbik (1988–2018)

<i>Parties and their leaders</i>	<i>Start of the term in office</i>	<i>End of the term in office</i>
<b>Fidesz</b>		
Collective leadership	30 March 1988	18 February 1993
Viktor Orbán	18 April 1993	9 July 1994
	9 July 1994	29–30 April 1995
	29–30 April 1995	19–20 April 1997
	19–20 April 1997	8–9 May 1999
	8–9 May 1999	29 January 2000
László Kövér	29 January 2000	5–6 May 2001
Zoltán Pokorni	5–6 May 2001	3 July 2002
János Áder (as executive chairman)	3 July 2002	17 May 2003
Viktor Orbán	17 May 2003	11 June 2005
	11 June 2005	19 May 2007
	19 May 2007	13 June 2009
	13 June 2009	3 June 2011
	3 June 2011	28 September 2013
	28 September 2013	13 December 2015
	13 December 2015	21 November 2017
	21 November 2017	Currently in office
<b>Jobbik</b>		
Dávid Kovács	24 October 2003	November 2006
Gábor Vona	November 2006	13 June 2008
	14 June 2008	25 June 2010
	26 June 2010	18 May 2012
	19 May 2012	20 June 2014
	21 June 2014	28 May 2016
	29 May 2016	9 April 2018

from his speeches (Róna, 2015). During the first period, his popularity within the party was so high that he was re-elected with 100% of the vote in the 2010 and 2012 congressional elections (see Table 7.1).

Over the 2010–2014 parliamentary term, Fidesz implemented several policy proposals originally formulated by Jobbik (Pirro, 2019a, p. 13). Thus, the radical turn and the ever-increasing populist tone of the government required Jobbik to come up with a new strategy. Ahead of the 2014 elections, Vona declared that the party has ‘reached its adulthood’ and defined Jobbik as a national people’s party. At the same time, Vona took responsibility for earlier radical remarks of the party and offered an apology to those who were unintentionally offended by previous

statements. That was the starting point of opening up to different groups within Hungarian society. At the local level, implicit alliances were formed between left-wing parties and Jobbik during interim municipal elections to defeat Fidesz-KDNP (Kovarek, Róna, Hunyadi, & Kreko, 2017). Following the government's campaign targeting immigrants, in the summer of 2016 Vona went even further and declared a new style of politics, called 'modern conservatism.' Jobbik leaders declared that the party had turned from a radical right-wing party into a moderate conservative people's party (Bíró-Nagy & Boros, 2016).

Jobbik's maneuver is not an unusual phenomenon in Europe: similar to the French, Italian or Austrian far-right parties, moderation reduced Jobbik's popularity among hard-line supporters. In 2016, Vona successfully used his power to win against his opponent, Előd Novák, within the presidency of the party (Róna, 2016, p. 236). But moving away from the party's far-right roots and staking out a more centrist position has resulted in the emergence of more radical dissident formations. During the 2018 elections, Vona took personal responsibility for the modern conservative maneuver of the party and offered his resignation if Jobbik lost the elections. Although Jobbik managed to break out of the electoral regions of Eastern Hungary and won many voters during the 2018 elections, it turned out that Fidesz is considerably stronger than it was in 2014. Although Jobbik was able to keep its position as the biggest party in the opposition, Vona kept his word and resigned.

### TRAIT ANALYSIS OF THE LEADERS

In the following part of our chapter we explore and compare Orbán's and Vona's personality traits and associated behavior across six dimensions: self-confidence, competence, integrity, need for power, flexibility and cognitive complexity.

#### *Self-Confidence*

Orbán's actions and behavior were generally characterized by high self-confidence, awareness and determination. He already demonstrated his hardness and diligence in his childhood (Debreczeni, 2003; Janke, 2013). His rebellious character defied limits and barriers. Coming from a rural family he faced a new challenge among the intellectuals of Budapest: he had to prove his abilities and aptitude. He was open

and eager to learn from others, but at the same time he tried to avoid relying too much on them. This successful self-transformation from a first-generation intellectual and political activist to a professional politician created a strong belief that he could reach ‘everything’ on his own.

His self-confidence stems from his political vocation. For him, power and politics means the ability to control the immanent uncertainties of the political environment. His formula is simple: the more he can control and influence political events and decisions, the more confident he is. The most spectacular way to demonstrate his confidence is to find and create conflicts that he can manage and solve. Orbán naturally mastered confrontational politics inside and outside his party. ‘If he can choose to open the door by pressing the handle or break it. He would rather break it’ (Janke, 2013, p. 15) one of his close friends has been quoted as saying. From Orbán’s (Orbán, 2006, p. 96) perspective, the compromise is a sign of weakness, while confrontation is the manifestation of power. This kind of attitudes tells us that, despite his initial lower self-esteem, the exercising of power (and the political game in general) became a mean for self-actualization.<sup>4</sup>

His vocation (power and relationships) means emotional stability for Orbán (Debreczeni, 2003, p. 459). This aspect seems more important in the light of his political character. Although his political thinking is rationalist and instrumentalist, his decisions strongly depend on his emotions and instincts. While gaining more power strengthened his confidence and emotional stability, it also raised distrust and suspicion toward his environment, resulting in more confrontational and warlike politics especially after electoral defeats.

Religious dedication is a strong component of Vona’s self-confidence. Writing about his early years (Vona, 2011, p. 15), he explained that during his first year at university studying historical films and books written about Saint Francis of Assisi had a huge impact on him, leading him to move into a Franciscan dormitory. For one and a half years he allegedly intended to become a priest.. Although he finished his studies as a teacher of history, ‘force, faith and liberty’ became the keywords of Jobbik’s mission and also the foundation of his political vocation. Vona’s

<sup>4</sup>His self-confidence was shaken only in 2006, when had to face a charismatic leader, Gyurcsány for the first time. He lost the television debate with Gyurcsány since he was more moderate, and less dynamic, authentic, convincing and powerful than he was in his previous public debates (with Gyula Horn in 1998 and with Péter Medgyessy in 2002).

strong personality was tempered from the moment he entered politics. As the leader of a far-right party he had to act in a permanent headwind. After the scandals of the Hungarian Guard he was in charge of defending the members of the organization.

During the 2018 electoral campaign, he was not only portrayed as the leader of Jobbik but he acted as if he spoke as a statesman. To raise the level of public expectations, he claimed that Jobbik was ready to become a government party. As the prime-ministerial candidate of the party, he took personal responsibility for winning the elections.

### *Competence*

As one of the first professional politicians of post-transition Hungary, Orbán's political skills, knowledge and virtues were already revealed during the early years of his career. He has never been afraid of applying Machiavellian means and strategies to reach his goals. Although the spectators can describe him as a natural-born leader, his mastery in conveying his vision and his messages, centralizing his party and reaching the political hinterland relied on the fact that he was able to learn from his failures (the electoral defeats of 1994 and 2002) and to adapt to new political challenges.

He saw clearly what kind of abilities a good leader (Prime Minister) needs to possess:

The first is analytical skills. The ability to understand. Those, who cannot understand this extremely complicated world we live in and do not have a cool head to analyse social reality, cannot make good decisions. The second as I would call is mental outfit, preparedness, because sometimes tough decisions must be made (...) you have to decide between right and wrong. Finally, a third thing is also required for prime ministership: vitality. The person, who does not have the necessary vitality, cannot execute his power after the analysis, cannot pass it on to the ministers and the public administration. (Orbán, 2006, p. 172)

His politics always seeks new challenges in order to demonstrate his exceptional political skills. Due to his competencies, he could stabilize and concentrate his leadership within Fidesz in 1994 and he became the top candidate of the right-wing camp. As Prime Minister, he could show some of his virtues for his followers, such as his governing skills, and he

could embody a responsible statesman as well. As a ‘charismatic hero’, he aimed to picture himself as the only one in Hungarian politics who could face and overcome actual economic and political challenges without compromising the national interest. He always harbored big dreams for attaining large historical achievements. Since 2006, key political challenges and conflicts are formed, redefined and even constructed voluntary by him in order to feed the need for his charismatic leadership and competencies. Overall, Orbán’s leadership is built on two more or less contrasting pictures at the same time: he is both responsible and virtuous statesman and instinctive and charismatic populist leader.

Vona is a good organizer with strong management skills. In order to embed the party socially, together with Jobbik’s party-director, Gábor Szabó, he came up with several initiatives (Hungarian Guard, King Attila College, National Associations, etc.) that have increased party membership. Beyond being a good organizer, these initiatives reflect his qualification as a historian as he was also able to shape Jobbik’s ideological character and included the preservation of Hungarian traditions into Jobbik’s mission. Vona is very good at persuasion. He practiced this skill before entering politics as a telemarketing assistant (Vona, 2011, p. 31). Combined with his argumentation skills, his persuasive abilities have helped him as the leader of Jobbik, especially during the 2010 parliamentary campaign when the party organized more than 3000 election meetings countrywide (Róna, 2015, p. 88). Overall, Vona has improved his skills (Table 7.2) gradually while leading Jobbik. During the 2018 electoral campaign he decided to go one step further and to prove that he is ready to become the prime minister of Hungary.

### *Integrity*

Orbán has managed to preserve and strengthen the perception of his integrity among his followers, despite his political career encompassing a number of radical turns. Regardless of the party’s changing ideological position or his personal transformation, such as giving up his anticlerical position and finding his way to Calvinism as a true believer from the mid-1990s, the purpose of these changes were to develop and protect an independent political identity while preserving his personal integrity. Orbán described these transformations as moral obligations (Debreczeni, 2003, pp. 278–279).

Table 7.2 The character traits of Viktor Orbán and Gábor Vona

	<i>Term in office</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Viktor Orbán	First (1993–1994)	Medium	Low	Low	High	Medium	Medium
	Second (1994–1995)						
	Third (1995–1997)		Medium				
	Fourth (1997–1999)						
	Fifth (1999–2000)						
	Sixth (2003–2005)						
	Seventh (2005–2007)						
	Eighth (2007–2009)						
	Ninth (2009–2011)						
	Tenth (2011–2013)						
	Eleventh (2013–2015)						
	Twelfth (2015–2017)						
Gábor Vona	First (2006–2014)	Medium					
	Second (2014–2018)	High					

His personal integrity is based upon the ‘myth’ of moral superiority and a strong sense of historical justice rooted in his anti-communism and playing the leading role in democratic transition. At the age of 26, he became a symbol of regime change by giving a speech at the reburial of 1956 revolutionary Prime Minister Imre Nagy on Heroes’ Square in Budapest on 16th June 1989. This seven-minute speech elevated him onto the center stage of Hungarian politics. He sought to create a similar myth of moral superiority in his vision of Civic Hungary (projecting a strong middle class) and Christian democracy (an illiberal state). As Janke (2013, p. 281) cited a leading member of Fidesz, ‘Viktor is convinced that he has a mission to be responsible for the fate of Hungary, believing that only he can fix the nation.’

Beyond these considerations his visions are pervaded by a strong pragmatism (Orbán & Kéri, 1994, p. 233) that subordinates moral principles and ideological ideas to the nature of politics. However, this doesn’t mean giving up his position of moral superiority. ‘[P]olitics also means a linguistic struggle. You have to imagine a chessboard: every square is a meaning or a category, and you have to occupy those to make them your own on the one hand, and to prevent others from taking them on the other. (...) This is very important for political tactics’ (Orbán & Kéri, 1994, p. 74). After 2002, his pragmatism combined with strengthening populism made his integrity more flexible.

Since Orbán has an adaptive political character, he can automatically transform objectives into personal inner convictions (Debreczeni, 2003, pp. 199, 279). The motive behind this is twofold. On the one hand, Orbán argued in a Weberian way (Orbán & Kéri, 1994, pp. 230–231) that the political realm is ruled by a moral standard differentiated from everyday life.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, he is also aware that he has to preserve his moral integrity (in an ordinary sense) in the eye of the beholder (Orbán & Kéri, 1994, p. 134). This duality was already present in his early career, but it became even more striking after 2010: “Do not pay attention to what I say, but to what I do” (Origo, 2011) From that time on, it was more evident that Orbán, with his position of moral superiority, is striving to overcome ideological battles and everyday political

<sup>5</sup> Orbán: “Then I learned, that world of politics is moved by different morality. Its rules are different from the everyday life. I never agreed with those who said that the politics is immoral. Politics has its own morality, it is just different from everyday life” (Orbán & Kéri, 1994, p. 30).

struggles in order to protect his own personal integrity. He avoids hostile media and public debates and engages mostly in controlled appearances and manufactured charismatic revelations. He deliberately seeks the opportunity for one-way communication in which he can reach and influence his (potential) followers without any distortions. At the same time, he surrounded himself with strong and loyal allies who can take over the burden of everyday political struggles and block political attacks.

The core element of Vona's integrity is patriotism. He defined 'the aim of Jobbik's march' (Vona, 2011, p. 44) as to 'restore the self-confidence of the nation' (...) 'If someone will be able to give pride to the Hungarians again, that person will restore almost everything'. As leader of the Parliamentary group of Jobbik, he claimed that 'the primary and most important aim of our politics is to unravel the collective unconscious of the Hungarians, and write down the messages of success, pride, prosperity and happiness' (Vona, 2011, p. 202). Although his early speeches contained radical, nationalist thoughts, since 2015 his statements have become much more moderate (Róna, 2015, p. 231) so that in 2016 none of his interviews contained radical expressions, while keeping patriotic messages. A strong conviction in the moral correctness of his beliefs drive his actions despite his shift from a radical to a moderate form of self-expression.

Vona's integrity suffered harm not because of his own actions but because of the violent attacks of the government-controlled Hungarian (public) media. Via a series of measures including turning the public media into a propaganda machine and the slow 'bleeding out' of private outlets by taking away their sources of income, Fidesz managed to change the Hungarian media landscape. During the 2018 electoral campaign, disinformation played a major role in Hungarian politics, and a Fidesz-initiated fake news campaign started against Vona as Jobbik became the second-largest Hungarian party (partly because of the fragmentation of the parties of the left). His integrity was targeted by questioning his trustworthiness in a series of news reports about his hidden homosexual orientation. Because of his Islamic views it was claimed that he has contact with terrorist organizations. While he started several lawsuits against those media outlets that have spread fake news and the court cleared him several months after the election campaign was over, these news items have harmed his reputation as a potential statesman.

Vona remained the key figure in Jobbik during its transition from a far-right movement to the second biggest party in Hungary and despite the internal resistance of some members to the mainstreaming campaign.

As a founding member and the longest-serving leader of the party, Vona's actions were guided by the party's needs and his beliefs had a great influence on Jobbik.

### *Need for Power*

Perhaps the most striking trait of Orbán is his desire for power and his ability to gain it. 'His formal power is enormous. The informal one is even bigger.' Janke (2013, p. 15) cites one of his colleagues. It has been apparent during the period of collective leadership of Fidesz that Orbán wants to dominate decision-making. The transformation within his party and its hinterland showed clearly Orbán's mastery of organizing, gaining and creating his power. For him, power means freedom of action, but it is difficult to decide whether he is driven by a sense of mission or hunger for power. Nonetheless, his visionary leadership has been strongly overshadowed by his pragmatism and, according to his opponents, his relentless nature in gaining and retaining power.

A good example of his attachment to power is that he resigned multiple times from his positions, but those resignations remained only symbolic. Following the 1994 election defeat, he resigned from the party presidency in order to take responsibility, but he nevertheless managed to retain the position. In 2000, as prime minister, he renounced the party leadership in order to create the image of a responsible statesman who stands above partisan conflicts and politics. But since his informal influence over the party was decisive, he could pass the formal title to his close allies (László Kövér, Zoltán Pokorni and János Áder). As a result, he withdrew himself from the 2002 election campaign. Finally, in the hopeless political situation after the first round of the 2006 elections, he offered to give up his candidacy for Prime Minister during the negotiation with the MDF. However, this had no real political stake. These resignations certainly strengthened his integrity in the eyes of his followers, but they did not reduce his demand for power.

The defeat of 2002 provided an important lesson for Orbán: politics requires strong leadership and absolute control over the party. Since then he decides personally on candidates and political positions. He surrounds himself with disciplined and loyal allies who follow his instructions and who are dependent on him. Those who have gained strong influence or formulated repeatedly opposite or alternative opinions, are neutralized by him (e.g. Tibor Navracsics and János Lázár). Overall, due to the

centralization of the party and the transformation of the party's hinterland, his followers feel that their success and progress depends directly and personally on Orbán.

Vona has always belonged to the inner circle of Jobbik, and he envisioned Jobbik's growing power. In 2012, running for re-election as the president of the party, he claimed that '2/3 of Hungarians are Jobbik voters but many of them are not aware of it' (Vona, 2013, p. 105). His role as a leader of the party was never questioned. A proof of his strong leadership skills is that Vona as a founding member of the party has won any conflict within the party since 2006. The president of Jobbik enjoys an extensive lists of rights compared to other Hungarian party chairmen (Hloušek, 2015; Illonszki & Várnagy, 2014; Kovarek & Soós, 2016). Vona is entitled to convene assemblies at any level and for any party organization, demand compulsory reports from them, appoint a commissioner to supervise party organizations, initiate the suspension of local party units, and even to suggest or veto candidates for nomination by the presidium he chairs. He uses these powers very efficiently to control different units and politicians of the party. However, major decisions are made by the Presidium (consisting of eight officials) by majority vote, where the chairman of Jobbik is *legally primus inter pares* (Róna, 2015, pp. 89–91). A clear sign of his leadership skills is that Vona could adopt his own initiatives by convincing the majority of the presidency even though the President of Jobbik does not have strong individual powers within the Presidency granted by the statute of the party.

His need for power increased by 2018 to such a high level that Vona did not consider coordinating with other parties of the opposition. He made it clear during the 2018 parliamentary elections that he wants to become the prime minister and Jobbik is ready to govern the country without coalition partners.

### *Flexibility*

Orbán stood out early due to his rhetorical talent and persuasive power. 'He feels very well the mood of the people. If he feels that he is right, there is nothing that can deviate him from his goal. He is tireless in persuasion. Also in argumentation' (Janke, 2013, p. 16). His priority has always been to overcome the challenge of mediating his messages properly to meet the expectations of different societal groups. He has always been a natural communicator and campaigner, who can easily build

connections with his audience (Janke, 2013, p. 161). According to a former member of Fidesz, 'he can do anything with people' (Janke, 2013, p. 104). Although his flexibility was clearly damaged by the ideological transformation and it was only strengthened slowly and gradually, he has always been able to feel the public mood. When it was an advantage in the media to be liberal, he was liberal. When the political right-wing collapsed and conservatives were fragmented, he realized the political opportunity and became conservative.

When the post-1989 elite fell, he transformed to appear populist and applied anti-establishment rhetoric. Following the defeat in the 1994 parliamentary elections, he has shown that he is able to create positive emotions, to shape people's desires and to persuade people of different views. He acted credibly and effectively as the leader of the right-wing community. However, he became inaccessible as prime minister and he joined the campaign too late, which contributed to losing the 2002 parliamentary elections. The year 2002 was a turning point for him. Thereafter, he not only tried to respond reactively to the opinions of his voters and party members, but he also made attempts to reframe them in a vigorous and populist way. He gradually mobilized voters' frustrations and fears, which reached its peak during the 2015–2016 migration crisis. Overall, Orbán brings politics directly to the electorate. The populist politics also meant that he could easily step back from some unpopular decisions that triggered great resistance from the electorate (e.g. the Sunday-closing of supermarkets, the tax on the internet).

Vona managed to get Jobbik through ideological transformations: originally, the movement led by Dávid Kovács was a conservative youth movement. During that period, Vona belonged to Orbán's own Civic Circle, where he met conservative intellectuals regularly. Following the leaking of Gyurcsány's 'lying speech,' Vona managed to mobilize the movement in a radical manner. As a political party, Jobbik entered Hungarian politics as a radical right party with his leadership. In 2013, facing the 2/3 majority of Fidesz in the parliament, Vona decided to start the 'mainstreaming campaign' of Jobbik. Therefore, we can claim that in ideological sense, Vona has always been flexible in positioning the party according to the necessities of the political arena.

In order to be successful, Vona needed to prove his skills as an organizer of new structures. However he was less flexible when it came to adaptation. As we have explained above, Vona, as a founding member of Jobbik, had several initiatives that helped Jobbik's development as a

movement during the early years. But in the shadow of the 2/3 majority of Fidesz after 2010, this was not enough. Vona was flexible enough to come up with a new strategy, focused on the belief that becoming a popular party is Jobbik's only chance of emerging as a force capable of ousting Fidesz as the main governing party in 2018. Vona first spoke of this change in communication in September 2013, and later in an address to Jobbik's parliamentary group on the opening of the 2013–2014 legislative season. He asked his MPs to get rid of the radical edge of their rhetoric (Bíró-Nagy & Boros, 2016, p. 245). However he was not flexible enough to offset Orbán's strategy of 'central force field': even though he knew that Fidesz positions itself in the middle, compared to its two-sided, drastically divided opposition, Jobbik did not coordinate its candidates in any districts and therefore even from a mathematical minority, Fidesz could win the 2018 parliamentary elections.

### *Cognitive Complexity*

Orbán's cognitive performance was important, but not decisive for his political success (cf. Janke 2013, p. 288). He has displayed strong capacity for strategic thought, but Orbán has never been a master of the details of public policy, he has displayed strong capacity for strategic thought. Orbán, always stands against an intellectual and technocratic understanding of politics. For him, problems are not ideological or policy questions, but clearly political ones. Instead of expertise, he puts political knowledge and action (Janke, 2013, p. 157) at the forefront:

In politics, action must be taken. You should not daydream, weigh, plan and worry too much about what will be the final result. If you feel you have to do something, then do it! Intellectuals are too smart, they see too many obstacles. In politics, two traits can be really terrible: if you aren't smart enough, or if you're too smart. (Orbán cited by Janke, 2013, p. 90)

After the populist turn, his understanding and ways of making sense of problems has become more and more one-dimensional. His black and white thinking assumes a lower cognitive complexity. He delegates detailed policy questions. Therefore, his cognitive style can be considered as moderate: on the one hand, he avoids complex political questions and answers, on the other hand, the complexity of his political messages has decreased and become one-dimensional.

Vona had an important role in defining the party's ideology. By linking examples from Hungarian history to the politics of Jobbik, Vona took part in this endeavor in a creative manner. As for the central element of his ideological background, he wrote: 'If I had to define the category to which I belong, based on my thinking and understanding, my answer would be: traditionalist.' (Vona, 2011, p. 190). Putting this idea into historical perspective, he claimed that 'History is an unstoppable descent, where anti-tradition gradually suppresses traditionalism' (Vona, 2013, pp. 216–217). The appreciation of tradition is rooted in every aspect of Jobbik's politics. But Vona is less concerned about policy (e.g. economic, legal) issues that he leaves for other politicians of the party. Rather, his speeches touch upon ideological questions. To take an example, there is quite a lot of cognitive complexity in his explanation about his relationship to Islam, for which he has been criticized often by Fidesz dominated media outlets. According to Vona, 'there is only one culture that strives to preserve its traditions' (...) 'the last bastion of the traditional culture of mankind has remained the Islamic world' (Vona, 2011, p. 190). This example also highlights the fact that Vona is ready to defend unpopular ideas on an ideological basis: he talked about his Islamic sympathies even after the Islamic terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015.

Since Jobbik could not rely on any support from the media, the party needed to create its own media outlets. Vona considered this task to be very important and contributed to it with several publications.

