6 - A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH REGARDING THE POLITICIANS’ PERSONALITY

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Abstract
In the field of political psychology, the topic concerning politician’s personality is one of great interest because of the influence the politicians’ decisions have on every citizens’ life. In Romania little research have been done regarding this topic. Therefore, I conducted a systematic literature review to find out which is the current state of study on this subject and to clarify the directions and main approaches developed internationally. I identified five research directions, which could fetch a new light over the Romanian Political Psychology field. These are: the analysis of politicians’ work and performance, the cognitive approach in the study of the politicians’ personality, the role of mass-media channels in creating the perception about the politicians’ personality, the study of politicians’ perceived personality traits and the psychological profiling of political leaders.

Keywords: personality, psychology, behavior, politician.

1. INTRODUCTION/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The field of political psychology is extremely important for the social life of any country, but in Romania little research has been done regarding this specific area of psychology. The Romanian society is changing continuously and finds itself now in a period of political uncertainty, with an economy that has to recover from the economic crises of the year 2008. Thus, Romania is in the present-day, between East and West, in an electoral year that will establish the political strategic direction for the future – an ambiguous future due to the Ukrainian conflict, Hungary’s and Poland’s democratic difficulties, Bulgaria ‘state capture, Serbia’s

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fluctuations on its path for integration in the European Union, and the divergent interests of Russia and The United States of America at the Black Sea.

There are several Romanian authors who have contributed to the field of political psychology, among them Lavinia Betea, Cristina Pripp, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Laurențiu Maricuțoiu, and Alin Gavrielieuc. All these authors approached the field of political psychology by developing theoretical frameworks. Therefore in Romania we have insufficient applied research in this field, and almost none regarding the Romanian politicians’ personality.

But what is the definition of the political psychology? I will provide the definition from the Psychology Encyclopedia written by Septimiu Chelcea and Petru Iluț: „an interdisciplinary field of scientific knowledge of behavioral interaction between individuals and groups in the political environment (political behavior – electoral behavior, psychological study of the political elites, people ‘social representations regarding political parties and political leaders” (Chelcea, & Iluț, 2003, p. 298).

In one of the studies of political psychology published in our country, - Political psychology. Individual, leader, group, in the communist regime – Lavinia Betea explains that the field of political psychology is close to the one of social psychology, view as the study of the individual’s behavior in his social environment. The author further explains the close relation between psychology and politics, asserting that psychology represents “the science about the human being, about his needs and reactions, about his activity and personality”, and for this reason “one cannot overlook its contribution to the understanding of politics” (Betea, 2001, p. 9-45).

2. SYSTEMATIC LITTERATURE REVIEW

2.1. OBJECTIVE

In order to answer the question “which is the current state of research on politicians’ personality?” I decided that a qualitative research synthesis of the literature regarding this subject would be appropriate. I have chosen to do a qualitative research synthesis of the literature and not a quantitative one because the group of studies are so methodologically diverse as to make the meta-analytic aggregation impractical, and also because conceptual and methodological approaches to research on this topic have changed over the last six years and I think there is benefit in reviewing all of this research.

I also want to emphasize the fact that the attention given to the personality factor as a theme studied by the political psychology field has been growing in the
last two decades. In my opinion this happened because until recently the psychological research in the personality area did not succeed to produce concise and valid taxonomies which could be useful to the study of political psychology. Apparently this situation is changing and I will outline my findings in the conclusion chapter.

2.2. PROCEDURE

For the systematic review I conducted a search in the most known data bases: Science Direct, Springer, Thomson, ProQuest, OUP, IEEE, Scopus, Sage, Wiley, Emerald, Taylor, Cambridge, IOP, MSN, NUS Libraries (National University of Singapore).

This search was conducted in June 2016, in English, by utilizing the syntax: subject terms - ("personality" OR "personality descriptors" OR "traits" OR "behavior" OR "personality assessment") AND subject terms - ("politician*" OR "political candidate" OR "statesman") AND abstract - ("research" OR "review" OR "meta-analysis"). I excluded newspaper and non-peer-review articles.

The procedure I followed for the systematic literature review is presented in fig. 1.
From the 490 initial records I reduced the search to 20 articles which I studied in full-text.