### ANALYSIS OF CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PARTIES

Orbán's traits and the way they have changed has had a huge impact on the electoral performance of Fidesz (Table 7.3). In 1994, his competencies and integrity were still on a low level and the strong need for power seen in his ambition to lead the country had negative consequences for his parliamentary party, which was just about to finish the transformation from a bottom-up and horizontal youth movement organization. However, Orbán's integrity, flexibility, and capabilities were strengthened following the defeat in 1994 and the party's electoral performance improved. In 1998, Fidesz became a party in government and Orbán used his first premiership between 1998 and 2002 to establish his leading role on the right. The positions of prime minister and party president were separated after 2000 and his absence during the 2002 electoral campaign left its mark on the party's performance. In 2003, Orbán was

Table 7.3 The consequences of Orbán's and Vona's leadership for their parties

		<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Viktor Orbán	First (1993–1994)	Lower	Higher	Higher
	Second (1994–1995)			
	Third (1995–1997)			
	Fourth (1997–1999)	Higher		
	Fifth (1999–2000)			
	Sixth (2003–2005)	No effect		
	Seventh (2005–2007)			
	Eighth (2007–2009)			
	Ninth (2009–2011)	Higher		
	Tenth (2011–2013)			
	Eleventh (2013–2015)	No effect		
	Twentieth (2015–2017)			No effect
	Thirteenth (2017–)			
Gábor Vona	First (2006–2014)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Second (2014–2018)	Higher	Lower	Higher

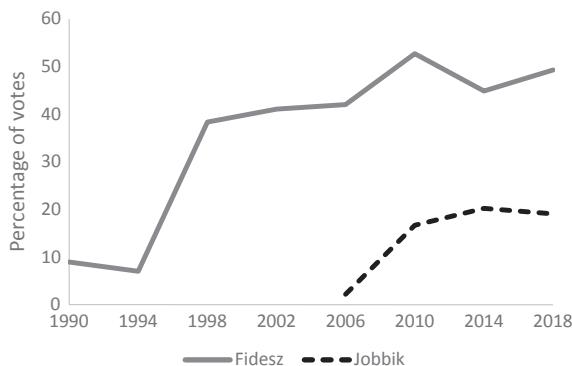


Fig. 7.1 The share of votes for Fidesz and Jobbik in the Hungarian legislative elections

elected as the president of the party again. After eight years of oppositional politics and hinterland building, Fidesz achieved a landslide victory in 2010 (Fig. 7.1) and gained an unprecedented two-third ‘supermajority’. Moreover, he repeated this twice due to his populist politics and the reform of the electoral system.

The development of Orbán’s competencies and his need for power strengthened party cohesion over the years. After 1994 he established a dominant position in the party and pushed his opponents out. The development of his self-confidence was a consequence of this rather than vice versa. As his opponents became marginalized and his power grew, his confidence strengthened. The party’s cohesion was not significantly weakened by electoral results (with the exception of the 1994 elections), and his flexibility increased support for the party, which in turn fortified Orbán’s position in the party. Under his leadership, Fidesz became the most centralized, most homogeneous and most disciplined Hungarian party.

His leadership and mobilization also boosted party membership. The defeat in the 2002 elections made Orbán understand the importance of mobilization and centralization of the hinterland. The introduction of dual party membership led to a sharp increase in the party membership,<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Changes in membership of Fidesz: 5000 (1990), 15,000 (1994), 13,000 (1998), 16,500 (2002), 39,932 (2006); 40,300 (2010), 36,800 (2014) (Gherghina, 2014, p. 109; Kovarek & Soós, 2016).

which peaked in 2010 and has remained at that level after a slight fluctuation. Currently, Fidesz has the largest party membership, which can be traced back to Orbán's competencies and his increasing self-confidence and flexibility. Overall, Orbán's traits have helped him to reach his goals: he has established a good relationship with the electorate and made sure that the party organization gets stronger.

Vona started his political career as an agile, talented leader of a far-right movement and many of his traits (self-confidence, competence and need for power) have increased parallel to Jobbik's rising electoral performance. Jobbik achieved a breakthrough in 2010 when the party entered the Parliament. During his second term, Vona was able to reposition Jobbik's ideological profile by mainstreaming the party and as the party became biggest party of the opposition he was presented as the future prime minister of Hungary. The primary reasons for the party's lack of success during the 2018 parliamentary elections were related to external factors (e.g. the Hungarian electoral system). However, with more flexibility and less need for power, Vona could have offset Orbán's strategy of 'central force field' by joining forces with other opposition parties.

Although Vona as a founding member of the party played an enormous part in Jobbik's success, his need for power decreased intra-party cohesion after 2014 for two reasons: on the one hand the mainstreaming campaign has alienated donors, who are key figures of the party; on the other hand Jobbik members became frustrated when he raised the bar by declaring that Jobbik's aim is to become government party whatever it takes. Because the government-controlled media outlets were successful in decreasing his integrity as a leader, Vona was unable to secure intra-party cohesion following the defeat of the 2018 elections.

Vona's competencies as a leader with good organizational skills, with ever-increasing self-confidence and need for power contributed to the steady increase of Jobbik's party membership.<sup>7</sup> All in all it has to be considered that, even though Jobbik lost the election in 2018 and Vona resigned from the party presidency and his parliamentary mandate as he promised during the campaign, he was able to keep Jobbik together in a

<sup>7</sup>Changes in membership of Jobbik: 1200 (2003), 3000 (2008); 5000 (2009) 11,000 (2010), 12,340 (2011) 14,000 (2013) 17,943 (2016) (Pirro, 2019b).

highly hostile political context. His party became the most powerful and relevant opposition party in parliament following the 2018 parliamentary elections.

## CONCLUSION

Although our article assumed that leaders' personality and character is decisive in steering their party through a transformation, we found that it is also constrained by contextual and institutional factors.

Our analysis has found that the selected two leaders' individual qualities were not only necessary to secure the ideological transformational process of their party, but they also affected electoral performance, intra-party cohesion and party membership. However, within the highly contingent situation of Hungarian politics, personality traits matter differently than assumed by the literature. Leaders' ambitions (need for power and self-confidence) must be constantly high to keep their leadership uncontested. The selected leaders also relied more strongly on their competence in order to increase and stabilize their control on the party, to keep the motion firmly in a specific direction and to deal with internal conflicts caused by the ideological transformation of their party. However, both cases revealed that leaders' integrity may become uncertain when they redefine core principles based on needs of their party.

Differences in the consequences of Orbán's and Vona's personality traits on their party's performance stem not only from their personal abilities and character, but also from the opportunity structure within which they acted. Orbán started his career in a new democracy where the political arena was open for ambitious political leaders, whereas Vona entered the parliament following the critical election of 2010 that changed the Hungarian political landscape completely. Using Orbán's phrases: the 'ballot box revolution' of 2010 created a 'central field of force' where Fidesz became a central and dominant political actor alongside a fragmented opposition. Orbán's reconstruction of the Hungarian political regime (Illés et al., 2018; see also: Körösényi & Patkós, 2017) changed dramatically the way in which power is exercised, the pattern of relationships between state and society, the underlying political and social coalitions and the (populist) political discourse which legitimizes it. As a major institutional change, the redrawn electoral system became more majoritarian as well in 2011. Moreover, the predominantly state-owned and Fidesz-related media market (Bayer, 2016; Dragomir, 2017) gives

wide latitude for a constant campaign focused on character assassination. Whereas Orbán has a favorable position as the founder of the regime, other party leaders cannot demonstrate their personality traits wholly and authentically for the public. Thus Vona had to act in a predominant party system, in a majoritarian electoral system and a government dominated media market. Within that context, Vona's opportunity to show himself to the electorate as an authentic leader who possesses the adequate and required set of traits was limited even as Jobbik became the second-largest Hungarian party.

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## CHAPTER 8

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# A Comparison of Two Polish Party Leaders: Jarosław Kaczyński and Donald Tusk

*Ben Stanley*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter compares the two most important political figures in Poland after the restoration of democracy in 1989: Jarosław Kaczyński<sup>1</sup> and Donald Tusk. After semi-democratic elections in June 1989 following the Round Table Talks between the communist regime and the Solidarity movement, Poland successfully transitioned to democracy, holding fully-democratic elections in October 1991. During the 1990s, Polish party politics was dominated by a ‘post-communist divide’ (Grabowska, 2004) between the successors to the Polish United Workers’ Party and the Solidarity movement, but this putative cleavage proved fragile amid weak and often ideologically heterogeneous governments and the changing priorities of voters. After the ‘earthquake’

<sup>1</sup>Henceforth any reference to ‘Kaczyński’ by surname alone should be understood to denote Jarosław Kaczyński, rather than his twin brother, the late former president Lech Kaczyński, who will be referred to by his full name.

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election (Szczerbiak, 2002) of 2001 the basic structure of the current party system emerged, with two new parties, the nationalist-populist Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*; PiS) and the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*; PiS) becoming the dominant forces over the next decade.

Kaczyński and Tusk are the most obvious choices for a comparative analysis of party leadership in Poland. Both served multiple terms in office, encompassing periods of opposition as well as government. This makes it possible to observe the evolution of their leadership styles and the impact they had on their respective parties. Yet they are interesting cases not only for their longevity but also in the ways their contrasting leadership styles and political objectives have shaped contemporary Polish politics. Both played leading roles in the consolidation of Poland's party system after the 'false start' of the post-communist divide. If Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 put a symbolic end to the process of transition, from 2005 onward Polish politics was dominated by a 'regime divide' between parties which broadly accepted the constitutional settlement of Poland's Third Republic (led by PO) and parties which contested the legitimacy of the new system even while working within it (led by PiS). The counterposition of Kaczyński's remorseless radicalism and Tusk's increasingly cautious approach to governing exemplifies these contrasting philosophies.

In the following section, I provide background information on the two leaders, focusing on their experiences as figures in the anti-communist opposition, then as somewhat minor figures during the first decade of post-communist transition, as the founders of new parties at the turn of the second decade, and the dominant role they subsequently played. The next section consists of a systematic analysis of both leaders' personality traits and their evolution over time. Finally, I evaluate the impact of these traits on the leaders' parties, with respect to electoral performance, intra-party cohesion and party membership.

## HISTORY OF THE TWO LEADERS

Both PiS and PO were formed amid the collapse of the coalition of Solidarity Election Action (*Akcja Wyborcza 'Solidarność'*; AWS) and the Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*; UW) which governed during the 1997–2001 parliamentary term. PiS was founded during the spring of 2001 by twin brothers Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński, after the latter was

**Table 8.1** Party leaders of PiS and PO (2001–2018)

<i>Parties and their leaders</i>	<i>Start of the term in office</i>	<i>End of the term in office</i>
<i>PiS</i>		
Lech Kaczyński	21 April 2001	18 January 2003
Jarosław Kaczyński	18 January 2003	4 June 2006
	4 June 2006	7 March 2010
	7 March 2010	30 June 2013
	30 June 2013	2 July 2016
	2 July 2016	Currently in office
<i>PO</i>		
Maciej Płażyński	5 March 2002	30 May 2003
Donald Tusk	1 June 2002	21 June 2006
	21 June 2006	26 June 2010
	26 June 2010	23 August 2013
	23 August 2013	8 November 2014
Ewa Kopacz	8 November 2014	26 January 2016
Grzegorz Schetyna	26 January 2016	Currently in office

Sources Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (2016, 2019) and Platforma Obywatelska (2019).

Notes Maciej Płażyński was elected leader of Civic Platform in November 2001, but 5 March 2002 was the date on which Civic Platform was registered as a party. Ewa Kopacz served as acting leader after Tusk's resignation by virtue of her position as deputy leader of PO; she was not elected to this office.

fired from his position as Minister of Justice in the AWS government. It was formally registered as a party in June of that year, and ran successfully in elections the following September, winning 9.5% of the vote. Initially a relatively moderate conservative party, it began to move further to the right, particularly after its first term in office from 2005 to 2007 (Stanley, 2016, p. 278). The first formal leader of the party was Lech Kaczyński, who served in that office from April 2001 to January 2003. Jarosław Kaczyński was then elected to the position and has led the party since, serving for five terms in office to date (see Table 8.1).

PO was also founded in early 2001, but would not formally register as a party until March 2002. It emerged primarily from a faction of UW politicians disenchanted with their party's performance during its term as junior coalition partner. The prime movers behind PO were liberals Donald Tusk and Andrzej Olechowski and conservative Maciej Płażyński. The party took on the mixed liberal-conservative complexion of its founders, emphasizing the need for further free-market reforms. Gaining 12.68% of the vote in the September election, it became the

second-largest party in parliament. Płażyński was appointed its first leader and would continue in this post until May 2003, when he left the party due to ideological differences and the emergence of leadership rivalries. Tusk was then elected as leader, a post he held for four terms until his departure from Polish politics to become President of the European Council in December 2014. After Tusk's departure, his successor as prime minister Ewa Kopacz assumed leadership duties on an acting basis until January 2016, when current incumbent Grzegorz Schetyna was elected to the role.

### *Jarosław Kaczyński*

Brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński first came to public attention when they starred in a popular 1960s children's film. Both subsequently studied law at Warsaw University and participated in the student protests of 1968. During the 1970s, Jarosław Kaczyński worked as an academic and became involved with opposition movements; firstly the Committee for the Defence of Workers (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*; KOR) and subsequently Solidarity, making contacts with striking workers and providing legal advice. During the 1980s he was involved with organizations promoting human rights, while maintaining his participation in Solidarity after its dellegalization following the introduction of martial law in 1981 through to the Round Table negotiations in 1989, in which he was a participant.

In the early years of transition Kaczyński was an active and influential public figure. Elected to the *Senat* (the upper house of Poland's legislature) in the semi-free elections of 1989, he also briefly served as editor of the Solidarity Weekly newspaper and as chief of staff to President Lech Wałęsa, using these positions to agitate for the acceleration of transition to democracy and decommunisation of the nascent political, business and media elite. From 1991 to 1993 he was a member of the *Sejm* (the lower house of the legislature), for the Civic Accord (*Porozumienie Centrum*; PC) party he founded along with other veterans of Solidarity in 1991. After PC failed to cross the threshold in 1993, he spent the next four years out of parliament, returning in 1997 as a candidate of the Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (*Ruch Odbudowy Polski*; ROP), a part of the AWS umbrella movement of post-Solidarity parties. Despite regaining a seat in parliament, he remained on the political sidelines.

Kaczyński's fortunes changed in 2001 with the founding of PiS (Fig. 8.1). The disintegration of the Solidarity side of the

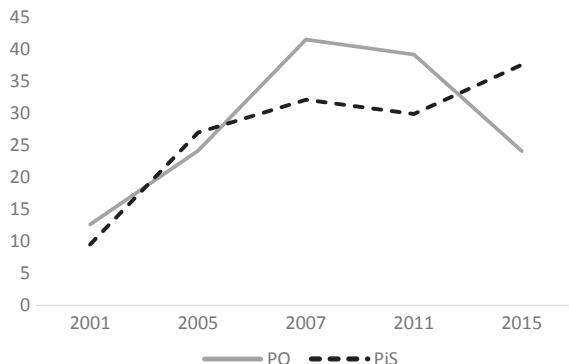


Fig. 8.1 The electoral performance of PiS and PO since 2001

post-communist divide was followed by a swift decline in the electoral standing of the beleaguered Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*; SLD), the successor party to the Communist party and the main party of government between 2001 and 2005. Amid recession, the difficulties of finalizing Poland's accession agreement to join the EU, and the exposure of significant corruption scandals, PiS's narrative of uncompromising anti-communism, social sensitivity and zero tolerance for lawbreaking began to resonate with voters experiencing the 'anxieties of transition' (Millard, 2006, p. 1007). In the parliamentary elections of 2005, PiS gained the largest share of seats and, after a brief period steering the government from behind the scenes, Jarosław Kaczyński became prime minister in July 2006. However, following the collapse of the three-party coalition on which his majority depended, he was ousted in the early elections of October 2007.

For the next eight years, PiS remained in opposition. In the aftermath of the 2007 defeat Kaczyński faced challenges to his authority, but remained leader. Although profoundly affected by the death of his brother Lech—then President of the Republic—in the Smoleńsk air disaster of April 2010, Kaczyński opted to remain in frontline politics, running unsuccessfully to succeed his brother as president and then leading his party back to power in the October 2015 election. Recognizing that his divisive personality was a potential liability, he opted not to run as candidate for prime minister, controlling the government from behind the scenes.

### *Donald Tusk*

Some eight years younger than Kaczyński, Donald Tusk's political activities began in the late 1970s, when as a student of history at the University of Gdańsk during the beginnings of the Solidarity movement he participated in the creation of an independent student association, subsequently becoming the leader of a branch of Solidarity. During most of the 1980s he worked as a manual laborer, and was a member of a coterie of liberal intellectuals, the Gdańsk Socio-Economic Circle, grouped around the underground publication 'Przegląd Polityczny'. Drawing on their experiences of the workers' cooperatives that were emerging during the mid-1980s, Tusk and his associates developed a pragmatic and gradualist approach to economic liberalization that did not seek to overturn the system but to function within the limits of what was currently permitted, creating 'independent, self-governing and self-financing state cooperatives' (Tusk, 1998, p. 18).

Tusk carried this approach through into the period of democratic transition. In June 1990 he was one of the founders of the Liberal-Democratic Congress (*Kongres Liberalno-Demokratyczny*; KLD), whose program sought to adapt its founders' pragmatic liberalism to new circumstances. In 1991 Tusk became the leader of KLD, which entered parliament after the October 1991 elections. During the unstable 1991–1993 parliamentary term KLD was in opposition to the government of Jan Olszewski which was supported by Jarosław Kaczyński's PC, a point of contention which would return in the future rivalry between the two leaders. After losing their seats in 1993, KLD joined the Democratic Union (*Unia Demokratyczna*; UD) to form the Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*; UW), with Tusk as one of the deputy leaders.

During the 1997–2001 parliamentary term UW served as coalition partner to AWS until it withdrew its support in 2000. In 2001 Tusk challenged leader Bronisław Geremek for the leadership of the party, but was defeated, after which he and his supporters left UW to form PO. In the 2001 elections PO came second with 12.7% of the vote, and Tusk became one of the leading opposition figures and a future candidate for president or prime minister. However, he was defeated in the 2005 presidential election by Lech Kaczyński, and PO narrowly lost the contemporaneous parliamentary election. The failure of coalition talks between PiS and PO set the two parties on the path of enmity. After the PiS-led government fell in 2007, Tusk led PO to power in 2007 and served as prime minister until 2014, when he resigned his position to take up the post of President of the European Council.

## ANALYSIS OF THE LEADERS ON THE SIX PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS

The concurrent nature of the leadership careers of Kaczyński and Tusk lends itself to a parallel analysis of their traits, which were to some extent influenced by their deepening rivalry. Table 8.2 shows qualitative ratings of the traits of both leaders during each of their terms in office, which are discussed in turn below.

### *Need for Power*

I start with an analysis of the two leaders' need for power, as changes in this trait also had a significant impact on other aspects of the leaders' characteristics. Common to both Kaczyński and Tusk was that they became leaders of parties they had been involved in creating. However, they initially occupied somewhat different positions within those parties. If Lech Kaczyński was the first formal leader of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński was the *de facto* leader to whom his brother deferred in questions of party strategy. While not as dominant over the party as he would later become, his position was one of first among equals. By contrast, PO's initial decision to place the leadership in the hands of a collegiate body of its three founders meant that while Tusk sought power, he had initially to share it, and his dominant position within the party was by no means as assured as that of Kaczyński.

Both Kaczyński and Tusk became leaders during the 2001–2005 parliamentary term, but under different circumstances. Kaczyński assumed formal power after it was ceded by his brother, who in the meantime had become mayor of Warsaw. Tusk gained leadership as the result of a contest for influence within the party. If initially internal rivalries within PO were an expression of the internal pluralism of the party, the battle soon became one of 'domination' over it on the part of Tusk and his cohort of supporters (Matyja, 2009, p. 62). When in June 2003 Tusk was elected to the leadership, he ran unopposed.

The dynamic of the dual presidential-parliamentary election in the autumn of 2005 established PiS and PO as the two major parties, and set them in rivalry with each other (Szczerbiak, 2007, p. 204). During this period, the two leaders consolidated control over their respective parties. Mindful of his divisive public image, Kaczyński initially remained outside government, with relative unknown Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz as prime minister. However, he exercised tight control over decision-making; as

**Table 8.2** The character traits of Jarosław Kaczyński and Donald Tusk

	<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Jarosław Kaczyński	First (2003–2006)	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Medium
	Second (2006–2010)	High	Medium	High	High	Low	Medium
	Third (2010–2013)	High <sup>a</sup>	Medium	High	High	Low	High
	Fourth (2013–2016)	High	High	High	High	Medium	High
	Fifth (2016–present)	High	High	High	High	Medium	High
Donald Tusk	First (2002–2006)	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Second (2006–2010)	High	Medium <sup>b</sup>	High	High	Medium	Medium
	Third (2010–2013)	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Fourth (2013–2014)	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low

<sup>a</sup>Medium during 2010<sup>b</sup>High from 2009 onwards

his former deputy Ludwik Dorn later remarked, ‘as soon as PiS formed a government, the political committee [of the party] ceased to exist’, and ‘there was no longer any institution incorporating PiS’s political conceptions and generating political ideas, strategies and tactics’ (Dorn, Łukasiak, & Rybak, 2009, p. 171). Lech Kaczyński’s election to the presidency compounded the de-institutionalization of decision-making processes; since the PiS party structure and the presidency could not formally coordinate their activities, this was achieved informally by the two brothers outside institutional structures (Matyja, 2010, p. 36). Eventually, when Marcinkiewicz’s popularity with voters began to rise and he started behaving more autonomously, Kaczyński forced his resignation as prime minister, and assumed the position himself.

At the same time, Tusk strengthened his position as party leader. On the one hand, successive revisions of PO’s statute ‘brought [the party’s] structure closer to that of a party in which lower levels of the party are more relevant’ (Sobolewska-Myślik, Kosowska-Gąstoł, & Borowiec, 2009, p. 51). On the other, Tusk engaged in a process of centralizing power in the higher echelons of the party, with the party executive increasingly populated with his allies and his internal opponents, particularly conservative Jan Rokita, marginalized (Matyja, 2009, p. 65). After PO gained power in 2007, Tusk used his position as prime minister to promote his allies within the party to positions of influence, while relegating his opponents to inferior ministerial posts or to the backbenches.

By the 2011 elections, both leaders were firmly in control of their parties. Kaczyński had ousted independent-minded and ambitious figures such as former deputy leader Ludwik Dorn, parliamentary speaker Marek Jurek, and former Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro, and had surrounded himself with the loyal and unthreatening members of his long-standing ‘cloister’. While PO was characterized by greater ideological pluralism, Tusk remained firmly in control of the party. Yet while both leaders had shown a similar determination to build their position by isolating their opponents, and a similar ruthlessness in doing so, Tusk placed less of a priority on clinging on to that power. Not long after being elected to his third term in office in 2010, he asserted that he would serve for another four years and ‘then give my successors a chance’ (quoted in *Newsweek*, 2010b). After a change in the method for electing the party leader, he stood again in 2013, defeating his challenger Jarosław Gowin, but in 2014 resigned his position prior to becoming President of the European Council.

By contrast, Kaczyński—who had significantly fewer prospects of and ambitions for further office beyond Poland—showed no intention of relinquishing power. Despite being emotionally shattered by the death of his brother in the April 2010 Smoleńsk disaster and his subsequent narrow defeat in the ensuing presidential election, thoughts of resignation seem not to have detained him for long, and he set about the task of restoring PiS to power with renewed vigor. PiS's triumphant return to power in 2015, when it won both the presidency and an overall majority in parliament,<sup>2</sup> gave Kaczyński a long-awaited opportunity to reform Poland in accordance with a critique of transition he had harbored for decades.

Although Kaczyński insisted that ‘while I have significant influence on what happens on the right of the political spectrum, I am not a dictator’ (RMF FM, 2019), few believed that he was not behind every important decision, from handpicking successive prime ministers Beata Szydło and Mateusz Morawiecki and vetoing appointments to their cabinets, to directing the speakers of both houses of parliament in the organization of legislative proceedings, to influencing the coverage of his party and the government in state media that increasingly resembled a public relations organization. Even a lengthy period of hospitalization in the spring of 2018 did not prompt thoughts of retirement; from his hospital bed he maintained control of party business.

### *Self-Confidence*

Consistent with the manner in which they gained and consolidated their hold on power, both leaders maintained a generally high level of self-confidence during their time in office. While Kaczyński was known for having a difficult character and a tendency toward conflict, these characteristics generally served his interests as party leader, inspiring respect and fear among his subordinates and would-be challengers rather than imperiling his position as leader. They were rarely the cause of political difficulties. The most significant exception was Kaczyński's response to the Smoleńsk disaster, and in particular the campaign for the presidential election that followed, in which he ran as PiS candidate. By PiS's

<sup>2</sup>Technically, this was not a majority for PiS as a party, but for its electoral list, which also contained members of the United Poland (*Solidarna Polska*; SP) and Poland Together (*Polska Razem*; PR) parties. However, the parties sat as a single parliamentary club and governed as a disciplined, united whole.

standards the campaign lacked dynamism, and Kaczyński was narrowly beaten in the second round by Bronisław Komorowski, a politician and campaigner of lesser caliber. Later that year, Kaczyński blamed his subdued performance on the fact that he had been prescribed strong medication to help him cope with his emotions in response to the disaster, and that he was in such a poor emotional condition that he played no part in the design of the campaign, leaving that to his staff (*Newsweek*, 2010a).

Whether this was indeed the case or was an attempt at rationalizing his defeat, Kaczyński clearly took time to recover his self-possession in the wake of the disaster. Nevertheless, having disposed of those who might have posed a threat to his status within the party and commanding the absolute respect and loyalty of those who remained, Kaczyński regained his assuredness. While his opponents attempted to exploit his occasionally explosive temperament, this tended to work to Kaczyński's advantage. On one occasion, realizing that Kaczyński's relationship with his brother and custodianship of his reputation was a sensitive issue, PO deputies goaded him into a furious denunciation from the parliamentary rostrum of the 'scumbags' who 'murdered my brother' (Gazeta.pl, 2017). While such an outburst might normally have been seen as a sign of weakness, in the deeply polarized context of post-2015 politics in Poland it had the ring of defiance.

By comparison, Tusk's public demeanor was calm and largely unemotional, and although he had a reputation for verbally aggressive treatment of colleagues in private, he came to be seen by the majority of the public as a sympathetic figure (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, n.d., p. 2). Rather than resigning in the wake of two defeats in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2005, he took the opportunity to strengthen his position in the party, allowing his rival and prime ministerial candidate Jan Rokita to be blamed for the failure of post-election coalition talks between PO and PiS. The unfolding chaos of the unstable 2005–2007 parliamentary term, in which PiS governed alongside the disruptive populists Self-Defence (*Samoobrona*; SRP) and the radical right League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*; LPR), gave Tusk numerous opportunities to develop a reputation as an effective leader. Tusk's development was in evidence during the electoral campaign, particularly when he scored a decisive victory in a televised debate with Kaczyński, who had previously had his measure as a debating opponent (Dudek, 2016, p. 596).

### *Competence*

The relatively high levels of self-confidence that both leaders possessed were reflected in their rising levels of competence as they gained experience of leadership and learned from their initial missteps. Both already had experience of party leadership in the early 1990s, but neither had experience of leadership while in high office, and both took some time to master the role. During the 2005–2007 parliamentary term, Kaczyński's ambitions to bring about significant reforms to Poland's Third Republic ran up against structural barriers in the form of mercurial coalition partners and a Constitutional Tribunal that was resistant to many of the government's proposed changes (Stanley, 2016). Even after replacing Marcinkiewicz as prime minister, Kaczyński struggled to overcome the disparity between the extent of his ambitions and the circumstances in which he was forced to pursue them. This led him to overplay his hand. His attempt to use tougher 'lustration' laws as an instrument to discredit members of the political elite backfired when the Constitutional Tribunal ruled against many of the new amendments. The odium of the 'land affair', in which the newly created Anti-Corruption Bureau failed in an attempt to entrap Kaczyński's junior coalition partner Andrzej Lepper into taking a bribe, clung to Kaczyński, who was accused of using the secret services to attempt to discredit a fellow politician. These and various other unforced errors had a serious impact on the government's standing, and led to its early downfall.

If PiS's resounding defeat in the 2007 election seemed at the time to herald the start of the party's decline, in retrospect the 2005–2007 period was a short, effective lesson in what not to do next time. The major bulwark to Kaczyński's intentions during this term in office was the Constitutional Tribunal. By the time PiS returned to power in 2015, Kaczyński had a better understanding of how to sequence his reforms to ensure that the Tribunal would not pose the same threat. One of the first actions undertaken by PiS after regaining power in November 2015 was to appoint three new members to the Tribunal in the place of three legally appointed judges, who were prevented from taking their seats by the refusal of President Andrzej Duda to administer their oaths of office. The government then exploited its prerogative to publish the official Journal of Laws by preventing rulings of the Constitutional Tribunal that would impede its strategy of judicial takeover from entering into force. Over the next year, Kaczyński orchestrated a series of steps that enabled

PiS to execute an illegitimate takeover of the Tribunal's presidency and the installation of a politically loyal alternative (see Pech & Scheppele, 2017, p. 15 for details).

By December 2016 the Tribunal was effectively in the hands of the executive, and no longer a threat to the government's legislative program. The takeover of the Constitutional Tribunal exemplified Kaczyński's mastery of the political game: by using weaknesses in Poland's institutional infrastructure that were vulnerable to a government which rejected customary norms of procedure (such as the aforementioned blocking of Tribunal rulings by refusing to print them in the Journal of Laws), establishing political facts on the ground before the European Commission and European Court of Justice could respond, and maintaining a political alliance with Hungary based on a mutual promise to veto any proceedings that might lead to EU-level sanctions against either country. In 2005–2007, Kaczyński's government rapidly unraveled amid domestic resistance and international criticism. By contrast, the 2015–2019 PiS governments—of which Kaczyński, officially a mere backbencher, was de facto prime minister—were remarkable for their stability and the high levels of public approval (CBOS, 2019) they enjoyed despite the international criticism they received.

Tusk developed into a decisive and determined leader after initially being dismissed as a lightweight. During his early years in politics, he gained a reputation for an aversion to hard work and a lack of interest in the daily routine of politics, falling asleep or watching football matches while chairing sessions of the Senate as deputy speaker (Krasowski, 2016, p. 13). However, the ruthlessness with which he seized power and then set about sidelining his opponents during his first two terms in the post were testament to his increasing ability to handle the challenges of the role. There were occasions when he made unforced errors that attested to a certain naivety, notably when using dubious charges of nepotism to eliminate one of his serious rivals for the PO leadership, the economist Zita Gilowska, only for Jarosław Kaczyński promptly to poach the well-regarded Gilowska as Finance Minister, thereby nullifying PO's charges that the incumbent PiS government was incompetent in that respect.

However, on coming to power in 2007 Tusk quickly grasped the demands of leadership, aided initially by the demoralized and disoriented state of the opposition. The onset of the global economic crisis in 2008 posed significant challenges for the nascent PO-PSL government, but

Tusk's status rose internationally as Poland's competent stewardship of the economy stood out against a sea of underperformers. Domestically, Tusk demonstrated that his capacity for ruthlessness could be allied to decisiveness in his reaction to the 'gambling affair' of autumn 2009, a scandal over the use of political influence concerning amendments to the law on gambling. Rather than attempt to brazen out the affair like his predecessor Leszek Miller, whose indecisive response to a similar case in 2002 set his government and ultimately his party on the path of decline, Tusk swiftly dismissed those responsible for the affair, thereby ensuring his government's ratings remained largely unaffected (Dudek, 2016, p. 617).

Midway through his second term as prime minister, Tusk's position as leader was secure to the extent that he easily defeated a challenge to his leadership by former Justice Minister Jarosław Gowin, gaining nearly 80% support on a vote by just over half the membership of the party (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2013). However, his popularity with the public was waning, and the decline in his government's fortunes was accelerated by the 'tapegate' scandal of 2014, in which illegal recordings of government ministers making critical comments about the condition of the Polish state and the diplomatic relationship between Poland and the United States were leaked to the weekly magazine *Wprost*. Realizing that he was becoming a burden to his party, Tusk drew a line under the tapegate scandal by announcing his resignation as prime minister and as leader of PO. The fact that his resignation stemmed not only from his awareness of his declining popularity but also from his success in securing support for his candidacy as President of the European Council was a testament to his competence as a political actor.

### *Flexibility*

The degree to which the two leaders exhibited flexibility reflected their broader approach to politics and their ultimate objectives in politics. Although both were characterized by ideological pragmatism rather than unbending principle, they nevertheless differed in their leadership styles, and neither changed significantly during his period in office.

Kaczyński's preferred position as backstage string-puller reflected his controlling nature. From the beginning of transition, Kaczyński held fast to an interpretation of the overriding facts of the political circumstances in which Poland had embarked on the process of democratization: in his

understanding, a ‘post-communist system’ [*układ postkomunistyczny*] had emerged as a result of the negotiated end of the communist regime, and its hegemony explained the adverse outcomes experienced by those deprived of access to power (Bochwić, 1991, p. 87). This interpretive structure did not change over the course of the next three decades, and provided the basic prism through which Kaczyński and his followers interpreted new events.

Rather than react to the opinions of the public or of party members, Kaczyński sought to shape those opinions, not in accordance with an unbending set of ideological principles, but in accordance with his underlying diagnosis of the need for fundamental political reform. Yet while Kaczyński remained accessible to fellow party members and the public only on his own terms, he developed a degree of adaptability in response to his experience of government in 2005–2007. In particular, he realized that his party would have to adopt more right-wing stances on social issues; this was not a matter of conviction, but of ensuring that the radical right—a significant political force otherwise—could not hive off votes from PiS (Lichocka, 2008). At the same time, the party could not afford to lose votes in the moderate center if it wished to remain electable. These imperatives drove Kaczyński to develop a somewhat greater responsiveness to the attitudes of the public, tacking toward the moderate center before elections but also appealing to the right through PiS’s participation in controversial patriotic rallies and the pursuit of distinctly illiberal policies on such issues as abortion, LGBT rights and the relocation of refugees. In summary, while Kaczyński’s top-down style was not naturally open to flexibility, he became capable of revising his stances to meet expectations.

In contrast, a degree of flexibility was built into Tusk’s approach to politics. Despite his past association with liberal intellectual circles, Tusk’s sought to play down his ideological roots, claiming toward the end of his tenure as prime minister to be ‘something of a social democrat’ (Janicki & Władyka, 2013) and, in contrast to Kaczyński, expressing skepticism toward grand narratives. His politics of ‘warm water in the tap’ was reflected in the pragmatism of his approach to governing, and appeared to be vindicated by the relative ease with which Poland negotiated the global financial crisis that began in his second year in office.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that Tusk was a ‘weathervane’ politician, happy to move in the direction public opinion pushed him. While his reluctance to pursue a number of the liberal policies

with which PO had been associated while in opposition irritated many of his supporters, his government nevertheless undertook some reforms that flew in the face of public opinion, most notably the decision to raise the retirement age, which made a significant contribution to PO's defeat in 2015.

### *Cognitive Complexity*

As illustrated above, Kaczyński's hands-on control of PiS and removal or sidelining of those who might threaten his position in the party left him in a position of dominance by the start of his third term in office. Subsequently, the series of 96 monthly public rallies to commemorate the Smoleńsk disaster contributed to the development of a cult-like aura around Kaczyński's person. While coteries existed within the party, from 2010 onwards Kaczyński was in full control of the organization and possessed both the procedural and the moral authority to deal with problems of party discipline and cohesion. By the time PiS regained power in 2015, internal problems of the sort experienced by other parties rarely emerged.

Following the low point of the 2007 election, where PiS lost what amounted to 'a plebiscite on a polarizing and controversial government' (Szczerbiak, 2008, p. 435), Kaczyński gradually became more adept at reading and responding to the public mood. Prior to the 2005–2007 parliamentary term, his public image was of a remote, cloistered politician who had little interest in or understanding of the world outside politics. One of the reasons PiS was defeated so soundly in 2007 was that this unworldly image became the image of the party, and this was particularly off-putting to young voters, who turned out in significant number for PO.

Following this defeat, Kaczyński would prove more adept in recognizing and responding to the need for the party to couch its policies in a complex vision of Polish society that offered voters points of reference amid a period of disorienting change. Through the development of symbiotic links with the grassroots Catholic *Radio Maryja* movement (Stanley & Cześniak, 2019, p. 77), the co-optation of the social movement repertoire of radical right movements (Stanley, 2019, p. 179) and the promulgation of a post-Smoleńsk narrative of betrayal and heroism (the dead were represented as 'fallen' heroes rather than victims of circumstance), Kaczyński bound the threads of a specific experience of

Polishness into a coherent narrative that satisfied public demands for more than just 'warm water in the tap'. Only on occasion did he misread the public mood, most notably when in 2016 PiS lent support to an initiative to tighten abortion laws, leading to widespread protests.

By comparison, Tusk's capacity for identifying and dealing with PO's problems did not exhibit significant change over the majority of his time in office. This reflected the different political objectives of the two leaders: where Kaczyński sought to shape Polish society, Tusk aimed to govern over it, and his leadership of the party reflected this more detached style. The exception was Tusk's short final term in office in 2013–2014 when his lackluster response to the 'tapegate' scandal, whose impact would make a substantial contribution to PO's defeat the following year (Dudek, 2016, p. 663), suggested a lack of focus possibly attributable to his imminent departure.

### *Integrity*

If integrity is understood narrowly as a characteristic relating to the orientation of party leaders toward their parties rather than toward their political opponents or society in general, Kaczyński can be seen as possessing a high level of integrity throughout his time as leader. This stemmed from his utter immersion in politics: while many treated politics as a means to the end of personal enrichment, for Kaczyński politics was both means and end. From the beginning, his involvement in politics was driven by a strong conviction that transition had been hijacked by illegitimate forces, and that his role was to resist and overturn this illicit 'system'. Kaczyński's personal honesty and trustworthiness as a leader reflected both this sense of moral imperative and his lack of any clear purpose outside politics. He was driven by his party's needs not because they outweighed his own needs, but because the two were one and the same.

Tusk was not a leader driven by a strong sense of morality. However, there was no evidence to suggest that he was in politics for the purpose of exploiting his access to power for purposes of self-enrichment. This is not to say he always acted with total integrity with respect to his party. During his first term in office between 2002 and 2006, there were occasions when his ambitions for power led him to take underhand actions to eliminate political opponents, with the spurious charges of nepotism against Gilowska a prime example. During his final short term in office,

he arguably placed his own needs in maneuvering for the position of President of the European Council over the interests of his party, and his premature departure certainly created the impression that he had chosen his moment to abandon a sinking ship. Yet for the majority of his time as leader, despite his lack of moral mission there is no evidence to suggest that he acted in his own interest rather than that of his party.

## ANALYSIS OF CONSEQUENCES

Given the length of time that both leaders ruled for, it would be highly unusual if their character traits had not had at least some influence on their parties. As summarized in Table 8.3, the impact of Jarosław Kaczyński is generally greater across the three criteria of interest.

### *Electoral Performance*

The first hypothesis is that party leaders with high scores on the traits identified in the previous section contribute to improvements in their party's electoral performance. The evidence from the Polish case is mixed in this respect. During Kaczyński's first period in office, PiS's electoral performance increased significantly (Fig. 8.1), with the party gaining 27% of the vote in the 2005 election compared with only 9.5% in 2001. Despite their electoral defeat in 2007, PiS slightly increased their share of the vote to 32.1%, and only fell back slightly to 29.9% in 2011. When PiS regained power in 2015, their share of the vote increased to 37.6%. Tusk's first election as leader saw a similar outcome, with PO's share of the vote rising from 12.7% in 2001 to 24.14% in 2005. Support then increased substantially in 2007 to 41.5%, and only dropped slightly to 39.2% in 2011, before dropping significantly to 24.1% in 2015.

Given the sheer number of variables involved in explaining electoral outcomes, we should be cautious in imputing decisive causal links between the character traits of leaders and the electoral outcomes of parties. Nevertheless, as Enyedi (2005, pp. 715–716) has shown in the case of Fidesz in Hungary, a talented leader with the determination to alter a party's 'discourse, social profile and organizational strategy' may have a direct impact on his party's electoral prospects by reshaping the fundamental line of competition in ways more favorable to his party.

PiS's sudden realignment of the basic divide in Polish politics from the regime divide of post-communist versus post-Solidarity to the

**Table 8.3** The consequences of Kaczyński's and Tusk's leadership for their parties

	<i>Term in office</i>	<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Jarosław Kaczyński	First (2003–2006)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Second (2006–2010)	No effect	No effect	Higher
	Third (2010–2013)	Lower	Higher	Higher
	Fourth (2013–2016)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Fifth (2016–present)	Not applicable	Higher	Higher
Donald Tusk	First (2002–2006)	No effect	Higher	No effect
	Second (2006–2010)	Higher	No effect	Higher
	Third (2010–2013)	Lower	No effect	Lower
	Fourth (2013–2014)	Lower	No effect	No effect

transition divide of ‘solidaristic’ versus ‘liberal’ parties (Szczerbiak, 2007, p. 211) was fundamental to their victory in 2005, but was only partly attributable to political voluntarism on Kaczyński’s part. Were it not for the decline of the left, which forced PiS and PO to compete with one another, it is doubtful that such a shift in ideological emphasis would have occurred. During Kaczyński’s second term, his character traits played no clear role: while Kaczyński’s low level of flexibility impaired his response to the problems experienced by his government between 2005 and 2007, PiS returned to opposition in 2007 with a higher share of the vote. In each of the three elections after 2005, they had a higher level of support than in 2005, regardless of whether they were in opposition or in power. The slight decrease in 2011 is consistent with the decline in Kaczyński’s self-confidence in the aftermath of the Smoleńsk disaster, which—as indicated above—was certainly a factor in the presidential election of that year, and is likely also to have had an impact on preparations for the 2011 election. The significant increase in 2015 is consistent with high or increasing levels on all the traits, but the role played by Kaczyński’s leadership in bringing about this outcome is unclear, given the impact of PO’s poor campaigning and the absence of credible alternatives.

As with PiS, to a large extent PO’s significant increase in popularity in 2005 was the product of circumstance, given the precipitous decline of the SLD and the ‘ceiling’ on support for the radicals SRP and LPR. As such, there is no clear connection between Tusk’s traits and the increase

in support for PO between 2001 and 2005. However, we see a significant increase in PO's standing during Tusk's second term which, as discussed in the previous section, owed much to Tusk's effective leadership in the 2007 election campaign. The 2011 election, which saw only a slight decrease in support for PO, was the high point of Tusk's politics of 'warm water in the tap', and the election result reflected the stability brought about by his competent leadership and party management. However, the 2015 election saw a significant decline in support for PO. While this cannot entirely be attributed to Tusk's performance as a leader, not least since he left office a year before the election, it was precisely the *absence* of his skilled leadership that was felt during lackluster presidential and parliamentary campaigns.

### *Intra-party Cohesion*

The second hypothesis is that party leaders with high scores on the traits increase intra-party cohesion. By the standards of the 1990s, both PiS and PO were remarkably coherent, and their discipline helped ensure their much greater longevity. Both parties experienced the splitting off of factions, but—in comparison with the cases of the progenitor parties AWS and UW—these were not the kinds of splits that threatened the existence of the parties, and in a certain sense they even contributed to the strengthening of the cohesion of these parties by externalizing internal sources of dissent.

In the case of PiS, Kaczyński's leadership style undoubtedly increased the cohesion of a party which grew from the remnants of the fissiparous post-Solidarity AWS. In the early years, the consolidation of the party was primarily driven by Kaczyński's need for power and self-confidence: by isolating and sidelining more values-driven conservatives within the party, he made it possible for the party to focus on its primary goal of fundamental reform of the institutions of Poland's Third Republic, rather than becoming distracted by struggles over policy.

In the aftermath of PiS's defeat in 2007, the party began to experience internal ructions, with moderate conservatives becoming dissatisfied with PiS's radical turn during its time in government, and radicals with what they perceived as *insufficient* radicalism on PiS's part. Prior to the 2011 elections, former PiS deputies set up the center-right Poland Comes First (*Polska Jest Najważniejsza*; PJN) which subsequently merged with another splinter party of similar profile, Poland Together (*Polska Razem*; PR). After

the 2011 elections, another group of former PiS deputies formed the radical right United Poland (*Solidarna Polska*; SP) party. Despite the potential for such breakaway parties to damage the integrity of the party by attracting defectors from both sides, PiS remained unified, and PR and SP were forced to negotiate an agreement to contest the 2015 election on the PiS electoral list. Kaczyński's high level of competence and cognitive complexity from his third term onward ensured that the party was united around his ideas and strategy. It was increasingly rare to find any open questioning of the authority of 'the Chairman', and when PiS regained power in 2015 both splinter parties quietly subordinated themselves to his will.

PO's experience was different for two reasons. First, it did not experience a comparable level of upheaval within its ranks. In 2010 merciful deputy Janusz Palikot left PO to form Palikot's Movement (*Ruch Palikota*; RP), which became the third-largest party after the 2011 elections, but the anti-clerical and socially liberal nature of this party meant that it did not attract defectors from PO. In 2013 former Justice Minister and unsuccessful challenger for the leadership Jarosław Gowin left to form PR, which despite its more congenial ideological profile failed to spark a breakaway. Second, compared with PiS, it was a party that retained a greater degree of ideological heterogeneity and thus did not require as strict an imposition of cohesion. While Tusk's actions during his first term in office increased party unity by forcing the exit of or curbing the authority of potential leaders of significant factions, the unity of the party was never really in question after Tusk's first term, and his personal qualities had no significant effect on it.

### ***Party Membership***

The third hypothesis is that party leaders with high scores on the traits boost party membership. Since it is not obligatory for parties to report levels of membership, and reported and estimated levels of membership are in any case rather low, it is difficult to draw robust conclusions.

In 2002, the estimated number of registered members of PiS was approximately 2600 (Paszkiewicz, 2004, p. 114), rising to 34,400 in 2018 (Interia.pl, 2018). According to the earliest available figures, in 2006 PO had around 30,000 members (Kowalczyk & Sielski, 2006, p. 127), rising to an estimated 50,000 in 2011 (Onet.pl, 2013) and then back to around 33,500 in 2018 (Wp.pl, 2018).

The constant rise in membership of PO is correlated with a general rise in the levels of personality traits on the part of Jarosław Kaczyński, but it is difficult to single out particular traits as especially important. It is likely, however, that a combination of Kaczyński's persistently high level of integrity and his rising degree of competence contributed to the growth in party membership, as there was a particularly strong correlation between trust in Kaczyński and propensity to support the party (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2014).

In the case of PO, the pattern of growth and decline appears to relate more to the party's electoral fortunes than to leadership characteristics, rising during PO's first term in power and beginning to fall as approval in the government began to fall after 2011. If Donald Tusk's personal qualities as a leader contributed to membership levels of PO, it is likely to have been an indirect relationship mediated by electoral performance.

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, I find mixed support for the three hypotheses on which this volume is based. The two leaders vary over time in terms of the key traits identified here, and those traits have different impacts in both cases. In broad terms, the hypothesis that high levels on these traits contribute to increased electoral support receives some support from the evidence presented here. In the case of intra-party cohesion, the picture is more uncertain: while Kaczyński's self-confidence and drive for power as a leader helped make his party a more cohesive force in spite of the emergence of splinter movements among the disaffected, Tusk governed over the various factions of PO by virtue of consent that he was the most competent leader, and not by force of personality. Finally, the evidence is also mixed in the case of party membership. The increase in membership for PiS over the years of Kaczyński's tenure as leader reflects a growing attachment to and identification with Kaczyński as leader, while in PO's case membership levels appear to be a function of party performance.

This comparative analysis of the leadership characteristics of the two most important political figures in post-communist Poland has illustrated how the traits of leaders have made important contributions to the consolidation of party systems in new democracies, if not necessarily always decisive ones. In the first decade of Poland's transition, an overabundance of leaders—and an undersupply of willing followers—was one of the factors contributing to the instability of the party system, where seemingly

every argument could birth a new faction. Both Kaczyński and Tusk were products of that environment, and learned from its failings. Yet they did not necessarily learn the same lessons or experience the same outcomes.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# Party Leaders in Romania: Designated Successors or Tactical Players?

*Clara Volintiru and Sergiu Gherghina*

## INTRODUCTION

For almost three decades of post-Communism, the Romanian party system included a handful of actors who shaped the country's politics and policies. Of particular importance are the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) due to their presence in all of Romania's coalition governments.<sup>1</sup> This importance is demonstrated by the fact that the PSD has won the popular vote in almost all the national legislative elections (the exception was 1996). The two parties share a common origin in the umbrella National Salvation Front

<sup>1</sup>There were a few situations in which the composition of the government changed between elections the parties left or were excluded from government, e.g. PDL in 2007, PSD in 2009. The two technocratic government (Isărescu 1999 and Cioloș 2016) were not considered when calculating the presence of the PDL and PSD.

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(FSN), the successor of the Communist Party (Pop-Eleches, 1999). The FSN split in 1992, forming two major parties; one backing the country's president, Ion Iliescu and the other providing support to the country's prime minister Petre Roman, who had been ousted from government by Iliescu. The splinter group supporting the Iliescu was initially called (the?) National Salvation Front (FDSN), later becoming the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR) and, since 2001, has been known as (the?) PSD (Gherghina, 2014) while the pro-Roman splinter became the Democratic Party (PD), later becoming the PDL.

Although both parties were successor parties of communists, they went in different directions. The PSD maintained its left-wing ideology and appealed to a large share of the electorate with its strong welfare policies, conservative politics and slow reform strategies (Stan & Vancea, 2015). For almost its first decade, the PDL had the same left-wing approach as the PSD but, with change of leadership, gradually moved to the center. Roman stepped down as party leader at the beginning of the 2000s and the party abandoned its traditional position in the party competition space. In 2004 it forged an electoral alliance with the Liberals to form a government and, in 2005, the party left the European Party socialist group, PES, to join the European People's Party. This rebranding helped the PDL (back then PD) to promote itself as an ideological alternative for the PSD and to win the largest number of seats in the 2008 elections.

In line with the broader concept of presidentialization of political parties (Mughan, 2000; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Webb, Poguntke, & Kolodny, 2012), party leadership is central for both of these parties. Their formation is rooted in a conflict emerged between the two individuals at the top of both the FSN and of the country. Iliescu and Roman had different approaches toward the first years of transition and their positions soon became irreconcilable in public office (Gallagher, 2005; Stan & Vancea, 2015). These tensions moved within the party, which was split between two factions, each of them becoming separate parties in the spring of 1992. Although Iliescu was president for some of this period, he was not leader of his party as this was forbidden under Romanian law. However, for almost a decade both he and Roman were synonymous with their parties. Roman was replaced as party leader by Traian Băsescu who would later appoint Emil Boc as his successor when he became president. The image of the PDL (and previously PD) has been associated with the two party leaders for over a decade, indeed until

the party ceased existence due to its merger with the National Liberal Party. The PSD has a similar story, with a range of prominent presidents after Iliescu stepped down from office in 2000. Four presidents, each of them in office for roughly five years, have personalized the party leadership position also with the help of strong territorial branches. These branches had prominent local leaders who were loyal to the party leader and provided legitimacy and support throughout the term in office, as shall be illustrated in our analysis below.

This chapter focuses on two leaders, one for each party, who have held that position for a considerable period of time and both acted as game-changers for their respective parties. Both parties had quite a few leaders (see Table 9.1) and the challenge was to select the relevant ones for this analysis. We aimed to include those leaders who could offer a true examination of the relationship between their personality

**Table 9.1** The list of the party leaders for the PDL and the PSD

<i>Parties and their leaders</i>	<i>Start of the term in office</i>	<i>End of the term in office</i>
<i>PDL</i>		
Constantin Vişinescu	7 April 1992	29 May 1993
Petre Roman	29 May 1993	29–30 August 1997
	29–20 August 1997	18–19 February 2000
Traian Băsescu	19 May 2001	18 December 2004
Emil Boc	25 June 2005	14–15 May 2011
	14–15 May 2011	14 June 2012
Vasile Blaga	30 June 2012	23 March 2013
	23 March 2013	26 July 2014
<i>PSD</i>		
Ion Iliescu	6 February 1990	27–28 June 1992
	17 January 1997	20–21 June 1997
	20–21 June 1997	9 October 1999
	9 October 1999	19 January 2001
Ovidiu Gherman	27–28 June 1992	9–10 July 1993
	9–10 July 1993	24–25 November 1995
	24–25 November 1995	17 January 1997
Adrian Năstase	19 January 2001	16 June 2001
	16 June 2001	21 April 2005
Mircea Geoană	21 April 2005	10 December 2006
	10 December 2006	20–21 February 2010
Victor Ponta	20–21 February 2010	19–20 April 2013
	19–20 April 2013	16 July 2015
Liviu Dragnea	12 October 2015	Currently in office

and behavior and also the general evolution of the party. Our analysis, consistent with the general goal of this book, seeks to test the leadership's impact on party organization in terms of electoral performance, intra-party cohesion and membership. Therefore, it was important to account for party leaders who had multiple terms in office to be able to best distinguish their impact on the party organization. While both parties had prominent leaders who served several terms as presidents of Romania—Iliescu (PSD) and Băsescu (PDL), these would not have been good case studies for this book, as they were not party leaders during their times in office. Consequently, we chose two prominent leaders from each of the two parties, who both served as prime ministers, and had multiple terms as party leaders: Emil Boc (PDL) and Victor Ponta (PSD).

The following section outlines the political career of the two party leaders and indicates their position in the chain of leadership within both parties. The third section highlights the six traits analyzed in this book and explores their manifestation throughout the terms in office. Next, we focus on the consequences that these traits produced among voters and for the party organization. The conclusions summarize the key findings and discuss in detail the implications of our analysis.

## A TALE OF TWO LEADERS

A series of contextual factors can provide a better understanding of how the party leadership worked for Boc (PDL) and Ponta (PSD). First, by looking at what is essentially an incubation period necessary to enforce a leader's legitimacy among party elites. In our case studies, we even see the effect the endorsement from senior party leaders has on the successful bid for presidency of an upcoming leader. As such, we should account for a “designated successor” effect in the major Romanian parties. Second, it seems that the overlap of the governmental executive function of prime minister and that of party leader has a dual effect. Being in power enhances the party leaders' standing within his organization, both at the elite level and with party members in general. This is based on the actual or perceived ability of the party leader to distribute favors to loyal party members (e.g. additional funding, fast-track decisions). In contrast, as soon as the executive governmental position is threatened through electoral decline, or individual contestation, the loss of the party leadership position is imminent too.

Third, the degree to which power is based on the relationship with local elites is important. In Romanian politics, a relatively feudal balance of power is still relevant today, as the leadership of large parties is still determined by the cooperation with local bosses. Given its relatively large area and its organization into 41 counties, the electoral role of local organizations at county level is very important. Local party leaders have long been referred to as “local barons” in the Romanian political jargon, thus underlining their semi-autonomous status. While they remain reliant on the party in the central office for resources, their role in general and internal party elections makes them closer to partners rather than subordinates to the party leadership. Local party bosses are frequent patrons of large clientelistic networks that reach both upstream (i.e. appointments in central office), and downstream (i.e. appointments and favors distributed at local level). This feudal trait of the major Romanian political parties (i.e. those with national wide territorial presence) is important in understanding both how leaders got a hold on power, and to what extent they were able to influence the party.

Boc and Ponta share a few common features; they have gradually climbed the career ladder inside the parties they would lead, were greatly assisted by the protection of former party leaders, have simultaneously occupied the positions of party leader and prime minister, and have had an impact on the party organization under their control. However, there are also differences, in their behavior and traits as well as in their ability to harness support from local leaders within their party.

### *Emil Boc: The Earnest Survivor*

Boc was never a likely figure of authority within a large party, with a background in the academia, soft-spoken and a limited political network. He broke into politics as a member of Parliament in 2000 on the lists of the PD. He subsequently distinguished himself at local elections in 2004, when he became the mayor of Cluj, defeating the much better known and well-established candidate from the PSD. At this stage, it was specifically the limited personal political capital of Boc that made him trustworthy to Băsescu. The latter had just won a tough presidential election at the end of 2004 and had to step down as party president, while not at all inclined to leave de facto control over the political organization. He knew he needed a loyal person as a pivot in the upcoming power struggles in a hung Parliament with a large coalition government.

As such, he appointed Boc as his successor for interim party president at the end of 2004 (see Table 9.1). Later, in 2005, Boc was officially elected party president, the sole candidate for the position. He subsequently developed his standing within the party, as the latter was changing itself. In December 2007, the PD became the PDL after the merger with the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD), a splinter from the Liberals. Most of the party elites from the PLD became supporters of Boc and proved to be an important critical mass for his new candidacy for party leadership.

For Boc, the main challenge was to maintain his hold over the party. At the time of his re-election as party leader in 2011, the internal party competition was arguably stronger than at his previous election. His main challenger at the 2011 PDL Congress was Vasile Blaga. Boc had indisputable advantages that were to bring him a clear victory in this internal race by having the support of the incumbent president and de facto party leader Băsescu, and being the incumbent prime minister, thus having control over appointments and resources. However, Blaga was a strong opponent because he was well-entrenched into the party organization and enjoyed the large support of local organizations. He had greater connection to the party on the ground than that of the incumbent prime minister Boc. The latter won this internal race by gathering the support of other party elites that were loyal to him and country president Băsescu. These included mostly national party elites like the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (the lower Chamber of the Romanian Parliament), the Minister of Tourism and several local leaders.

Outside the PDL, Boc has served in a succession of leading public office position. From 2004 to 2008 he served as a mayor of Cluj—one of the larger cities in the country. He returned to this position in 2012, where he remains largely unchallenged until present day. This steady career in the public administration of Cluj allowed Boc to have a strong local base (one that he could and did fall back to after his spotlight in national politics faded) and to develop the reputation of an earnest, reliable politician focused on civil service more than party politics. His political career at national level followed the party's electoral success: Boc became prime minister in 2008, after he secured a strong result in the legislative elections (see Fig. 9.1). He stayed in office until 2012, when he resigned following street protests against the austerity measures implemented as a result of the financial crisis. He resigned as party leader

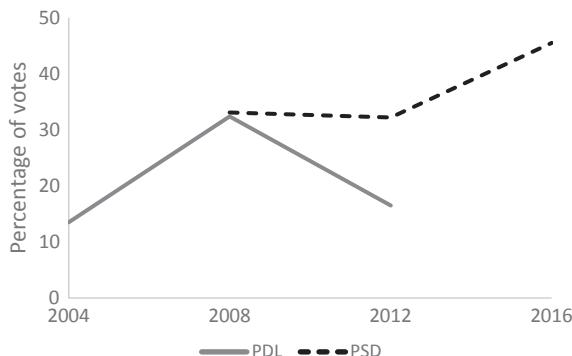


Fig. 9.1 Electoral support for PDL and PSD (2004–2016)

following the loss at the local elections in 2012 but remained loyal to the party after its fusion with the Liberals, in spite of the fact that his former protector Băsescu split from the PDL to form a new party.

#### *Victor Ponta: The Promise of Youth*

One of the key elements in Ponta's rise to become party leader of the largest party in Romania at only 38 years of age was an internal party strategy to promote future party leaders from the ranks of young members. Starting with the leadership of Adrian Năstase, and continuing under Mircea Geoană, the promising young party members of the PSD enjoyed something of a fast-track to power. The leaders of the PSD youth organization would be actively supported to access public office and central office early on. It was generally meant as a strategy to create a new face to what many still regarded as the communist successor party in Romania. The assumption of the young party elite was that their quick access to public and central office should be mirrored in the power they enjoyed within the party organization. This was not the case, as older, more entrenched elite networks continued to dominate the party on the ground. After the 2004 electoral defeat of the PSD, party leadership took the opportunity to support new leaders in local organizations in what was generally considered as “one step backwards” punishment for leaders of party organizations who failed to bring electoral success. However, this strategy backfired, as instead of disciplined local leaders,

the PSD was managed by a mosaic of new and old members, mainstream and dissidents, young and old.

The trajectory of Ponta was initially linked to the protection he enjoyed from former party leader Năstase. Between 2001 and 2004, Ponta was a promising young prosecutor with the Romanian Supreme Court of Justice. Prime Minister Năstase, as a well-established Law professor himself, coordinated Ponta's PhD thesis and appointed him to a number of central office positions (i.e. state secretary, minister of Internationally Funded Projects, delegated minister for the Relationship with the Parliament). Consequently, Ponta enjoyed large access to power, both outside, and within the party. His mentor's confidence was firmly established in the circles of power, by referring to Ponta as the "little Titulescu"<sup>2</sup>

Between 2003 and 2006, Ponta was the leader of the PSD youth branch. At the same time, at only 31 years of age, Ponta was occupying a vice-president position within the PSD. While it may have been flattering enough to be one of the 17 vice-presidents of PSD at the time, what was more important for the future political career of Ponta was his access to the Central Executive Bureau meetings and those of the National Council. He became integrated into the elite group of what was a relatively highly centralized and hierarchical party organization at that time. Internal battles marked the following years with some of the party's key players turning against each other such as former president Ion Iliescu was now fighting with former Prime Minister Năstase. In this context, a new direction seemed to be adopted when former external affairs minister Geoană won a narrow victory at the 2005 PSD Congress (see Table 9.1), but his grasp over the party structures remained very limited.

While Năstase's hold over the PSD slowly decreased after the electoral defeat of 2004, Ponta remained highly valued by the new party leader Geoană for whom he served as press spokesperson at the 2009 presidential election. Following the defeat in the presidential elections, Geoană lost also the internal race for party leader. Ponta's victory was due to procedural change to a single vote for the leadership team (i.e. party leader, vice-presidents and general secretary) in which Geoană could have been

<sup>2</sup>Nicolae Titulescu was a famous political figure in between the wars, when he served as Minister of External Affairs. Năstase himself a former Minister of External Affairs was a great fan of Titulescu, and considered both the skills and the appearance of Victor Ponta to bear a striking resemblance to the historical figure.

punished for his failures and to the large support enjoyed among prominent local leaders. Even so, the race was very tight with Ponta winning by only 75 votes at a Congress attended by approximately 1700 delegates (HotNews, 2010a).

From outside the party organization, Ponta's victory in 2010 seemed a triumph of a new generation over the old. The strategic vision of Ponta was to form an alliance with the young reformists from the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Conservative Party (PC), thus leading to the creation of the Social-Liberal Union (USL). Overall, it was the internal power brokerage that brought him the victory, not his strategic appeal, or the generational change in itself. Ponta's ability to hold control of the party after gaining the leadership position was clear in 2013 when he was re-elected as party leader with 3851 votes out of 3932 in total (Mediafax, 2013). At the time of his re-election, Ponta took the opportunity to fill the majority of vice-president positions with loyal local and national leaders, thus ensuring little opposition in the leadership forum in preparation of the presidential elections for which he stood as the PSD candidate. Ponta resigned as party leader in July 2015, after becoming the subject of a corruption investigation. While he was subsequently cleared of the charges, he remained marginalized in the PSD. He left the PSD to form a new party (Pro Romania) in 2017.

### THE CHARACTER TRAITS OF BOC AND PONTA

The general profile of the two leaders are quite different. On the one hand, Boc did not strive for a high profile in his party neither before nor during his leadership. For a long period of time, especially during his first term in office as party leader, he was often in the shadow of Băsescu, considered by many as the *de facto* leader (Gherghina & Miscoiu, 2010). The bond between the two politicians was strengthened during their cooperation as president and prime minister in 2008–2012. There were many situations in which Boc's public discourses mainly echoed Băsescu's ideas. For example, in 2010 when Boc attacked one of the main opposition parties, he referred to the support provided by the Liberals to former collaborators with the Communist State Police (i.e. Securitate) (HotNews, 2010b). The themes of Securitate collaborators and previous regime lie at the core of Băsescu's discourse for a great deal of his term in office as country president (Pop-Eleches, 2014). On the other hand, Ponta has constantly tried to be the dominant face in the

party, has made attempts to rise to the level of his predecessors, and has shown eagerness to gain visibility. As a vice-president of the party, prior to becoming leader, he put on display a vivid discourse and engaging personality, going public against the political opponents whenever he had the chance. In parallel with his ascension to the office of party leader, Ponta has also boosted his career outside the party by paving his way to the position of prime minister, which he occupied between 2012 and 2015.

In spite of these differences, they both proved to be highly resilient and effectively fought internal party opposition to either obtain or maintain their party's leadership. Turning now to how the personality traits have been reflected in practice for each of them, as explained in the previous section, Boc built a reputation—both within and outside the party—as an earnest, steady character, whose leadership was very much a reflection of a team effort, and not a driving force by itself. As the PDL was closely tied to Băsescu, the party leadership position was from the beginning perceived to be a “caretaker” mandate. Boc was promoted as a party leader due to his loyalty, agreement and compliance with Băsescu's political views. As such he initially derived his power and influence from that of Băsescu, especially in terms of political network and supporters. This dependence in terms of image and status made Boc be quite hesitant in his first term in office (see Table 9.1). His self-confidence was medium because he soon developed a strong sense of how to proceed internally and although for most decisions Boc consulted Băsescu, he could defend them against opponents.

Boc gradually proved himself to be much more decisive than others would have expected. Toward the end of his term as prime minister and party leader, he was challenging the wishes of the country president and did not submit his resignation when requested. His level of self-confidence increased during his second, albeit shorter term as party leader. The confidence of the latter period is informed by both his victory over a mobilized internal opposition at the party Congress in 2011 as well as his position as prime minister. Boc built strong relationships with the territorial branches of the party and learned how to resist internal attacks even when prominent members were involved (Parvu, 2010). His growing self-confidence was visible also during the 2012 electoral campaign when he fulfilled a double task: he defended his activity as prime minister and the performance of his party in government and attacked the newly formed political alliance between the PSD and the Liberals (Table 9.2).

**Table 9.2** The character traits of Emil Boc and Victor Ponta

		<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Emil Boc	First (2005–2011)	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
	Second (2011–2012)	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
Victor Ponta	First (2010–2013)	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	Medium
	Second (2013–2015)	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low

His achievements in public office made Boc a suitable candidate for the leadership of a party that was increasing in popularity with the electorate. He occupied a series of positions in the party, the most important being the leader of the party's regional branch in Cluj, the speaker of the PD parliamentary and executive president of the party prior to becoming president. In spite of this important experience and career within the party, his level of competence was low. One indicator of this was that none of the major decisions in the party were the result of his initiative or strategy. For example, in 2007 the Truth and Justice Alliance (DA) formed by the PD and Liberals disintegrated following major misunderstandings between Băsescu and the prime minister at the time, leader of the Liberals. Another example is that the merger with a splinter from the Liberals in 2007 was also orchestrated by Băsescu. Boc appeared to be mainly a follower in his role of party leader. His presence in the shadow of Băsescu was also obvious at the party congress for his re-election, where the country president was the one who influenced all the major decisions in the party (Duțulescu, 2011).

Boc's first term as party leader marked a steep learning curve in terms of understanding the political game, but his competence for the position was relatively low given the wide contestation within his party. Boc proved to be better able to handle the job during his second term in office, but failures on the executive side, and the impeachment of his Cabinet proved his skills as party leader to be insufficient for survival. Much of his second term in office had been closely linked to internal party dynamics. The majority of his cabinet represented high profile party leaders that were already building up their political support to take over the PDL. In the 2012 party congress, Vasile Blaga—Minister of Internal Affairs and Public Administration during the Boc (2) Cabinet, and Elena Udrea—Minister of Regional Development and Tourism, have faced each other in a long-standing confrontation. The fact that Blaga prevailed in this confrontation is a testimony of the relative weakness of Boc within his own party, as he was part of Udrea's political circle.

This internal party fractionalization affected to a certain extent the actual authority Boc was able to exert. It affected his authority within the party—where many considered his days as party leader to be numbered, and outside the party—over a cabinet that was much more preoccupied with the upcoming party election than their current executive mandates. The numerous scandals of corruption (e.g. Blaga, Udrea) that broke during the following years, clearly showed how the most prominent

party and cabinet members were much more inclined to fend after their own affairs, than to exert the governing functions in a considerate and constructive manner. Whether Boc was unaware of these problems, or unable to act upon them is hard to assess. It is however a clear indicator of his limited understanding of the political game and the problems that were affecting his party.

All of these elements suggest that Boc's need for power was average and his flexibility low during both terms as party leader. A higher need to control would have conflicted with Băsescu's desire to get involved in the party business. A lower degree of control would have meant to give into the demands arrived from all parts of the party, especially from those members with strong territorial backup. His low level of flexibility was reflected by the poor adaptation to the changing realities and low sensitiveness to the voices of members. In this sense, the failure to prevent the poor electoral result in 2012 and the emergence of internal factions in PDL are illustrative. The 2008 elections were won due to the popularity of Băsescu at the time and the discontent toward the Liberal government. In 2012, none of these were present and after four years in government Boc did not deliver policies and messages that could persuade the public. Internally, Boc's behavior led to discontent among some of the members who formed a strong faction (around Blaga) opposing him and Băsescu's involvement.

Boc was and remains a stable, trustworthy political actor, whose integrity was not visibly challenged. While his political career at the national level was mostly developed in the shadow of the Băsescu, Boc acted with great concern for the party. He was however not always aware of the real problems of the party on the ground—factions, disenchantments etc., which was one of the main causes of the contestation in his second term in office.

### *Ponta: Self-Confidence and Need for Power*

Ponta's influence within the PSD was very much a story of the transition of the young *protégée* to that of an established national leader. Based on his professional training as a prosecutor and early access to office both within the party and within the government, Ponta displayed a high level of self-confidence even before becoming the party leader in 2010. He had the courage to stand up to more established party leaders and support his bid for the top position within the party, which clearly reflect

this level of self-confidence. Furthermore, during both of his terms in office as party leader, Ponta relied extensively on his close collaborators from the younger generation and had no hesitation to appoint them in senior party and governmental positions. While this decisiveness in shifting power over to the new political generation ensured him a loyal political and governmental team, it also created resentment from the party on the ground and local leaders. The more the government functions yielded positive results, the more Ponta's power within the PSD grew. In contrast to Boc, Ponta was leading a homogenous party and his government team had no aspirations to take over the party leadership. The major exception was to be Liviu Dragnea, who took over the PSD after Ponta's demise, but even he was not a direct competitor when Ponta was in office.

The high levels of self-confidence and need for power in his first term in office were reflected in the creation of a political alliance with the Liberals.<sup>3</sup> Ponta had a political project that originated in the support provided by the Liberals to the PSD candidate in the second round of the 2009 presidential election. In the attempt to defeat Băsescu and his supporting PDL, the two opposition parties joined forces and failed to produce a change. However, Ponta and the Liberal party leader took the idea one step further and created a political alliance in 2011, which obtained roughly two-thirds of the parliamentary seats in the 2012 national election (King & Marian, 2014). Ponta constantly pushed for this political project and silenced the voices in the PSD that opposed the alliance. His need to control what was happening with the party was reflected in his thorough engagement in every discussion related to this alliance and the ways in which he dealt with candidate selection in the local and national election when he was in office. When the alliance forged a plan to remove the PDL government, Ponta obtained the prime minister position for himself (and for the PSD), aiming to control the executive and become a counter-balance to Băsescu.

Internal and external political engagements made Ponta's two terms as party leader seem rather different in terms of his approach to the party organization. In the first term, he presented himself as an alternative,

<sup>3</sup>The Social Liberal Union (USL), formed in 2011, included four parties out of which this chapter emphasizes the most important two: the PSD and the Liberals. Two other minor parties—the Conservatives and the UNPR—were part of the USL, but their role was marginal and with little relevance for our discussion.

and political innovator—who was meant to bridge generational and factional divides in the pursuit of electoral success. All these were reflected in his speech at the 2010 PSD Congress when elected as a party leader. As such, he was accessible, quick to react and adaptable. He developed strong ties with various party organizations and consolidated the PSD's bid for power during the local and national elections of 2012.

The major downside of the executive function that Ponta wielded as prime minister was that he delegated too much of the attributes of party organization to close allies. This proved to be a mistake on two accounts. Firstly, the majority of these politicians proved to be inexperienced and had very limited engagement with the party on the ground. This was not surprising, as the majority of Ponta's camarilla came from the ranks of the MPs, spending the large majority of their political careers in the capital city, and as such, had limited roots in local party organizations (such as Nicolae Bănicioiu). Essentially, these substitutes of a party leader were much poorer versions than the party leader himself. Ponta despite being relatively young for the position he was holding, had a vast previous experience within the party. In contrast, local party leaders became frustrated with the poor representation they had in the central office (i.e. no appointments from local organizations). All this did not represent as much lack of understanding on the part of Victor Ponta, but rather a conscious decision to push through a new generation of political leaders. This generation was constituted mostly by technocrats and leading professionals in their fields (such as Finance Minister Ioana Petrescu, Energy Minister Răzvan Nicolescu, Youth and Sports Minister Gabriela Szabo), who did not appeal to a relatively entrenched and traditional party structure.

Secondly, Dragnea took advantage of the relative absence of Victor Ponta in PSD's internal conundrums and further consolidated his control over the local party leaders. What always made PSD such a stable party is its ability to mobilize the electorate at local level, and to maintain personal connections between local party leaders and the people—often via clientelistic distribution of goods and services (Gherghina & Volintiru, 2017; Volintiru, 2016). As such, the central reform promoted by Ponta in government had little positive impact on the territory. Thus, while local leaders were enjoying the benefits of Ponta's governance, they were not necessarily co-interested in his party leadership. Especially during his second term as party leader, his awareness of the real problems with and within the party was relatively low. Preoccupied with a

**Table 9.3** The consequences of Boc's and Ponta's leadership for their parties

		<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Emil Boc	First (2005–2011)	Higher	No effect	Lower
	Second (2011–2012)	Lower	Lower	Lower
Victor Ponta	First (2010–2013)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Second (2013–2015)	No effect	No effect	Higher

presidential election on which he risked his entire political capital, and generally overly eager to delegate responsibilities, he lost touch with local leaders. His need for power and flexibility decreased, and left himself vulnerable to contestation.

Ponta's political rise has been steady and fast up until 2012. This was both a merit and a problematic temptation: after assuming the office of prime minister, he began very fast to focus on the next phase. While it is natural for a party leader to be the presidential candidate of his party, it is however a heavy load to manage simultaneously the internal party affairs, the government, the Parliamentary majority, and a potentially successful run for presidency. Nevertheless, Ponta did not back down from the presidential challenge. This suggests that his need for power might have been moderate within the party organization because he was invested in a higher pursuit.

Wielding power in public office as prime ministers proved to be both an advantage and a disadvantage in their respective positions of party leader. The main advantage for both Boc and Ponta was that, in controlling the government, they were able to project power and support local leaders from their organizations. The other side of the coin however, was that they gradually lost touch with the grounds of the party, becoming entrenched in “state affairs” and leaving themselves exposed to internal contestation. Ironically, they were both actors in a very similar scenario of rise and fall to national political power, as both Boc and Ponta had to resign before the end of their executive term in office. While Ponta was the political catalyst of the impeachment of the Boc cabinet in 2012, following street protests against the Boc austerity measures, the wheel turned as he himself later became the target of street protests in 2015 following the mismanaging of a nightclub fire that resulted in tens of deaths. He subsequently resigned from both Government

and party leadership. As such, in terms of integrity, both leaders seem to have been able to sacrifice their positions for the sake of their parties. However, while Boc had constantly remained loyal to his party, Ponta seemed to have had a much more pronounced personal agenda. Starting with the option to form large coalitions during his terms as party president, and ending with his subsequent departure, Ponta did his best to keep his political options open.

### THE CONSEQUENCES FOR PDL AND PSD

As political leaders' traits and actions impact upon their party organization to a great extent, it is important to analyze their consequences. Throughout this volume, we explore the relationship between leaders' traits and the party's electoral performance, the cohesion within the party organization, and the membership levels. One of the main hypotheses we test is that the higher the scores for party leaders' traits, the higher their party's electoral performance. In both cases, we can see an increase in the electoral performance of their parties during their first term in office, and a decline during their second (Table 9.3).

Ponta's leadership of the PSD coincided with an overall positive electoral performance. During his first term in office as party president, the PSD won the local and national elections in 2012, leading Ponta to the position of prime minister. His self-confidence, competence, and need for power led him to develop ambitious and innovative approaches in the political competition. His tactics were consequential in ensuring the positive results of the PSD in 2012 (see Fig. 9.1).

Before the 2012 elections, Ponta acted on two fronts: destabilizing the main opponent by impeaching the new PDL government of Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu before local elections, and creating the USL alliance. After Boc resigned as prime minister following street protests in February 2012, the new government led by Ungureanu was intended to project confidence within the PDL, and appeal to the disillusioned electorate. Ponta's strategy to remove this new government from office before the local elections in early summer 2012, allowed him the double win of image projection and organizational control. As an incumbent prime minister for less than one month (i.e. since May 2012) he had all the advantages of the image of a plausible high office-holder, without having any stains of an actual executive term in office. From the organizational perspective, the gains were substantial, as his

government would now organize the elections, and had the institutional leverage of oversight over local governments, thus enhancing territorial mobilization; the detailed theoretical argument can be found in Volintiru (2016).

Ponta's political strategy and personal traits did not only ensure a positive electoral performance for the PSD, but also an increase in membership. During his first term in office we can trace an increase in the number of registered members of the PSD: from 290,111 in 2008—representing 1.57% of the Romanian electorate, to 409,833 in 2012—representing 2.22% of the Romanian electorate.<sup>4</sup> During his second term, there is also an increase in party membership, reaching 509,551 registered supporters in 2014.<sup>5</sup> In terms of intra-party cohesion, Ponta's leadership had relatively different resonance between his two terms. “Giving back the PSD to the social democrats, not to the president's camarilla” was one of his cornerstone messages at the 2010 Congress, when he emphatically won his position. He was thus sending a powerful signal to the party on the ground.

However, toward the end of his first term and during his second term as party president, Ponta did little to enhance intra-party cohesion. He was quick to exploit existent frictions and factions, while covertly or overtly supporting alternative new party formations on the ideological left. He found it useful to use external leverages to control better the PSD and to counter internal contestation. During his first term as party leader, he relied on his personal relationship with coalition partners. Later on, he began to use the threat of alternative parties on the left, such as the Union for the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR), or the United Romania Party (PRU)—both fueled with disenchanted members from the PSD.

It is difficult to ascribe an electoral effect to Boc, in his position of party president, outside the direct influence and agency of Traian Băsescu. Traian Băsescu changed the rules of the political game in

<sup>4</sup>Victor Ponta won the leadership in 2010, but we only have data available for 2008, as such the total increase should be also attributed to the previous leadership of Mircea Geoană, but it is reasonable to assume that the upward trend was maintained during Ponta's first term.

<sup>5</sup>The membership rolls for both parties come from the Official Party Registry, the Permanent Electoral Authority in Romania and Gherghina (2014).

Romania with regards to the relationship a president can have with its political party. While a certain degree of affinity was always expected, former presidents Iliescu (PSD) or Emil Constantinescu (CDR<sup>6</sup>) maintained the constitutional neutrality. For appearance's sake, they left the party leadership in the hands of their successors. Băsescu praised himself to be a “player president” and remained the prime electoral asset of what continued to be “his” party. This is one explanation for the fact that the electoral performance of the PDL recorded a fall during Boc’s second term as party president (see Fig. 9.1),<sup>7</sup> while his traits proved to be the same or improved (i.e. self-confidence) (see Table 9.2).

In terms of party cohesion, we distinguish between the various levels at which party members engage politics: public office (e.g. Members of Parliament, mayors), central office (e.g. cabinet members) and the party on the ground; for an extended theoretical argument about this approach, see Close and Gherghina (2019). In such a tri-dimensional framework, we can see a differentiated effect of the traits of Emil Boc. He managed to achieve a high cohesion among elites in public office and most of the elites in central office, as it was with them that he was interacting on a current basis. However, he did not establish a good connection with the party on the ground, or the majority of local leaders. It was this latter category that was mobilized by Blaga to counter his bid for a second term as party leader at the 2012 PDL Congress. While Boc managed to maintain the party leadership for a second term, the lack of intra-party cohesion, especially with the lower levels of the organization was clearly visible.

Boc’s party leadership did not help boost party membership either. On the contrary, between 2008 and 2012, the number of party members of the PDL decreased from 153,333 to only 86,817 (Gherghina, 2014). His traits remained constant over both his terms as party leader, and it was probably a lack of flexibility, or his poor ability to react to the opinions of the public or of party members that contributed to the lack of appeal of PDL to potential members.

<sup>6</sup>Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) was an electoral alliance of several center-right political parties in Romania, active between 1991 and 2000.

<sup>7</sup>For 2004 (DA) and 2012 (USL) we calculated the percentage of votes having as a point of reference the number of parliamentary seats for each party, based on the distribution algorithms established within each alliance.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to analyze the personality traits of two party leaders belonging to parties with a common origin. The two leaders overlapped in office for two years and were in charge of their parties when the two opposed strongly on the political scene. Our analysis shows that Boc and Ponta did not enjoy the same political clout when they gained their party's leadership. While both were very much ascending on the basis of a *protégée* status, Boc was much more dependent in the beginning upon the endorsement of the former party president Băsescu. However, they both consolidated their status as leaders through an expansionist strategy. Under Boc's first term the party had an important merger, while under Ponta's first term as party leader the PSD formed a strong political alliance. It was through these political maneuvers that the two leaders gained electoral victories, which in turn consolidated their legitimacy within the party. The outward strategies of the two leaders also proved effective in consolidated their power within their parties through the leverage of outside political allies.

It was also contextual pressures that ended both leaders' term in office. Despite high-self confidence in their second terms, they were ousted by popular protests. Their party leadership was, in their first terms, consolidated by the accumulation of party leadership and executive function as prime minister. Reversely, when their executive mandate was challenged, they lost the party leadership too. The relationship with local party leaders was a major factor in the evolution of major party leaders in Romania. The essential *quid pro quo* relationship with local party leaders means that these are sooner determinants of a candidate success in obtaining party leadership, rather than members of a leaders' team.

Our analysis also sought to identify the effects produced by their leadership style on electoral results and party organization. In terms of electoral performance, the first term in office was better for both leaders. Their parties had more popular support in the national legislative elections organized at the time. However, in their second term in office things either stagnated (Ponta) or worsened (Boc) for reasons related mainly to less involvement of the two leaders in the internal life of their parties. The concern for the public office of prime minister or candidacy for country presidency is one possible explanation for this outcome. Boc had a negative effect on the PDL's intra-party cohesion in the second term in office because he allowed factionalism to develop and cut

connections with territorial branches, which supported him in the first term in office. Ponta had a positive effect on intra-party cohesion in his first term in office and rallied most members around his cause to win the elections. Finally, the effects on party membership diverge extensively with the PDL constantly losing members under Boc and the PSD gaining members with Ponta.

All these indicate that the two leaders left an important mark in their parties and in Romanian politics. Their current political careers match to some degree the divergent paths they had as party leaders and their priorities in office: Boc returned to local politics and Ponta formed his own party at the beginning of 2018 with which it ran for the first time in the 2019 European elections. As an irony, Boc ended up among the Liberals, with which the PDL merged at the end of 2014, although he fought against them for most of his terms in office as a party leader. Ponta ran his first election campaign in 2019 with messages oriented against the PSD, the party that promoted him in politics.

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## CHAPTER 10

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# Rising Expectations and Centralizing Power: Party Leaders in Serbia

*Dušan Spasojević*

## INTRODUCTION

Serbia is a young, weakly consolidated electoral democracy in crisis, and some scholars even classify Serbia as a competitive authoritarian regime (Bieber, 2018). It is similar to the other post-communist transitional countries in terms of weak intuitions (Dolenc, 2013), strong leader-driven parties (Spasojević & Stojiljković, 2019) and marginalized civil society (Pavlović, 2006; Spasojević, 2017). However, Serbia has some unique characteristics that are consequences of the Yugoslavian period: a contested territorial issue (Kosovo); a consequential lack of political consensus on EU and NATO membership; and deeply rooted conflicts with some neighboring post-Yugoslav states (Spasojević, 2016). Serbia belongs to the group of countries that have experienced two-stage transitions (e.g. Romania or Bulgaria), with the first phase being under control of the (partially) transformed communist elite, and the second stage reflecting completed regime change (Kasapović, 1996).

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The first step toward the democratization of Serbia was taken in 2000, when Democratic opposition of Serbia (DOS) defeated Slobodan Milošević and his regime. However, the legacy of wars, articulated though demands from ICTY, decisions on Montenegro and Kosovo's independence from Serbia, and regional animosities, created a polarized political scene in Serbia and led to intensive, passionate and sometimes violent political competition (Slavujević, 2017). The second crucial step toward democratization was taken in 2008 when pro-European parties won a majority and caused a series of crises among right-wing, nationalistic and anti-EU parties (Spasojević, 2011).

However, the Yugoslav legacy is not limited to the main issues and actors. It also includes social and political values and dominant forms of political culture and practice. In the context of this book, this legacy is most related to authoritarian values and the role of leaders in politics (Kuzmanović, 2010). Josip Broz Tito, a leader of communist Yugoslavia, was elected as lifelong president of the state and perceived as the 'father of the nation'. Many scholars understood Milošević's success through his ability to step into Tito's shoes and become 'the leader instead of leader' (Đukić, 2010). Milošević's opponents often competed with him on a personal basis, instead of introducing alternative narratives and methods of conducting politics, until the final stage of his regime when DOS used support from grassroots civil society organizations, gave up on the idea of finding a strong 'counter leader', and executed the Serbian version of a color revolution (Minic & Dereta, 2007; Spasojević, 2010).

Serbian politics, to a significant extent, can therefore also be understood as a battle between strong leaders. Even today, 19 years after the end of his mandate, it is almost impossible to make any statement about contemporary Serbia without reference to Milošević and his regime's legacy. He was the first president of Serbia after the communist period and led the country during the first transitional decade as the leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). Milošević was defeated by an umbrella coalition (DOS) led by two younger leaders who would go on to define the post-Milošević period. The first was Vojislav Koštunica (president of DSS—Democratic Party of Serbia), a moderate nationalist and professor of law, who was elected as president of Yugoslavia to replace Milošević; the second was Zoran Đindjić (president of the DS—Democratic Party), an intellectual and philosopher, with modernist and pro-European views, who was elected Serbian prime minister after Milošević's defeat. If Milošević laid the foundations, Đindjić and Koštunica set the landscape

for current Serbian politics with their debate between traditionalist and modernist poles of Serbian society (Goati 2004; Komšić, Pantić, & Slavujević, 2003; Spasojević, 2016).

However, our focus here will not be on any of the aforementioned politicians. Although Milošević would be the first choice as a case study, he ruled during an unusual and disruptive decade that affected many of the characteristics and outcome of his politics. A second choice to study would be Đindić, but he also partly belonged to the first transitional decade and his political career was violently interrupted when he was assassinated in 2003. To make our study more contemporary and comparable with other cases, our sample consists of two politicians who became leaders in post-Milošević and post-Đindić Serbia, although with significant political experience and roots in the 1990s.

The first case study is Boris Tadić, who took over the presidency of the Democratic Party (DS) soon after Đindić's assassination and led it for eight years, serving most of the time as the state president as well. The second subject is the current Serbian president, Aleksandar Vučić, who transformed the nationalistic Serbian Radical Party (SRS) into a moderate, centrist, right-wing people's party—Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)—and made it into the strongest party in the history of Serbian pluralism. Vučić and Tadić represent legacies of the 1990s, but they are also symbolic of contemporary Serbia and its current political debates. From that perspective, the two selected cases will provide our analysis with elements of both continuity and change, but within the current competitive and pluralist environment. Furthermore, as both served as state and party presidents, they provide another comparative dimension. The simultaneous performance of public the function and party presidency complicates the differentiation and relation between the two positions. However, this would also be the case in any other relevant sample choice we could make. Finally, additional caution should be taken when analyzing the Vučić case because he currently serves as president of Serbia and thus cannot be judged from a temporal distance.

This chapter begins with a brief history of the two leaders and the political circumstances that influenced their careers. This part serves as the framework for the following two sections: the first analyzes the leaders from the perspective of six personal characteristics; the second investigates whether those traits had some effect on three important dimensions—electoral performance, intra-party cohesion and party membership.

## HISTORY OF THE TWO LEADERS

This section briefly explains the paths to power of the two leaders, their parties and the political circumstances surrounding their career. Both are the offspring of their parties, with extensive political experience—they could serve as ‘poster boys’ for them. However, both transformed their parties during their mandates and made them more important and popular compared to the parties before them (Orlović, 2011).

Tadić joined the DS in 1990 at its formation. The DS was perceived as a party that articulated liberal, social democratic, or center-right options and tended to gather members from intellectual and academic circles (Radojević, 2006). During the 1990s Tadić was a member of the main board and executive board, and a member of the Yugoslav parliament. In early 2000 he was elected as party vice-president, involved with the development of the party structure and organization, with good ties to the Democratic youth (the party organizational unit dedicated to younger members). During the Đindić period he was perceived as an important but silent part of the party leadership. At that time, DS had several prominent figures who publicly spoke in the name of the party, but Tadić kept himself in the background. After the assassination of Đindić, and just before the extraordinary parliamentary elections in December 2003, the Democrats chose Tadić to be first on the electoral list (Goati 2006) and later, in 2004, he was elected as party and state president. Tadić was re-elected as Serbian president in 2008 for a five-year term in office, which lasted until his defeat in the presidential elections of 2012 by Tomislav Nikolić (SNS). He was later appointed as ‘honorary president’ of the DS (Goati, 2013), which was perceived to be a gesture of condolence and a farewell gift from the party. Just before the parliamentary elections in 2014, Tadić left the DS and founded the New Democratic Party (Jovanović & Vučićević, 2014). The DS and the NDS each won just 6% of the votes, which ended the democrats’ successful electoral run, which they had enjoyed since 2004. Tadić’s decision was heavily criticized by the public and it initiated a division among the electoral body that is still active and influential.

Tadić took the lead of the DS in very specific circumstances, after Đindić’s assassination. Also, the public perception of the party was held responsible for the first transitional problems by one part of society, whereas another part saw the DS as the driving force behind the transformation and democratization (Spasojević, 2016). Tadić fitted the

profile of DS leader due to his family background (his father was a prominent member of the Serbian Academy of arts and science) and opposition experience in the previous period, but he also realized that the DS had to become more centrist and pragmatic to become the ruling party again. This change of ideology was perceived as the second transformation of the DS, after the first conducted by Đindić in 1993, when the party departed from the model of a party as an intellectual circle toward a party focused on electoral success (Spasojević & Stojiljković, 2018). Tadić introduced more catch-all elements into the DS ideology and employed PR experts to improve communication strategy, which ended in an excessive focus on marketing elements and a lack of concepts and content in the politics (Stojiljković, 2015, p. 255).

However, a centrist interpretation of the DS ideology created divisions within the party, and soon after Tadić's inauguration, former vice-president Čedomir Jovanović (often perceived as the successor to Đindić's politics) initiated the foundation of a Liberal democratic faction within the DS and eventually left the party (Spasojević, 2016).<sup>1</sup> On the other side, catch-all tactics generated political results: in 2004 Tadić was elected as Serbian president after he secured mild support from voters of the rival DSS. Being a president of the state (within a semi-presidentialized system with a stronger prime minister) enabled him to be present in public and influential to a significant extent, but without actual executive powers (and without being held responsible for the results). Tadić's ideological influence on DS policies became more visible after the 2008 elections when the Democrats decided to create a government with their former archrivals—the Socialist Party (formerly Milošević's party)—and signed a Declaration on historical reconciliation between these two parties, which was heavily criticized by many DS supporters (Goati, 2013). During his second term in office (Table 10.1), Tadić tried to maintain a balance between the main blocks in Serbian society, which resulted in widespread but low-intensity support, both from internal and international actors. Being too centric, indecisive and stretched between options made Tadić and the DS appear weak and vulnerable, and as soon as a viable alternative emerged, they found themselves out of power.

Like Tadić, Aleksandar Vučić had significant political experience. He joined the Serbian radical party in 1993, one year after the party's

<sup>1</sup> Jovanović was later excluded from the party, because the DS statute does not recognise factions (Stojiljković & Spasojević, 2016).

**Table 10.1** The list of party leaders for the DS and the SNS

<i>Parties and their leaders</i>	<i>Start of term in office</i>	<i>End of term in office</i>
<i>DS</i>		
Dragoljub Mićunović	3 February 1990	29 September 1990
Dragoljub Mićunović	29 September 1990	25 January 1994
Zoran Đindić	25 January 1994	15 April 1995
Zoran Đindić	15 April 1995	24 May 1997
Zoran Đindić	24 May 1997	27 February 2000
Zoran Đindić	27 February 2000	12 March 2003
Boris Tadić	22 February 2004	18 February 2006
Boris Tadić	18 February 2006	18 December 2010
Boris Tadić	18 December 2010	25 November 2012
Dragan Đilas	25 November 2012	31 April 2014
Bojan Pajtić	31 April 2014	24 September 2016
Dragan Šutanovac	24 September 2016	2 June 2018
Zoran Lutovac	2 June 2018	
<i>SNS</i>		
Tomislav Nikolić	21 October 2008	24 May 2012
Aleksandar Vučić	29 September 2012	28 May 2016
Aleksandar Vučić	28 May 2016	Currently in office

foundation. He was soon elected a member of Serbian parliament, and in 1995 was elected Secretary-General of the party, a position he kept until leaving the SRS. His first important governing position was in 1998 when he was appointed as minister of information, as a part of the ‘national unity government’ that was formed as a response to NATO intervention in Serbia. As he was in charge of the media system, his position became very prominent and he was perceived to be the driving force behind attempts to decrease media freedom and to eliminate independent and pro-opposition press and radio stations (Slavujić, 2017). During the first post-Milošević decade, Vučić served as MP and presented fierce criticism of the new democratic regime. However, his party was without coalition potential and he remained outside of power-sharing circles. When party leader Šešelj voluntarily went to ICTY, acting president Nikolić and Vučić gained more freedom and tried to reshape the party to some extent (Goati, 2013). When those attempts proved futile, and after another significant electoral defeat by the Democrats in 2008 (Stojiljković, 2009), Nikolić decided to create a new party that would be moderate and centrist and would consequentially have stronger coalition potential. The new party (SNS) had a head start because it was welcomed by the public

and by most other parties as a new actor that was stepping in instead of the Radicals (Jovanović, 2013). The ideology of SNS was declared ‘as centre-right, pro-EU and *popular* party. Party was designed as *catch-all* party aiming at promotion of economic issues in order to decrease damaging nationalistic ideological baggage’ (Spasojević, 2019, p. 130).

SNS had its first major electoral success in 2012 when Nikolić surprisingly won the presidential elections against Tadić (Stojiljković et al., 2012). In contrast to Tadić’s dual presidency (of party and state), Nikolić immediately resigned from the party leadership and made way for Vučić to step in—soon after Vučić was elected SNS president. Vučić also took a position in the government as the first vice-president in charge of security issues, fighting against crime and corruption, and as minister of defense (Jovanović & Vučićević, 2014). At the same time, he was the leader of the strongest partner in the government, with a majority of ministries.<sup>2</sup> After snap elections in 2014 and 2016, Vučić was elected as prime minister and led the government in coalition with the Socialists. Although the position of prime minister is constitutionally more important and powerful compared to the president, in 2017 Vučić decided to run for state president and consequentially forced Nikolić into political retirement (by denying him an opportunity for the second mandate). Vučić was elected in the first round after winning 52% of votes, but he did not repeat Nikolić’s ‘mistake’ by resigning from the party, and he hung on to both positions, similar to Tadić in 2004 and 2008.

Regardless of his formal position, Vučić became an extremely popular politician (Jovanović & Vučićević, 2014). Already during his first mandate he had initiated a campaign against corruption (which was one of the main elements of the SNS electoral manifesto [Stojiljković et al., 2012]) and ‘arrested’ Miroslav Mišković, a leading tycoon and one of the wealthiest Serbs to get rich during the transitional years. This event saw support for Vučić explode, and he used this popularity to marginalize opposition under the accusation of corruption and political clientelism. In the usual populist manner, Vučić represented himself as the defender of the true people in the fight against corrupt politicians (mostly from the DS), corrupt judiciary, civil society and journalists who served the interests of the former government instead of the public (Spasojević, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>The Serbian government works on a ‘one man-one vote’ principle, so the number of ministries can also be extremely important for coalition agreements and very often can produce weak prime ministers that do not control the government in a full capacity.

Because of his dual position (president of state and party), Vučić was perceived to be someone who was in control of everything and who did not respect the division of power. He basically acted in the same manner and his political influence was the same regardless of his formal positions—vice prime minister, prime minister or president. This is possible because he was the undisputed leader of a party that had 40–50% of votes. However, he has been constantly subject to criticism that his rule has led to a decrease in democratic standards due to his personalization and centralization of power (Bieber, 2018; Freedom House, 2018). A series of street protests against the Vučić regime in 2017, 2018 and 2019 signaled that there is a growing dissatisfaction among the population and that some potentially very turbulent times are ahead for Serbia. Yet, at the same time, he is adored and worshipped by his voters.

### ANALYSIS OF THE LEADERS ON THE SIX PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS

The following section presents an analysis of the two leaders in respect of six personality dimensions: self-confidence, competence, integrity, need for power, flexibility and cognitive complexity (as presented in Table 10.2). These dimensions will also be presented through each of their mandates and with emphasis on potential changes and developments.

Tadić took power in the DS during a very complicated situation. The party needed a change to escape from its negative image and consequences of the early post-Milošević period, and Tadić initiated this change. From the early stages, his actions were goal-driven and decisive. Although there were many objections and resistance within the party, he was convinced that his understanding of the ‘new’ DS was the right one and he managed to marginalize other voices, including prominent members such as Jovanović. Early electoral success gave additional strength to Tadić and he remained self-confident; voters praised his ‘firm belief that his goals are justified’ and his ‘dedication to their fulfilment’ (Slavujević, 2017, p. 167). However, during his second and third mandates, Tadić gradually started to make compromises and to search for balance between many options, which (besides some political gains for him and the party) created a perception of an indecisive leader and generated criticism from the liberal and pro-EU standpoints (e.g. the white

Table 10.2 The character traits of Tadić and Vučić

	<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Boris Tadić	First (2004–2006)	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Second (2006–2010)	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
	Third (2010–2012)	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Low	Medium
Aleksandar Vučić	First (2012–2016)	Low	High	Low	High	Medium	High
	Second (2016–2019)	Medium	High	Medium	High	Low	High

ballots campaign in 2012 that called for annulment of votes because ‘all options are the same’).

Tadić’s self-confidence was also partly based upon his solid competences. As he spent almost his entire adult life in politics, he was able to comprehend the job requirements and to understand the specificities of the political game in Serbia. He was well-balanced between being intellectual as required by his background and party image, but his PR team also presented him as casual and as ‘not that far from ordinary people’ or Serbian tradition. However, he ‘got lost’ in this balanced and mediatized perspective, especially during the third mandate when he came to be perceived as a politician in whom ‘the form dominates over the content’ (Slavujić, 2007, p. 105) due to the enormous attention he devoted to image-building. This can also be related to the state president position and his presidency of the lead governing party, when he was more in the spotlight and without room for political maneuvers. He maintained his emotional stability, even after his electoral defeat, although it was time-limited because of his actions in the post-electoral period when he decided to initiate the New Democratic Party. In terms of his understanding of ‘the rules of the political game’, it could be argued that he was too friendly toward his political opponents—signing a declaration on reconciliation with the Socialists was an unnecessary move; his support of SNS in the initial stages was also above the necessary level (although it is understandable that he wanted to substitute the Radicals with their moderate version); and in these circumstances his self-confidence and, perhaps, need for power damaged his competences and good judgment.

In terms of integrity, Tadić initially used his back-bencher position to regain the trust of voters because he could not be held responsible for the party’s wrongdoings, and yet he was already recognizable to the wider audience. In one of his first important speeches in the capacity of DS president he admitted wrongdoings during voting procedures in the Serbian parliament (MPs used ID cards to vote for other MPs in abstention and tried to cover it up) and promised that it would never happen again. Since Serbian politicians rarely admit mistakes, this was an excellent beginning for Tadić and he was welcomed as ‘the better and honest face of the DS’ (Antonić, 2011, p. 108). In his first mandate his integrity level was very high as he promoted the values that he stood for during his entire political career, including some very important ideas on regional reconciliation and cooperation. Like self-confidence, perception of Tadić’s integrity started to decline during his second mandate as he

tried to include more catch-all standpoints in his politics. However, he continued to be perceived as a man of high integrity.

Most Serbian parties are centralized and presidentialized (Spasojević & Stojiljković, 2019). In a comparative perspective, the Democrats have the most developed party structure and highest level of internal debate. For example, when Tadić took over the party it was common to have several party representatives speaking in public and expressing different positions. Very soon he started to change this practice and to channel debates into party councils and bodies and to reduce dissonant voices expressed in public. However, as time progressed, he had less and less understanding for such internal pluralism and opposition. After the 2008 electoral success, the process of centralization became stronger, and toward the end of his third mandate Tadić was in control of many party internal processes, often without respect for minority opinions and objections from within and outside of the party. Some scholars even argue that his leadership status was transformed into a cult (Slavujević, 2017).

At this point he was also more oriented to being president of Serbia than of his party. He had a very strong influence on weak Prime Minister Mirko Cvetković, and this culminated with the introduction of new politicians at the highest levels without party approval. Since most had been privately connected to Tadić for some time, Antonić (2011) classified this as an 'old boy network' of the Serbian political elite. One notable example was Vuk Jeremić, who was appointed as minister of foreign affairs although he was not well known in Serbia before he took this position. Later, when Jeremić ran for vice-president of the DS, he lost regardless of Tadić's strong support, which proved that there was strong resistance to Tadić within the party. However, while Tadić kept the DS in power, those unhappy voices would remain at a low volume. On the other side, public criticism grew, especially after Tadić decided to run for the presidency for a third time, although the constitution only allows two terms (Dolenec, 2013).<sup>3</sup>

In terms of flexibility, Tadić has a dual character: it seems that he was adaptable in reaction to public opinion and what he understood as median voters, but he was less responsive toward internal party debates. He was especially unresponsive to the debate claiming that the party

<sup>3</sup>Tadić used a legal loophole and claimed that the first mandate was under a different Serbian constitution, while Serbia was a part of state union with Montenegro.

went too far toward the center and lost its identity, as well as to the claims that he created parallel structures of power within the party that did not respect party organs in an appropriate manner. As Stojiljković argues, Tadić showed elements of 'political narcissism' while 'his associates acted with significant level of arrogance' (2015, p. 255). As usual in the Serbian case, those divisions and complaints became more visible once the DS was removed from power in 2012, and Tadić was soon replaced by Dragan Đilas and marginalized.

This can also be used as a description of a cognitive complexity issue. It seems that Tadić's understanding of party was much better in his first mandate, whereas his attention moved to state level in his second and third mandates. Although it is hard to differentiate whether he was aware of the issues/problems or just decided not to react, led by a belief that those problems would not cause too much damage, the political outcome was similar.

Vučić started his career in the SNS after several weeks of thinking. It seems as if he was unsure whether it was a good choice, and that he had many doubts about this initiative and whether to join a new party or remain loyal to the Radicals. The perception of the great ideological shift from nationalist toward a pro-EU position, followed by above-mentioned second-guessing is an important part of his personality, and that is why his self-confidence level has initially been evaluated as low. Regardless of the general perception of his ideology, which is now pro-EU, moderate and center-right, there are many situations in which he could not hide his radical background and reacted impulsively and without control. The best examples are his discussions with journalists when he expresses dissatisfaction with questions, engages in debate or accuses them of working for foreign states (Slavujević, 2017). The same can be observed in accusations against political opponents as 'traitors, tycoons, rapists' in almost all SNS press releases. Also, the way he treats close associates (e.g. as seen during the broadcast sessions of the Government) shows that his transformation was partial and that his confidence level is quite low. This partially changed during his second mandate when Vučić became slightly more confident, especially after taking the role of state president, which allowed him some distance from the executive process.

Unlike self-confidence, his competence scores are very high. Due to his long experience in politics, he knows the rules of the game and looks like 'he knows everything and controls everything' (Stojiljković, 2015,

p. 257). Vučić is well adjusted to a style of politics supported by his voters and he can achieve his goals, both within and outside the party. He showed an ability to recognise the time to change and adapt, within the limits of what can be acceptable by his constituency. He worked very hard to be where he is now. During long periods in the opposition, he invested in himself by learning the trade (e.g. using public opinion survey results that he followed passionately on a daily basis), but he also got closer to the voters. For example, he once participated in a reality dance show and proved that he understood the capacity and importance of contemporary media, especially in the Serbian context where informational and political programs are often mixed into infotainment forms.

In terms of integrity, Vučić had a very low start because of the significant ideological transformation of his party and himself from radical nationalist toward EU-friendly positions. Some of the voters accused him of betraying the people he worked with for two decades. On the other side, the pro-EU part of the political spectrum greeted this transformation and enabled the smoother transition of the entire party, which to some extent decreased criticism of Vučić in relation to integrity. His integrity score improved rapidly after he took the office of government vice president and became the man behind the arrest of Mišković, a tycoon and a negative symbol of the Serbian transition. The arrest of Mišković was important because it was presented as a decisive fight against corruption and a defense of ordinary people, which was very important for Vučić's populist elements (Spasojević, 2019). However, six years after the arrest, Mišković's trial is still underway and since his business operates freely, it seems that Vučić's integrity has only been established among his own voters and not in relation to the general public.

Need for power is probably the trait in which Vučić receives the highest score. Regardless of whether this need is rooted in the legacy of the Serbian Radical Party and strong ruling of Šešelj, Vučić's personal characteristics or in the authoritarian tendencies of Serbia's right-wing parties, Vučić has a strong tendency toward micromanagement of every process, in the party or in government. He spent his first mandate trying to marginalize people loyal to Nikolić and he had successes as he won an incredible 100% of votes (out of 4000 delegates) for his second mandate as party president (Stojiljković & Spasojević, 2016). He makes all the decisions in the party, although there are often fake debates within the party. His involvement is not just related to political processes: probably his most notable appearance was his participation in the televised rescue

action of children whose bus was trapped in snow, and this footage was used by friendly tabloids to create a heroic image of Vučić (Stojiljković, 2017). However, whenever there are real political disagreements, his opposition is either forced to leave the party (as in the case of MP Saša Mirković) or spends some time expressing unlimited and uncontested support for Vučić. Some examples of usual narratives from other high party representatives include expressing their own views on certain issues with the addition that the final decision will be made by president Vučić (Slavujević, 2017). The centralization of power in terms of party organization can also be understood based on the personal involvement of Vučić's brother Andrej, who often serves as a personal representative and visits local branches, helping them during campaigns, despite having no formal role in the party.

Considering his expressed need for power, Vučić could not be too flexible. In terms of responding to and analyzing public feedback, there can be some elements of flexibility. His ideological transformation can also be seen as a sign of flexibility. Furthermore, during the first years of his mandate, he tried to decrease his weak spot—‘radical baggage’—and carefully communicated with former opponents (including civil society and media and international community representatives). However, in terms of reaction to demands from the outside (e.g. from the opposition or international community), Vučić is quite rigid and usually sticks to his original positions and plans. He reacts on a daily basis to what has been written or said publicly (he even follows Twitter debates and often make comments on tweets by ‘ordinary’ people), but in most cases there are no changes to his or his party's policies. On rare occasions, when under very strong pressure, he has either followed suggestions to some extent (e.g. Branislav Gašić was removed as defense minister, but Vučić appointed him later as director of the Serbian intelligence agency) or made vague promises that demands would be fulfilled and waited for the pressure to cool down.

As with his competences, Vučić's cognitive skills are rated as high. Vučić created the party in accordance with his understanding and he knows it in detail. He spends a lot of time micro-managing the party structure because he knows of its importance. Of course, from a mid-term perspective this might have a negative effect because the party relies on his popularity, and it is hard to evaluate party power without Vučić as president. However, in the current situation, the position of the SNS is rather strong and Vučić should take credit for that.

## ANALYSIS OF CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PARTIES

Finally, this section tries to evaluate whether there are connections between leaders' traits and party electoral results, intra-party cohesion, and party membership. A word of caution is needed, due to some characteristics of the Serbian electoral and party systems in most cases parties compete as part of coalitions and it is hard to evaluate the strengths of individual parties; also, in many cases parties look cohesive from the outside because they (try to) hide internal debates and divisions, and the proportional representation electoral system enables them to do so. However, it is possible to reach some comparable conclusions.

### *Electoral Performance*

The first hypothesis deals with electoral performances: *party leaders with high scores in these traits improve their party's electoral performance*. To begin with a methodological problem, Serbian parties usually participate in elections as part of coalitions—smaller parties want to secure results above the 5% threshold, while large parties want to have the highest number of votes, regardless of the effect on number of MPs and even at the cost of having ideologically very heterogeneous coalitions (Jovanović, 2014). Therefore, in many cases we need to compare electoral results with public opinion surveys to evaluate the share of votes for particular parties.

The two parties investigated here have similar-sized coalitions and electoral tactics, especially considering the 2012 elections. Both the DS and the SNS were large parties that gathered many smaller partners to achieve certain goals at the time. Analysis partially confirms that leaders with high scores do improve a party's electoral performance, or to put it in inverse logic—leaders with low scores on traits decrease party/coalition success. It seems that the decline of some traits can be a sign of electoral crisis. In Tadić's case, a decreased level of self-confidence, competence and integrity were the driving forces behind the fall of the Democrats because their constituency cherished these traits to a significant extent. DS was perceived to be a party of intellectuals, public servants, experts and the social elite in a broader sense, and once these groups started to criticize Tadić or at least not to support him strongly, it was enough to create an opportunity for the SNS to take power (Fig. 10.1).

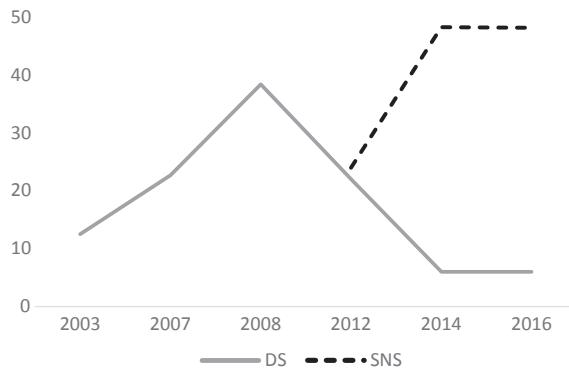


Fig. 10.1 Electoral support for DS and SNS (2003–2016)

In Vučić's case (see Table 10.3), lower scores for flexibility and integrity expose weak points and provide the potential for the decline of SNS electoral success. However, at this point, SNS electoral support is quite stable. In terms of positive effect, and since Vučić is behind the SNS success, his high competence or cognitive complexity are important parts of his image and the foundation of identification with him. It is interesting to note that the effects of some traits depend on party ideology and values of the voters—for example, the need for power can be perceived as neutral or positive for SNS voters (as they are more authoritarian and prefer 'strong hand' rule), whereas the Democrats can evaluate need for power as a negative characteristic and as a sign of nondemocratic and oligarchic tendencies.

Table 10.3 The consequences of Tadić's and Vučić's leadership for their parties

	Terms	Electoral performance	Intra-party cohesion	Party membership
Boris Tadić	First (2004–2006)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Second (2006–2010)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Third (2010–2012)	No effect	Lower	No effect
Aleksandar Vučić	First (2012–2016)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Second (2016–present)	Higher	Higher	Higher

### *Intra-Party Cohesion*

The second hypothesis reads that *party leaders with high scores in these traits increase intra-party cohesion*. Again, as in the case of the first hypothesis, there is some strong evidence in favor and some ideologically dependent supporting arguments. Electoral success can be one of the main preconditions for high cohesion. Tadić managed to achieve electoral success, and his integrity, competence and belief that he follows the right way also increased party cohesion and identification with the party. He was a leader who generated strong support within the party similar to that enjoyed by Đindjić, but Tadić also managed to accrue much wider support from the outside. During his mandate, the Democratic Party initially regained clearer ideological standpoints and a pro-European orientation created a wave of optimism among voters and party members. His centralization of the party also generated some cohesion and developed the party identity, especially among younger members and supporters. In his second, and especially during his third mandate, Tadić's flexibility on the one hand (too many compromises with coalition partners) and need for power, on the other, led to the decline of intra-party cohesion. Lack of cohesion was more visible in relation to members and activists, whereas internal circles and party leadership remained quite cohesive.

In the second example, Vučić's rule in SNS created an extremely cohesive and organised party oriented under a strong leader. His style of leadership and high scores in need for power, cognitive complexity and competences gave birth to a party that resembles a social movement with a strong leader (Stojiljkovic & Spasojević, 2018), similar to the Serbian Radical Party under Šešelj (Bochsler, 2010), with a high intensity of group dynamics. SNS is a party with a high organizational capacity—whether the task is to collect 60,000 signatures for Vučić's presidential candidacy in one day (whereas the legal time frame is one month) or to organise 50,000 supporters for a welcome ceremony during Russian president Vladimir Putin's visit to Belgrade. The intensity of group cohesion is also created through the series of electoral processes—some are regular (presidential and local elections in 2016 and 2017), but SNS also called snap elections in 2014 and 2016. Constant electoral campaigns have become the trademark and modus operandi of SNS as the 'politics of state of emergency' (Stojiljković, 2015) or politics of creation and management of crises (Bieber, 2018). This set of elections had several purposes: to reduce the already-atomized

opposition's power in parliament; to maintain a presence in the media during the intensive campaigns; to keep party members and organizations on alert; and to marginalize Nikolić's followers in the party. SNS's extensive usage of contemporary technology can also be linked to party cohesion: SNS has well-organized social media teams and party 'bots' are very active. The party sometimes uses social media as a tool for party discipline—including the illegal practice of posting pictures of voting ballots or from official events as evidence of their presence and participation. An important part of cohesion is relation with out-groups, and SNS often uses a populist narrative to emphasize division between 'true people' from SNS led by president Vučić on one side, and the alienated elite from other parties and international institutions on the other. In that framework, Vučić is perceived as protector and savior, perhaps explaining the passion and affection that many SNS members show for him, supporting his strong and undisputed rule.

### *Party Membership*

The last hypothesis assumes that *party leaders with high scores for traits boost party membership*. Party membership is very complex in Serbia, because parties do not have public lists of members, and they are published only when they are satisfied with the results. Also, there are no mechanisms against multiple memberships (Spasojević & Stojiljković, 2018). However, including the usual caveats, it is possible to observe trends in changes of party membership that can provide some insight. In terms of both parties and during the two leaders' mandates, there has been a rapid growth of membership. In the case of the DS, during Tadić's leadership the number of members increased from 70,000 in late 2003 to 170,000 before the 2012 elections. It is hard to evaluate the reasons behind this success, but there is no doubt that at least an initial increase is related to Tadić's performances and traits, whereas later stages (e.g. from 2010) can also be related to development of clientelistic networks. Like party cohesion, Tadić managed to create a party that was attractive for members and to expand it beyond its previous membership size. He also partly reversed old trends of splits in the party and attracted back some prominent members, including the first party president Mićunović and his Democratic Centre (Stojiljković & Spasojević, 2016), and invested many efforts into the development of youth and women's networks within the party.

In a similar manner, it can be argued that SNS membership during the opposition stage (300,000 in 2012) was driven by ideological and political reasons. At the time, the SNS was considered a movement of disaffected and politically marginalized people against the oppression of the government; it was a party of people who demanded justice and equality in transitional circumstances (Jovanović, 2013). Vučić's success and performance as party president in his first mandate also boosted membership rates, mostly because of a strong anti-corruption campaign.

However, once in power, SNS gradually transformed itself and shifted expectations toward more realistic goals. Based on an excellent understanding of media and influence on the Serbian media system, Vučić managed to fulfill this goal. Similar to other cases, being in power usually leads to mass-scale clientelism, which created an additional wave of membership, and SNS reached 700,000 members in 2018, a number even greater than the Socialist party under Milošević (Spasojević & Stojiljković, 2018). However, as previously suggested, the intensity of members' identification with Vučić is higher than with Tadić and the third hypothesis is stronger in Vučić's case.

## CONCLUSION

Serbian parties are dependent on their leaders. In most cases, those leaders have plural mandates at the top of their parties and in many cases parties had only one leader for their entire history. This research chose two leaders with many common traits: Vučić and Tadić were 'infected' with politics during the Milošević period, but they rose to power in the DS and the SNS, respectively, in completely different circumstances. Both leaders changed their parties through the introduction of centric and catch-all approaches to increase their number of votes and coalition capital; both leaders served as state president and exerted strong influence over weak prime ministers; both leaders reorganized their parties, centralizing and presidentializing them.

However, their personal traits are somewhat different, and they produced different outcomes due to the different ideological profiles of their parties and party members. Tadić had a better starting point due to high integrity, competence and self-confidence, which he used to redefine the party and to get elected as state president. During his mandates, the DS became the strongest party in Serbia for the first time in its history. However, Tadić's need for power and excessive usage of PR and

marketing experts led to growing disaffection within and outside of the party, which created unfavorable electoral conditions for Tadić and the DS. Many problems surfaced at the same time and Tadić's decline was swift and unavoidable after his 2012 electoral defeat.

On the other hand, Vučić's starting position was as an outsider: he got into power due to the unexpected electoral victory of Nikolić and his resignation as the SNS president. However, once in power, Vučić used his excellent political skills to become an undisputed leader and the most popular politician in Serbia. His skills were beneficial to his party as well, and SNS grew into the largest party in Serbian history, with almost 700,000 members. In contrast to Tadić's case, SNS voters are less critical of Vučić's need for power, and they express strong affection and support for the party president. However, his rigid style of government is generating many problems with the opposition, journalists and civil society, and it will be the most important challenge for Vučić in the future. His response to the decline of democratic standards and his ability to adapt to new circumstances will determine his political legacy.

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## CHAPTER 11

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# The Rise and Sustainability of Party Leaders in Slovakia: Robert Fico and Mikuláš Dzurinda

*Miroslav Nemčok and Peter Spáč*

## INTRODUCTION

After the demise of the Communist regime in 1989, Slovakia opted for a model of parliamentary democracy. The emergence of democracy together with the proportional representation (PR) electoral system adopted in 1990 led to the establishment of a multiparty political competition which often changes with the frequent changes of parties represented in the National Parliament. In 1998, the country witnessed a moderate electoral reform including the adoption of a single nationwide constituency which endures until today (i.e. 2019). Since 1993, when the country became independent, only two relevant parties (the Christian Democrats and the Slovak Nationalist Party) managed to change the leader and maintain their relevance. Therefore, Slovakia

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is an especially important case to focus on in order to understand how the personality traits of party leaders shape the performance of political parties.

In this chapter, we examine two leaders who are inherently tied to the political development of Slovakia during 1998–2019—Mikuláš Dzurinda and Robert Fico. They both represent relevant political leaders who led their parties during periods in which they served as Prime Minister as well as when they were in the opposition. At the same time, the length of their leadership offers enough variance to better understand the influence of their personality traits on political development in Slovakia. The central argument presented here is that both Robert Fico and Mikuláš Dzurinda had a strong need for power that led them to disregard political agreements and bypass leadership bodies in their previous parties to satisfy their greatest political ambitions. They managed to utilize self-confident communication performance to successfully consolidate power in their own hands. However, while Robert Fico maintained this pattern also after becoming Prime Minister and remained the most popular politician for almost two decades, Mikuláš Dzurinda shifted his focus to competent policy implementation while sidelining attention to his decreasing popularity, which led to the slow marginalization of his person as well as his party.

The next section presents events that led to Robert Fico and Mikuláš Dzurinda reaching the chairmanship in their parties. Subsequently, this chapter discusses dynamics in the personality traits of these two leaders throughout the several terms they remained in the leadership position of their parties. Later, the dominant personality traits during particular terms are compared and discussed with respect to consequences for the parties. Lastly, conclusions are added.

## THE HISTORY OF ROBERT FICO AND MIKULÁŠ DZURINDA

Robert Fico has been one of the longest-serving political representatives in Slovakia. He graduated from Law and before entering politics; he worked for the Legal department of the Ministry of Justice until 1995. He continued in his career as a lawyer even while serving as an active politician, holding the post of Representative of Slovakia at the European Court of Human Rights between 1994 and 2000. This experience assisted him later in building his image as an expert in law and politics (Kopeček, 2007).

Fico started his career in politics shortly before the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989. In 1987, he joined the ruling Communist Party. After the establishment of the democratic system in 1989, the party lost its previous monopolistic position and began the process of its own transformation. As a result, the party dropped most of its Communist legacy, renamed itself the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), and aligned itself with social democratic values (Hloušek & Kopeček, 2002).

Fico gradually improved his position within SDL structures. In 1992, he was elected as MP for the first time. After the early election in 1994, he became the leader of the party's parliamentary group. The low result of SDL in the 1994 election led to dissatisfaction inside the party and to a change of its leadership. Six contenders announced their desire to become party leader, Robert Fico being one of them. Although he did not occupy any higher party position except the one in the parliamentary group, he received the most support from the party regional structures. Despite the fact that Fico stepped out of the competition shortly before it took place, he was elected as Vice-Chairman of SDL (Mesežníkov, 2000, pp. 119–120).

A breaking point in Fico's career was the 1998 general election. The election led to a victory of opposition parties including SDL against the bloc of parties grouped around semi-democratic Prime Minister Mečiar. Based on these results, four opposition parties created a new and ideologically heterogeneous government. However, Fico was not given any important office despite having received the highest number of preferential votes of all SDL candidates. What is more, Fico openly showed some reluctance toward the composition of the newly created government, especially the presence of the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) as the main representative of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (Mesežníkov, 1999). In sum, this started a process that eventually led to the separation of Fico from his own party. In January 1999 he stepped down as the SDL vice-chairman, and as an MP he pursued his own political initiatives, which was not perceived well by the SDL leadership. Finally, in September 1999, Fico left the SDL ranks and founded his own party, Direction (SMER).

The new party continuously increased its support base and became one of the main pillars of the Slovak party system. This success was inevitably and primarily connected to Robert Fico. Not only has he so far been the only and unchallenged leader of SMER (Table 11.1), but he

**Table 11.1** The list of the party leaders for SMER and SDK/SDKÚ-DS

<i>Parties and their leaders</i>	<i>Start of the term in office</i>	<i>End of the term in office</i>
<i>SMER</i>		
Robert Fico	11 December 1999	10 May 2003
	10 May 2003	30 September 2006
	30 September 2006	13 December 2010
	13 December 2010	10 December 2016
	10 December 2016	Present (April 2018)
<i>SDK/SDKÚ-DS<sup>a</sup></i>		
Mikuláš Dzurinda	4 July 1998	16 November 2000
SDK was effectively transformed into SDKÚ which <i>de jure</i> is a different subject, but <i>de facto</i> constitutes a direct successor of SDK		
Mikuláš Dzurinda	17 November 2000	24 November 2002
	24 November 2002	17 November 2006
	17 November 2006	6 November 2010
	6 November 2010	19 May 2012
Pavol Frešo	19 May 2012	2 July 2016
Milan Roman <sup>b</sup>	2 July 2016	Currently in office

<sup>a</sup>The original party name was Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia; SDKÚ) until 21 January 2006 when party Congress confirmed the merge with the Democratic Party (Demokratická strana; DS) and amended the party's name to SDKÚ-DS

<sup>b</sup>Milan Roman is not a Party Chairman, but the First Vice-Chair appointed by Party Congress to find a new Chairman. The Congress responded to the situation when former Chairman Pavol Frešo abandoned the party immediately after disappointing electoral results in 2016. Milan Roman was supposed to present a new Chairman by the end of 2016, but he has not done so as yet

also became the longest-serving Slovak Prime Minister, serving from 2006 to 2018, interrupted only by a short period of two years.

Similar to Robert Fico, Mikuláš Dzurinda also switched partisan affiliation before becoming a party leader. After graduating in Economics, Dzurinda worked as economist and researcher for a transport research institute and later for the National Railways. He became active in politics shortly after the collapse of the Communist regime. In 1991, he joined the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), a right-wing and conservative party with strong anti-Communist appeals.

During subsequent years, Dzurinda climbed through the ranks of KDH and became a solid part of its elite. He was elected MP for the first time in 1992. After the government led by Vladimír Mečiar failed to survive a vote of no confidence in parliament, a caretaker cabinet was created for a six-month period before the 1994 general election. In this government, Dzurinda occupied the seat of Minister of Transportation.

With Mečiar back in the Office of Prime Minister after the 1994 election, KDH returned to the opposition and Dzurinda served the whole term as an MP. In 1996, Dzurinda competed for the position of KDH Chairman but lost to the incumbent, Ján Čarnogurský. The rally, however, showed his high levels of party support and he was elected Vice-Chairman (Kopeček, 2007).

The period between 1994 and 1998 was crucial both for the political development of the country as well as for Dzurinda himself. In 1996, in response to Mečiar's authoritarian tendencies, three center-right parties (including KDH) agreed on forming the Blue Coalition. In May 1997, the coalition was joined by two more parties—the Social Democrats (i.e. SDE) and the Greens—and was renamed the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK). One of the struggles was to find a proper leader. Although KDH was the strongest of the founding parties, its leader was reluctant to vie for this position. As a solution, Dzurinda was first selected as “speaker” of SDK (Mesežníkov, 1998).

Electoral success in the 1998 elections enabled the opposition parties to create a government led by SDK with Dzurinda as its Prime Minister. However, the following months revealed that the visions about the future political development were not shared between the leadership of SDK and the leadership of SDK's founding parties. While Dzurinda stressed the importance of the SDK and opted for its further existence as a political party, the founding parties, KDH in particular, preferred the dissolution of the SDK and a return to the form of an electoral coalition. As these two groups were unable to find a mutually satisfying compromise, Dzurinda and his close allies decided to establish a new party. Hence, the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) was established in early 2000 (Haughton & Rybář, 2004). The party expressed its will to carry on the legacy of the SDK (hence the similar abbreviation). Mikuláš Dzurinda was elected as the party's leader and remained in this position for the next 12 years (Rybář, 2011).

### ROBERT FICO: ABSORBING OPPONENTS TO CONSOLIDATE POWER

Robert Fico demonstrated a strong need for power from the very beginning of his political career. He became an MP on the ballot of SDE in 1992 and only four years later, in 1996, he unsuccessfully ran for the

party's chairmanship.<sup>1</sup> After the 1998 elections, when SDL was among the parties which successfully defeated Mečiar and were about to create a government, Fico did not hide his aspirations to become Minister of Justice. However, his aspirations were denied, and it was obviously his unsatisfied desire for power that led him to leave SDL, create the new SMER (Fitzmaurice, 2004, p. 163), and step into its lead from the first day of its Founding Congress, held on 11 December 1999.

Thanks to his change of affiliation, Fico was able to heavily criticize the social and economic reforms of the first Dzurinda government (which SDL was part of) and attract disillusioned voters of the anti-Mečiar coalition (Gyárfášová, 2003, 2006). SMER was experiencing a fast and steady increase in its popular support, which satisfied the party membership and improved Fico's position within the party (Haughton, 2002; RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 2002a). Despite the fact that Fico was trying to fight the image of a one-man-show by introducing "new faces" (such as Monika Beňová, Milan Murgaš or Dušan Čaplovic) (Toft, 2003), all the new figures were overshadowed by Fico (Haughton & Rybář, 2008).

The 2012 election results confirmed the dominant position of SMER in the left ideological space, where the party self-positioned itself. As a competent party leader, Fico found opportunity in the weakness of the rest of the leftist parties after the 2002 elections (including SDL, which scored less than two percent of the vote) and effectively absorbed them into SMER's structures (Haughton & Rybář, 2008). The merging process was formally confirmed at the Party Congress in December 2004 and this left SMER without any ideologically similar opponents.

Before the 2006 election, Fico was the main challenger for incumbent Prime Minister Dzurinda (Bugaric, 2008, p. 196; Gati, 2007, p. 108). The election brought a landslide victory for SMER and Fico took the lead in the creation of the next government. Despite other possible options and international criticism, Fico needed only two weeks to create a government with two parties—Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Mečiar and Slovak National Party (SNS) led by Slota—obviously displaying the mentality of political authoritarianism (Rybář, 2007).

For Fico, the coalition with HZDS and SNS meant access to the highest state office while minimizing the possible intra-coalition conflicts.

<sup>1</sup> Fico withdrew his candidacy shortly before the election.

All other parties in Parliament were also previously included in the second Dzurinda cabinet, which had been heavily criticized by Fico. Thus, the cooperation carried the risk of a serious intra-coalition crisis. Moreover, this composition of government also satisfied Fico's need for power. During the negotiations, Fico easily outweighed Mečiar and Slota and ensured the most relevant cabinet portfolios for SMER (plus the Parliament Speaker), while SNS and HZDS got only three and two ministries, respectively (Deegan-Krause & Haughton, 2012).

The relationship between the three parties included in the government remained unbalanced during the whole 2006–2010 period. Usually, being the biggest party in government tends to hurt its subsequent electoral performance. This case was quite the opposite. In 2010, SMER experienced another landslide victory and thanks to taking over voters from his two coalition allies, SMER added 15 percentage points to its result from 2006 (Spáč, 2014).

During the 2010 elections, Robert Fico's personality was heavily polarizing Slovak society. Therefore, all opposition parties were reluctant to join SMER and hence it was impossible for SMER to go on with governance. However, as the Opposition Leader, Fico did not hesitate to constantly point out the frequent conflicts among the governing parties during the 2010–2012 term and successfully positioned SMER as the party that could bring back the stability typical of the 2006–2010 period (Rybář et al., 2017, pp. 146–165). As a result, SMER received a parliamentary majority (as the first and only Slovak party after 1993 so far) and governed alone for the next four years (i.e. 2012–2016).

However, this level of comfort lasted only until the 2016 elections. The public support for SMER had dropped and the results suggested that Slovakia was about to experience a hung parliament with no possibility for a government majority. Yet, Fico demonstrated his need for power again: He reacted quickly, invited the party leaders who did not fully reject cooperation with him during the pre-electoral campaign (or were at least hesitant to do so) and, only three days after the official announcement of the results, it became obvious that Slovakia would have a government led by Fico. To accomplish this, Fico managed to convince and put together the representatives of the nationalist SNS and the party representing the Hungarian minority, Most-Híd (Rybář & Spáč, 2017). In 2018, after the murder of an investigative journalist (and his fiancée) who published several articles revealing SMER's corrupt practices, Fico stepped down as Prime Minister but kept his role as the party's leader.

With all this in mind, it is apparent that Robert Fico is well aware of the political game he is taking part in. On the intra-party dimension, he understands that his position as leader is only as strong as (a) the public support tied to him as the leader and (b) the political power controlled by the party in order to satisfy the demands of its members. Therefore, he makes sure that his personality is closely tied to the party and his personal popularity brings assets that are later distributed among party members to reinforce their loyalty (Kopeček, 2007). On the inter-party dimension, Fico is well aware of the risks stemming from being surrounded by ideologically similar parties, which can easily attract his dissatisfied supporters. Thus, he does not hesitate to use his personal popularity to weaken close political allies to the point that they could be either fully absorbed into SMER's structures, or become completely politically marginalized (Gyárfášová, 2003, 2006).

### *Sophisticated Campaigner with Worsening Issue Selection*

For most of his career, Robert Fico presented a fairly high-level of self-confidence in terms of his personal political career as well as ambitions for his own party. Robert Fico tended to appear on prime time TV shows outside of political programs, which revealed his awareness that sophisticated marketing is necessary for the sustainability of any political career.

For the newly established party, Fico recruited Fedor Flašík, an enormously talented media figure who claimed to be able to “produce cola from water” (Vagovič, 2016). Before the 2002 election, SMER launched an aggressive election campaign, which Haughton (2002) describes as follows:

In early April, posters went up all around Bratislava declaring, “As they stole for Mečiar, so they are stealing for Dzurinda.” These billboards followed a campaign depicting three dogs. “Who,” ran the slogan, “is the best defender of Slovakia’s interests?” A small, scrawny-looking mutt called Miki (Dzurinda), a bulldog called Vlado (Mečiar), or a large, friendly-looking “Slovak” dog called Robo (Fico)? Fico’s desire to attack both Dzurinda and Mečiar is clear from his TV campaign, in which Monika Beňová stands in a kitchen holding up two dirty T-shirts, one emblazoned with a picture of Mečiar and the other with Dzurinda. Like an advertisement for washing powder, Beňová’s distress for the state of her dirty laundry is only removed when Fico appears offering a new type of washing powder called “Poriadok” [what could be translated as “Order”] which will remove all the stains.

The campaign was very efficient, attracted a lot of attention and some of the slogans continue to echo within the Slovak society. However, despite how catchy the campaign was, its enormous aggression backfired and SMER ended up third with 13.5%, which fell far below Fico's expectations (Fitzmaurice, 2004). Fico did not allow the disappointing results to steal his determination and self-confidence. He had learnt his lesson and, in the next elections in 2006, ran a well-balanced campaign spreading critical as well as positive political messages, and he did not forget to add entertainment (Rybář, 2007). This confirmed that Fico sees communication performance as a crucial element for political success.

The second half of the 2006–2010 term, Fico's time as Prime Minister, was visibly tiring. The constant corruption scandals related to members of his government (although not necessarily nominees of SMER) resulted in his very rude behavior toward journalists, who were labeled as “anti-government, but also against the nation [i.e. Slovakia] and against the people [i.e. Slovaks]” (Mesežníkov, 2009). However, with the approaching electoral campaign for the 2010 election, Fico did not hesitate to use his incumbency to his advantage. He emphasized SMER's major role in economic development (since Slovakia was only marginally hit by the 2008 economic crisis) and made sure that he personally appeared at every event that could be interpreted as a success of his government—e.g. opening a new terminal at Bratislava airport or new parts of highways (Henderson, 2010). This was enough to ensure that SMER received the highest number of votes in the 2010 election, however, the weak result of his former coalition partners sent SMER into the opposition.

As the Opposition Leader during the 2010–2012 term, Fico was mastering the art of political communication. Despite the fact that scandals tied to his previous government have not fully disappeared from the public space, he did manage to effectively point out conflicts between parties taking part in the Radičová government and emphasize that his party could bring stability to the country (Spáč, 2014). It paid off. After the 2012 election, Fico returned to the Prime Minister's seat and declared that “with the fall of the Radičová government [and the emergence of the single-party cabinet of SMER], stability has arrived” (SITA, 2013).

However, during the 2012–2016 term, Fico's self-confident communication performance turned to the ridiculous. He ran in the 2014 presidential elections and he often spouted that his nonpartisan challenger, Andrej Kiska, was a member of the Church of Scientology (Rybář &

Spáč, 2015). In the 2016 election campaign, he stressed the danger stemming from the migration crisis, despite the fact that migrants were a nonexistent problem for Slovakia (Kroet, 2016; The Slovak Spectator, 2016), while ignoring the growing strikes of dissatisfied teachers and nurses (Rybář & Spáč, 2017; Tódová, 2016). For the greater part of his career, Fico had managed to respond to problems that resonated with the population (with the small exception of unnecessary fights with journalists during 2006–2010). However, in the 2014 presidential and the 2016 legislative campaigns, his attentive responsiveness disappeared, and Fico accentuated issues that made him sound both less trustworthy and less serious, and most probably negatively affected his electoral results (Table 11.2).

### *Lack of Content and Ideology*

Robert Fico has continuously proved his extraordinary capacity to understand the rules of the political game and to attract voters. However, when one is trying to understand his political positions and policy preferences, they reveal strategic flexibility and ambiguity and rather a lack of firm content.

Shortly after Fico founded SMER, he emphasized that “Slovakia does not need left- or right-wing policies,” but “strong pragmatic politics capable of solving problems” (*Daily Pravda*, 2000) and “thorough solutions” (Tóth, 1999), which were supposed to be reflected in the party program’s objectives “order, justice, and stability” (Wienk & Majchrák, 2003). Consistent with this framing, Fico attacked the Roma population, whose members, he said, “do not want anything except to lie in bed and survive on social security” (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 2001). He also conditioned postelection cooperation with the party representing the Hungarian minority on “SMK [Party of the Hungarian Coalition] ‘distancing itself’ from defending ‘a foreign country’s [i.e. Hungary’s] interests’” (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 2002b). No substantive (or reasonable) solution has ever been proposed or implemented by the party, however, and this rhetoric thus seems to be only an attempt by SMER’s leader to stimulate anti-Roma and anti-Hungarian sentiments to increase his popularity (Haughton, 2001). Very similar pictures can be seen in the cases of the 2012 elections when Fico defended against an unstable “conglomerate” of center-right parties, in the 2014 presidential election, when the runner-up was a member of the Church

of Scientology, as well as in the 2016 when Slovakia was in danger of migrants for whom Slovakia was neither a transit nor a final destination.

It must be admitted that during the 1999–2006 period Fico was a strong opponent of economic liberalization reforms implemented by the first and second Dzurinda government (Fitzmaurice, 2004; Rybář, 2007), which makes his ideological position a bit less fuzzy. Nonetheless, despite Fico's accentuation of his socio-democratic background, his rhetoric and actions are very inconsistent and ambiguous in terms of ideology (Haughton, 2002) and have remained so throughout his whole career. Being ideology-free ensures him a high degree of flexibility, which allows him to dynamically respond to current discourse and swiftly press the right buttons in order to maintain his popularity (Rybář & Deegan-Krause, 2008) (Table 11.2).

### MIKULÁŠ DZURINDA: LEADER OF THE ANTI-MEČIAR CAMP

After being confirmed as the leader of SDK, Dzurinda was able to effectively balance heterogeneous branches (ranging from Greens and Social Democrats to Christian Democrats and liberals) inside the party to defeat Mečiar. This made him a very competent party leader during those turbulent times (Rhodes, 2001, p. 6).

Outside the party, Dzurinda managed to improve his communication performance and boost his capability to sell the party to voters. Dzurinda had learnt his lesson from the 1994 campaign, which was heavily won by Mečiar. While still Vice-Chairman of Christian Democrats (KDH), he had paid too much attention to the urban parts of Slovakia. This time he ran the campaign as a competent and self-confident leader and he targeted mainly the rural areas; and, despite not being able to work the crowds as well as Mečiar or Fico, he made himself an inherent part of the electoral campaign and successfully attracted the spotlight by bicycling around Slovakia and running a marathon (Fitzmaurice, 1999, p. 294). However, the 1998 campaign represents a peak in his communicative performance, and for the rest of his career he was only moderately responsive to the demands of the general public (Table 11.2).

#### *Competent Prime Minister with Decreasing Popularity*

As Prime Minister in 1998–2002, Dzurinda showed great political skills. On the interparty dimension, he proved his competences through the

Table 11.2 Character traits of Robert Fico and Mikuláš Dzurinda

	<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Self-confidence</i>	<i>Competence</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Need for power</i>	<i>Flexibility</i>	<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Robert Fico	First (1999–2003)	medium	high	medium	high	medium	high
	Second (2003–2006)	high	high	medium	high	medium	high
	Third (2006–2010)	high	high	low	high	high	medium
	Fourth (2010–2016)	high <sup>a</sup>	high	low	high	high	high
	Fifth (from 2016)	medium	high	low	high	low	low
Mikuláš Dzurinda	First (1998–2000)	high	high	medium	high	high	medium
	Second (2000–2002)	medium	high	medium	medium	high	low
	Third (2002–2006)	medium	high	medium	medium	high	low
	Fourth (2006–2010)	low	high	medium	low	medium	low
	Fifth (2010–2012)	low	high	medium	medium	medium	low

<sup>a</sup>Medium after 2012

survival of his very broad “rainbow” coalition, consisting of the already heterogeneous SDK, leftist SDĽ, ethnic Hungarian SMK and center-left Party of Civic Understanding (SOP). Despite the heterogeneity of his government, Dzurinda, consistent with his pre-electoral pledges, implemented important economic and social reforms that earned Slovakia OECD membership and took it to the threshold of EU and NATO membership (Fitzmaurice, 2004).

On the intra-party dimension, Dzurinda realized that the creation of the SDK was a stepping stone in defeating Mečiar, but definitely not a long-term solution. The party was an immediate reaction to the new electoral law passed by Mečiar’s coalition before the 1998 elections, which implemented an additional legal threshold for electoral coalitions. It effectively meant that while a single party must pass the 5% threshold, for an electoral coalition each of its parties had to do the same, otherwise its votes were wasted (Spáč, 2010). In response, the five parties that had previously planned to cooperate transformed the SDK to a new single-party entity in order to bypass the additional electoral threshold. After the elections, some of the members went back to their previous parties, while others remained in the SDK. For Dzurinda, however, a return to the Christian Democrats would mean that he would need to comply with its leader Ján Čarnogurský, with whom he had already had several conflicts. Instead, Dzurinda refused to abide by the previous agreement, convinced several members of his government to join him, and founded the new SDKÚ as a direct successor of the SDK (Rhodes, 2001; Tódová, 2012).<sup>2</sup>

Violating the public agreement did not have a major influence on Dzurinda’s political career, however. Quite the contrary. SDKÚ followed up on the position of SDK, became a major power in Slovak politics and a counterbalance to Mečiar’s HZDS. Therefore, the foundation of SDKÚ consolidated Dzurinda’s position as a leading figure within the anti-Mečiar camp. At the same time, it proved that Dzurinda was a highly competent political leader who was decisive and understood the political game.

After the 2002 elections, Dzurinda managed to form his second cabinet. This time the coalition contained no leftist party and its ideological consistency allowed him to deliver another set of economic and social

<sup>2</sup>SDK was effectively transformed into SDKÚ which *de jure* is a different actor, but *de facto* is a direct successor of SDK.

reforms. However, as Prime Minister, Dzurinda considerably decreased his effort to enhance his political reputation. He significantly worsened his communication style and even got into several conflicts with journalists. His self-confidence in communication performance as a leader was on the decline. In addition to that, the implemented reforms were highly unpopular and opposed by the people. The combination of all these factors resulted in a significant decrease in Dzurinda's popularity (Gati, 2007).

Despite his damaged image, Dzurinda remained a consistent and competent political leader in his government as well as inside of SDKÚ. His political stances were ideologically consistent and publicly well-known. Despite the fact that Dzurinda's second cabinet was ideologically more consistent, the internal struggles were more visible to the public. However, also in this case, Dzurinda was successful in balancing various demands and the cabinet fell apart "only" half a year before the expected date of the elections, even though it had already lost parliamentary majority in 2005 (Haughton & Rybář, 2008).

Inside the party, Dzurinda had to face the criticism of several high-profile members (including e.g. Minister of Interior Affairs Ivan Šimko supported by SDKÚ's Vice-Chairwoman Zuzana Martináková). But Dzurinda successfully handled the resistance, and the group left the party (Balogová, 2003). Except for this short episode, SDKÚ remained internally stable mostly thanks to the fact that its leader had managed to retain the party's leading position in the Slovak government for eight years while still polling somewhere between 15 and 20%, which meant that it was the second strongest actor in the party system. To conclude, Dzurinda showed high adaptability to new cognitively complex conditions and reacted in a way that played in his own favor during his two terms as Prime Minister.

### *Dzurinda's Move to the Background While Keeping the Chairmanship*

The government dissolution only three months before the preliminary elections was not the best campaign that the already-exhausted Dzurinda could have wished for. Moreover, he could not seriously compete with the well-balanced campaign of Fico, who was already quickly advancing during Dzurinda's second term as Prime Minister (Haughton & Rybář, 2008). After two terms as Prime Minister, Dzurinda was no longer perceived as the one who defeated Mečiar, but the one personally

responsible for unpopular economic and social reforms (Gati, 2007). That was proven in the 2006 elections when Dzurinda, despite being a party list leader, got fewer preferential votes than the SDKÚ's Vice-Chairwoman Radičová or Vice-Chairman Mikloš (Tódová, 2012). At the same time, Dzurinda did not shy from his main ideological preferences and he was still convinced about the necessity of the implemented reforms. Therefore, his inability to understand and respond to peoples' dissatisfaction did not increase his popularity.

In the 2006 elections, the SDKÚ came in second, more than 10 percentage points behind Fico's SMER. Nevertheless, its vote share of 18%, which represents its best result since 2010 (Balogová, 2012; Rybář, 2007), significantly exceeded the pre-electoral polls. Under these circumstances, Dzurinda proved his political adaptability as he openly proposed a possible coalition government including center-right parties and their former main rival—Mečiar's HZDS. The plan failed to be implemented, however, and for the next four years SDKÚ went into the opposition. During the whole 2006–2010 period, Dzurinda opted for a rather passive approach toward politics despite the corruption scandals related to Fico's first government, which offered plenty of opportunities to attack (Haughton, Novotná, & Deegan-Krause, 2011, p. 398). A partial explanation may lie in the fact that SDKÚ was going through its own scandal: Dzurinda was unable to explain several suspicious financial contributions to the party (Tódová, 2012).

During the whole 2006–2010 period, Dzurinda did not implement any strategy which could possibly improve his public image and increase popularity. His impending resignation as the public face of the party became fully clear when he agreed to hold party primaries to determine the party's leading candidate for the 2010 elections; he did not enter the contest. Later, when SDKÚ became the leading force in the government, Dzurinda seemed to be satisfied with becoming the Minister of Foreign Affairs while SDKÚ's Vice-Chairwoman Radičová became Prime Minister.

These were his actions outside the party. Inside, he was unwilling to step down as Party Chairman. The reason was that it was the chairmanship that allowed him to maintain his influence and pull the strings, even though the most visible person was the Prime Minister and SDKÚ's Vice-Chairwoman Iveta Radičová (Mesežníkov, 2012, p. 21). Even though Dzurinda kept himself in the background, his nonformal influence from the gray zone was very controversial and aroused a lot

of criticism. Thus, after the poor performance of Radičová's government (which lasted only for 15 months and fell far below expectations), Dzurinda was automatically blamed too. Despite criticism from inside of SDKÚ, he argued that "it would not help if I were to step down from the position of election leader" (Balogová, 2012). However, the 2012 elections brought as little as 6.09% for SDKÚ, while SMER, as its main challenger, was able to create a single-party government. Shortly after the elections, Dzurinda could not resist the pressure from inside the party and announced that he would not run for the chairmanship of the party for the next term (Tólová, 2012).

### ANALYSIS OF THE CONSEQUENCES: FROM WELL-PERFORMED CAMPAIGNS TO CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

Both discussed leaders understood that political success is determined by an appealing public image. In the case of Dzurinda, this was true mainly for the first years of his career as party leader. He was lucky enough to gain experience as the Vice-Chairman at Christian Democrats in 1994, and this allowed him to improve the targeting and performance of the newly founded SDK (Fitzmaurice, 1999). The successful campaign positioned SDK as one of the main pillars of the party system in Slovakia, and this rapidly increased the membership of SDK and, later, SDKÚ. However, SDK was internally too heterogeneous and thus unstable, which led Dzurinda to bypass the initial agreement and found SDKÚ as the direct successor of SDK. Despite increased homogeneity, an internal opposition began to form within the new party after Defense Minister Šimko (in the second Dzurinda cabinet) failed to vote in accordance with party orders (Balogová, 2003). Dzurinda did not hesitate to rely on his high degree of support inside of SDKÚ and effectively silenced his loudest critics, who soon left the party. This kind of leadership allowed Dzurinda to stand in the lead of an internally very cohesive party during his whole Prime Ministership, ending in 2006 (Table 11.3).

Fico learnt his lesson in political communication during the 2002 election campaign. Despite employing highly competent people and great positioning of the party, Fico went overboard with aggression and even though he got the highest overall number of preferential votes, SMER's result remained below expectations (Haughton, 2002). Nevertheless, the lesson was learnt and Fico subsequently developed a well-balanced campaign strategy that increased both electoral

**Table 11.3** The consequences of Fico's and Dzurinda's leadership for their parties

	<i>Terms in office</i>	<i>Electoral performance</i>	<i>Intra-party cohesion</i>	<i>Party membership</i>
Robert Fico	First (1999–2003)			
	Second (2003–2006)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Third (2006–2010)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Fourth (2010–2016)	Higher	Higher	Higher
	Fifth (from 2016)	Lower	Lower	Lower
Mikuláš Dzurinda	First (1998–2000)			
	Second (2000–2002)	Lower	Higher	Higher
	Third (2002–2006)	No effect	No effect	No effect
	Fourth (2006–2010)	No effect	Lower	Lower
	Fifth (2010–2012)	Lower	Lower	Lower

performances as well as party membership until the 2016 elections.<sup>3</sup> It is hardly surprising that this continuous increase consistently pleased the structures inside the party and its internal cohesion was on the rise as well (Rybář, 2007) (Table 11.3).

### *Divergence in Patterns After Access to Office*

Fico and Dzurinda employed obviously similar strategies when entering party leadership office. However, from the moment their parties became the leading forces in the newly established coalitions, their strategies started to diverge. Dzurinda remained a consistent politician who competently balanced the heterogeneous demands of the parties included in his coalition(s) with the aim to implement social and economic reforms necessary to rebuild Slovakia's international recognition (Fitzmaurice, 2004; Haughton & Rybář, 2008). Reaching office in 1998 represents the peak in Dzurinda's public image and he did not implement any strategy to increase his popularity even when it became obvious that the implemented reforms were opposed by the people (Polák, 2004). Despite that, the electoral results of SDKÚ remained roughly comparable over time, which is the most probable explanation for why Dzurinda did not change his strategy as party leader and politician. However, the

<sup>3</sup>Part of the increase in the party membership is a result of mergers with other leftist and left-leaning parties.

party growth stopped and later started to decline in terms of membership as well as intra-party cohesion (Rybář, 2011).

In 2006, despite international criticism (Bugaric, 2008), Fico eagerly created an authoritarian-style party government and stayed focused on communication performance, while policy implementation remained secondary (Gati, 2007; Henderson, 2010). What makes Fico a competent party leader is his capacity to use his personal popularity to reach public office and subsequently satisfy the demands inside of his party. The public support for SMER continuously increased from its formation until the 2012–2016 term. This was achieved only thanks to absenting ideology and policy content, so Fico could flexibly respond to popular demand, quickly adjust his communication performance and position himself as a possible solution (Rybář & Deegan-Krause, 2008). Obviously, constant electoral success and growing popularity is a very attractive attribute for new members and deeply satisfying for party structures. Therefore, SMER's intra-party cohesion was high and, in fact, there was no visible intra-party conflict visible from the outside until Fico's presidential campaign in 2014 and SMER's parliamentary campaign in 2016, which were both built around unfortunately chosen topics.

### *Keeping the Chair for Too Long*

Despite staying in the opposition during the 2006–2010 term, Dzurinda came under the spotlight due to a scandal related to SDKÚ's party finances. His non-convincing response put him under pressure before the approaching 2010 election. Therefore, Dzurinda agreed to hold party primaries to determine the election leader and he himself did not run (Balogová, 2010). He did, however, keep the chairmanship. The pressure further increased after the disappointing government performance led by SDKÚ during 2010–2012 in which Dzurinda took on the role of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Nevertheless, he led the party to the 2012 elections while claiming “it would not help [SDKÚ's popularity] if I were to step down” (Balogová, 2012). Yet, the party ended with 6.09%, after which Dzurinda announced that he would not run for another term of chairmanship (Fig. 11.1).

During the period of SDKÚ's decline, Dzurinda remained consistent, which did not help the party at all. His decreasing popularity and passive approach toward communication performance caused the inevitable marginalization of the party. Interestingly, despite the rapid decrease in party

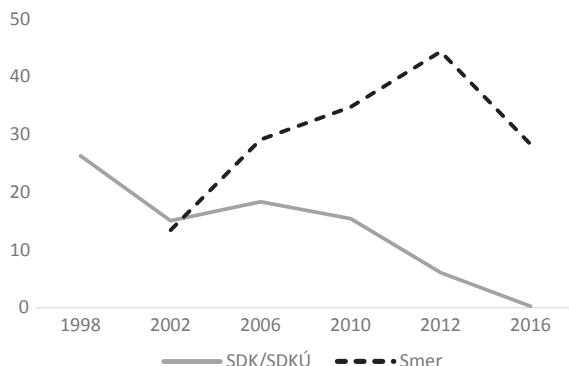


Fig. 11.1 Electoral support for Smer and SDK/SDKÚ (1998–2016)

support and the heavy criticism from inside the party, Dzurinda managed to keep the chairmanship, and intra-party opposition groups left rather than attempt to take the lead. This shows how Dzurinda setup the internal party functioning in a way that SDKÚ was unable to internally recruit another generation of leaders. Therefore, shortly after Dzurinda stepped down, SDKÚ was completely marginalized.

Fico was able to sustain his leadership thanks to his communication abilities. Despite corruption scandals related to his 2006–2010 cabinet, he managed to repair his image as a competent political leader (Deegan-Krause & Haughton, 2012), and his 2012–2016 single-party government, which had made no significant achievements whatsoever, also did not hurt his or his party's top position in public preferences. Fico's poor selection of campaign topics in the 2014 presidential and the 2016 legislative elections brought disappointing electoral results (Rybář & Spáč, 2015, 2017) and intra-party opposition groups openly expressed their criticism for the first time in the party's history. Although Fico acted quickly to dampen the critique and secured SMER's position in the post-2016 government, the party lost the intra-party cohesion it had previously had, and it lost its attraction for new party members as well. Therefore, it seems that SMER's stability was heavily dependent on the popularity of the leader, which brought high electoral gains and access to public offices. This was a satisfying combination for the party structures, which appeared to be very homogeneous to outside observers. However, the decrease in Fico's popularity also brought intra-party struggles.

## CONCLUSION

In Slovakia, where only two relevant parties since 1993 (i.e. Christian Democrats and Slovak Nationalist Party) have managed to replace their leaders and maintain their relevance, the focus on the influence of personality traits on party politics is especially important. This chapter examined two party leaders—Robert Fico and Mikuláš Dzurinda—who represent two politicians with the highest influence on Slovak politics during the last two decades (1998–2019).

While Robert Fico obviously left SDĽ because its leadership restricted him from reaching a high-profile office, Mikuláš Dzurinda reneged on the original temporary nature of the five-party cooperation against Mečiar and instead transformed SDK into a regular party—SDKÚ. It seems that in both cases it was the need for power that led them to establish their own parties and step into their lead. To consolidate power, they focused on self-confident communication performance through which they achieved high degrees of personal popularity and eliminated the opposition inside as well as outside of their parties during the early years.

Robert Fico maintained this pattern for another decade after first becoming Prime Minister. His personal popularity brought high election gains and therefore he was able to employ his political flexibility and ability to comprehend the cognitively complex political environment to access public offices. That was satisfactory for party structures and SMER appeared to be internally highly cohesive as long as Fico managed to maintain this pattern.

After becoming Prime Minister, Dzurinda gave up on his popular public image and focused on managing his heterogeneous coalitions to implement the policies he perceived as necessary. After moving into the opposition, Dzurinda did not do much to improve his popularity. Despite moving to the background and leaving the election leadership to others, he kept the chairmanship for himself. This resulted in increasing intra-party conflicts and decreasing party membership, which effectively brought the party to marginalization in 2012, when the previously dominant party on the Slovak political landscape ended with as little as 6.09%. Subsequently, Dzurinda announced that he would no longer seek the chairmanship.

In contrast with Dzurinda's clear ideological profile, Fico does not tie himself to an ideology or comprehensive political visions. This allows

him to respond flexibly to current political developments and through his self-confident communication performance achieve electoral gains for the party. The sustainability of Fico's leadership seems to be a well-managed combination of (a) his capacity to turn high election gains into access to public offices, which (b) effectively satisfies party membership. What remains a question is how SMER will react to recent political developments in Slovakia. Since its emergence, SMER relied strongly on the popular personal image of its leader. However, the political crisis in 2018 that started mass civic demonstrations damaged the support of both Fico and his party. However, we must wait until the near future for conclusive evidence.

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## CHAPTER 12

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# Conclusion: An Aggregate Comparison of Party Leaders in Eastern Europe

*Sergiu Gherghina*

## A DIVERSITY OF PARTY LEADERS

This book had three central goals: (1) to describe and compare the personality traits and associated behavior of party leaders; (2) to assess the changes in leaders' personality traits during their time in office; and (3) to identify the impact of leaders' traits on their parties' electoral performance and organization. To this end, each country chapter analyzed two leaders along the six personality traits presented in the introduction to this edited volume. They provided an in-depth and fine-grained scrutiny of the leaders' behavior in office, taking into account several contextual developments within the party system. This final chapter brings together all the country-specific observations and assessments made in the individual contributions to deliver a comparative, and slightly broader, perspective of party leadership in Eastern Europe. This is done with the aim of highlighting the implications of this book for the future study of party leadership. Since this is the first comparative study of party leaders in Eastern Europe, let us start with an overview of their time in office.

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All the 20 leaders scrutinized in this book are men and are well-known faces in domestic politics. Many of them were also prime ministers. This is not surprising given the fact that they were the leaders of parties that participated in government coalitions, quite often in a position of *formateur*. Figure 12.1 depicts the number of years spent in office by the party leaders analyzed in this book. They are clustered by country with the leader who spent fewer years in office being listed first. The gray and dark bars are only used for visual purposes, i.e. to clearly delineate countries from each other, without any substantive meaning. The time in office depicted in the graph was calculated until May 2019 for the leaders who are currently in office. The years in office have been rounded. There is great variation both within and between countries. Within countries there are only isolated cases in which the two leaders served for a similar number of years in office (e.g. Croatia or Serbia). For most other countries there are major differences between the experiences in office of those who were selected for analysis. For example, in Poland one leader was in office for 12 years while the other held office for 16 years. Greater discrepancies are observed in Hungary (12 vs. 23 years).

Between countries, there is a very broad range of time in office that goes from five (Ponta in Romania) to 24 years (Natelashvili in Georgia). The latter value becomes even more relevant if we keep in mind that the maximum time in office is 30 years, i.e. the time elapsed between the fall of the previous regime. One of the main criteria used to select the leaders

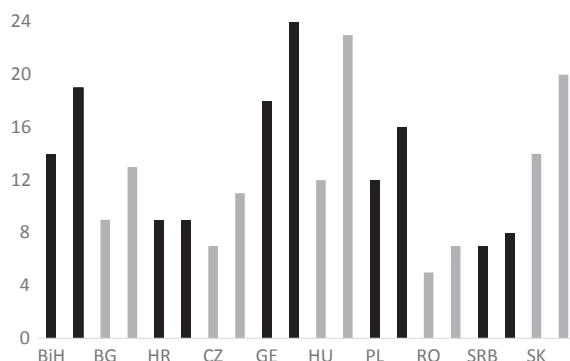
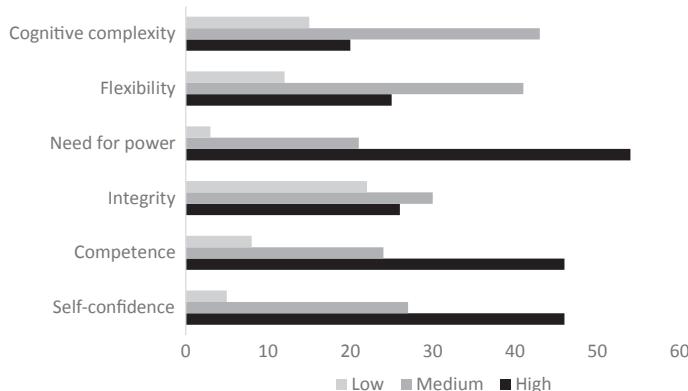


Fig. 12.1 The number of years spent in office by party leaders

for analysis was that they had to serve at least two terms in office. Based on this, we would expect a greater homogeneity of the years in office across party leaders. Yet, we can identify notable empirical differences that have two main explanations: the duration of the terms in office differs across parties and some leaders were more stable than others, serving for more terms in office even though sometimes these terms were short (e.g. Fidesz in Hungary). An additional explanation is the extensive personalization of party politics. There are quite a few cases in which the party is dependent on the image of its leader (e.g. both parties analyzed in Bosnia, Georgia, Poland or Slovakia). As explained in detail in the book's chapters, this process of personalization followed two paths. In certain countries, it occurred during the party formation when an individual with political ambitions started a party and gradually developed an organization around him. In others, prominent leaders have risen to power when parties faced the need to reform or address electoral loss. Their initial success in fulfilling these two tasks led to a continuation in office.

## THE PERSONALITY TRAITS

This section focuses on the distribution of personality traits among the party leaders and the consequences they produce. To this end, it uses the term in office as a unit of analysis. There are 78 terms in office on which the six personality traits are distributed as indicated in Fig. 12.2. These traits have been extensively discussed in each of the country chapters and the authors explored whether the leaders score low, high or medium on each trait. There are three traits on which the leaders score uniformly high: the need for power, self-confidence and competence. The high need for power means that most of these party leaders are keen to hold control over what happens in their parties and to be actively involved in the decision-making process. The high centralization and the exclusion of others often ends up in the presidentialization of the party in which the officeholder gains prominence against the party organization. A great many of the East European leaders included in this book display this feature, with only three terms in office being characterized by a low need for power. This strong inclination toward control contrasts with the more recent trends of decentralization in party organizations across Europe. However, many leaders studied here were in office before this trend began.



**Fig. 12.2** An overview of the character traits for party leaders

The high scores on self-confidence and competence indicate that the need for power comes with trust in their own powers and knowledge about how to proceed. Most party leaders appeared to know what they were doing and thus back up with substance their desire for prominence in the life of their party. The distribution in Fig. 12.2 refers to aggregate numbers and the association between individual terms in office is not presented. However, the descriptions in the country chapters indicate that the three can go hand in hand. For example, as many analyses in this book indicate, self-confidence is an important trait especially if leaders want to stay in office through re-election. The re-election is often achieved through competent handling of difficult situations. Self-confidence and competence can be the root of high need for power: when leaders see how well they can control the game, it makes little sense to devolve power. In a different logic, the high need for power can also re-inforce self-confidence since a leader in control will have to take decisions that convey a clear message to avoid creating opposition against his actions.

Flexibility and cognitive complexity are the two traits for which most party leaders in Eastern Europe score in the mid-range of the continuum. In roughly half of the terms in offices analyzed in the book, the leaders were considered to have medium capacity to adapt to new challenges and be responsive to the opinions of others. In quite a few instances (12 terms in office for different leaders) their flexibility was low and corresponded to bumpy periods in the life of the party. Being in the mid-range in terms of flexibility is not a poor strategy considering the

multiple pressures to which leaders are subjected. Contemporary political parties have either a hierarchical or a stratarchical organization. The hierarchical organization presupposes the existence of a vertical chain of command, having at the top one or just a handful of people that decide (Eldersveld, 1964; Katz & Mair, 1995; Michels, 1911; Panebianco, 1988). Stratarchy means that political power is not located in a single place and various units within the party enjoy various degrees of autonomy in their activities and decisions (Carty, 2004). The two models do not exclude each other since even the stratarchical structures presuppose some hierarchy in the distribution of power and resources between party units (Bolleyer, 2011). All these indicate that in both types of organization the party leaders receive demands from those who want to keep them accountable. The usual suspects include the central office, the congress, the territorial branches or the members. Too much flexibility could result in giving up some of the leadership authority in favor of other units and weakening the leaders' position.

The medium scores for cognitive complexity reflect incomplete awareness of the problems with and within the party. It is vital for a leader to be able to process and use information about what happens around him. And yet only in one-quarter of the terms in office, e.g. in 20 out of 78, were the leaders considered to have high cognitive complexity. At a glance, this distribution contrasts with the earlier idea about competence. It can be questionable how party leaders can perform well in office with medium or even low levels of cognitive complexity. The two are not mutually exclusive either in theory—as indicated in the introduction to this volume—or in reality as illustrated in several country chapters. The logic behind their coexistence is that party leaders can fulfill well the tasks associated with their position without being familiar with every single issue arising in their environment. That explains, for example, why although the leaders were competent in office, there were factions emerging within the party. The latter were formed and mobilized support within the party on the grounds of limited awareness of the party leader regarding sources of discontent.

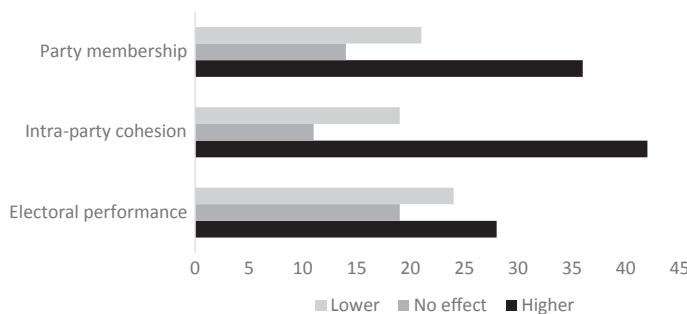
Integrity is the trait for which the party leaders are almost evenly distributed across the three values. It is also the trait with the highest number of assessments in the low category. Trustworthiness, reliability and honesty of leaders have been questionable in a number of instances with only 26 terms in office being assessed as high. As the chapters of the book illustrate, low integrity in office corresponds to situations in which the party leaders pursued their own interest above that of their party, behaved misleadingly to achieve goals or could not be relied upon.

The medium or low integrity of party leaders match the broader perception that citizens have about East European politicians in general. The negative opinion of the public was determined by corruption scandals, incompetence in office, lies and the pursuit of personal interests in office. When such behaviors are replicated by party leaders, it is unlikely to lead to positive consequences for the parties.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF LEADERSHIP STYLES FOR PARTIES

With respect to consequences, the book has closely analyzed the effect of the leadership style—measured from this combination of traits—on electoral performance, intra-party cohesion and membership rolls at the national level. When assessing the effects, the authors indicated the developments of the party during a leader's term in office. The latter was the unit of analysis and Fig. 12.3 depicts the distribution of assessments according to the three values used: higher, no effect or lower. As these labels indicate, the effects were measured relative to the previous performance of the party. Consequently, the number of terms in office is somewhat smaller than the one for Fig. 12.2 because several party leaders analyzed in this book were the first to occupy that position. Thus, for their first term in office, no positive effects could be observed and the analysis started from their second term in office. The availability of data is another reason for which the number of terms in office is smaller for Fig. 12.3—one in Georgia and one in Poland, see the country chapters.

A caveat must be acknowledged when discussing the effects of leadership style. This is the aggregate perspective and there is only a limited



**Fig. 12.3** An aggregate assessment of party leadership effects

ability to discuss causal relationships without the individual traits. Those are available in the individual chapters and here we aim to have a more general comparison about the broader effects of leadership styles. Each country chapter sought to provide a discussion about the three hypothesized relationships. We address the hypotheses here in a more general sense. The results in Fig. 12.3 indicate that the most ambiguous effect of party leadership is on electoral performance. In 28 instances, the party leaders increased the vote share of their parties from one term in office to the next. In 24 elections they lowered the party's vote share and in 19 there was no effect. Arguably, among the three variables this is the variable we would expect to have the weakest effect, especially in the short term. The traits and behaviors of party leaders are only partially available to the broader electorate and thus are less likely to make an immediate impact. Quite often, their actions and reforms to improve the functioning of a party are reflected in electoral performance in the longer term. Unless there is a dramatic change when compared with the previous leadership, ordinary voters need more time to see what has changed under the new leader.

The most obvious impact of leadership style is with intra-party cohesion where in more than half of the terms in office (42) leaders had a positive effect. In only one-quarter of situations (19 terms in office) their leadership style weakened intra-party cohesion. Intra-party cohesion is a multi-faceted concept that involves a variety of party units—for a review of the literature, see Close and Gherghina (2019)—and the role of the party leaders can be paramount. The latter is supported by rich empirical evidence in this book, which complements the existing knowledge about the role of party leaders (Cross & Pilet, 2016). Many country chapters indicate how different combinations of traits and behaviors helped various party leaders to strengthen the cohesion of their organizations. Since there are rare instances in which leaders do not affect intra-party cohesion ( $N=11$ ), this effect could be the subject of further research on the relationship between the leader and the organization.

The effects of leadership style on membership rolls (H3) are also quite straightforward. In more than half of the terms in office analyzed in this book the party leaders succeeded in boosting the party organization. The detailed analyses in the country chapters reveal how sometimes this effect was the result of leaders' competence, flexibility or cognitive complexity. There were several instances in which contextual factors also played an important part in what happened with the number of members that had little connection with the type of leadership. For example, the legacy of

the previous leader or stronger political competition from newly formed political parties augmented or inhibited the enrolment of new members. In slightly more than a quarter of the terms in office ( $N=21$ ) the leadership style lowered the number of members. This often has been associated with a higher need for power and low integrity. When members or potential members perceive that leaders have a strong need for control, they may become aware that their voice within such a party will be heard less. In addition, few people want to be associated with a party that has a person with integrity problems in a leadership position.

Further research can delve deeper into these effects and seek to unveil the functioning mechanism. The analyses in this book focused on the personality traits and were quite exploratory in terms of consequences. The intention was to cover three possible effects and to observe discernable patterns across leaders, parties and countries. The discussion built on general assessments of leaders' behaviors, documented over several terms in office. Future research on the topic is welcome to substantiate and refine these findings. The comparisons in this edited volume intended to show that many processes and developments happen along similar lines. As such, they are neither exceptions nor context-sensitive and can foster a broader understanding of how important leadership styles are in contemporary politics.

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