The criteria I used for the exclusion of the articles: year of publication (older than 2010) – n=257; relevance of the article regarding the main topic (i.e. politician’s personality – political psychology) – n=68; focus on issues only related to the main topic (e.g. gender stereotypes, ethnicity, simple biographies, political marketing, political communication etc.) – n=141; impossibility to find the full-text of the article – n=3; full-text articles, but with confusing results and conclusions and incoherent argumentation – n=1.

3. RESULTS

Because of the diversity of the 20 articles included in the qualitative synthesis, I chose to arrange this review conceptually, so that articles relating to the same ideas appear together as general directions for research regarding the politician’s personality.

The five research directions I identified in this review are:

1. The analysis of politicians in terms of the work that they're doing, and performance they achieve (Duduciu, 2012b; Silvester, Wyatt, & Randall, 2014). This kind of approach follows the hypothesis that politicians’ personality traits influence their work and political performance. This relation personality-performance has been studied by Alina Duduciu (2012b). She highlights the fact that social perception about politicians’ personality has two facets – morality and competence – which both can influence citizens’ electoral behavior. Other authors (Silvester, Wyatt, & Randall, 2014), explain that politicians could benefit from the psychological analysis of their work and performance. This analysis should be done by psychologist using the specific methods of the organizational psychology field.

2. The cognitive approach in the study of the politicians’ personality (Duduciu, 2012a; Ng, & Kidder, 2010; Resch, & Bella, 2010; Suedfeld, 2010). These studies approach the politicians’ personality from a cognitive point of view, analyzing topics like: the role of the integrative complexity in politics (Suedfeld, 2010); the importance of politicians’ facial discrimination for the electoral behavior which is impacted by the first impression of the political candidate’s physical appearance upon the voters (Duduciu, 2012a); the study of the politicians’ emotive performance – for politicians the public display of emotions represents a real social performance which should be attentively
analyzed, as in the cases of Bill Clinton and Jiang Zemin who according to their cultural background use authentic episodes of emotive performance to efficiently promote their political agenda (Ng, & Kidder, 2010); the study of the politicians’ personality by identifying the cognitive functions, attitudes, behaviors that might affect the politicians’ ability to perform, through indirect or direct methods like: analysis of speeches, interviews, and public participation, psychological analysis of biographical data, psychological testing (Resch, & Bella, 2010).

3. The analysis of citizens' exposure to political information, especially through the mass-media channels and the manner in which media contributes to the construction of the politicians’ personality perception (Brewer, 2014; Fridkin, & Kenney 2011; Rekklang, 2012). Today it is largely recognized that mass-media channels have great importance in building the politicians’ personality perception, influencing the electoral process and even the political participation. For example, the study of Paul R. Brewer (2014) has revealed the fact that politicians’ perceived authenticity during the electoral campaign is shaped by the news television channels, so influencing the result of the voting process. In the article “The Role of Candidates Traits in Campaigns”, the authors Fridkin and Kenney (2011) analyze the U.S. Senate Campaigns form the point of view of the information presented in the news coverage. This information is intended to shape citizen’s perception of the candidates and it succeeds in doing so, especially regarding the relation challenger-incumbent (e.g. negative trait information delivered to the press by the challenger influence citizens’ perception of incumbent). Also Pratoom Rekklang (2012) studied the relation between the political information exposure, the citizens’ perception about politicians’ personality, the political attitudes and the political participation in Bangkok. He revealed the fact that the political information influences both the political attitudes and participation, this influence being managed by the media channels.


The study of Castellani and Alberici (2012) investigated the influence of politicians’ perceived personality traits over the vote decision of early vs. late deciders. These traits proved to be a good predictor of vote decision in both cases, but the relation is moderated by three variables: citizens’ political sophistication, the different attention rendered to the challenger vs. incumbent candidate, and also
the quantity of information presented by the media regarding the challenger vs. incumbent candidate.

Oleg Gorbaniuk (2015) shows in his article that the politicians’ perceived personality traits can be evaluated in three ways: by questionnaires created for specific studies that are not linked in any way to personality models, by specific personality measure instruments or by creating a specific scale for the unique purpose of measuring politicians’ personality traits. He presents his own scale with four dimensions, each with seven adjectives (he argues that for measuring the perception on politicians’ personality traits few dimensions are needed than in the case of ordinary people, in this case four – strength, confrontationality, intellect and dishonesty). This study confirms the value of the particular scales for explaining citizens’ preferences.

Two articles (Hayes, 2010, and Holian, & Prysby 2014) examine the role of politicians’ personality traits in election process: U.S. 2006 Senate campaigns, and U.S. 2012 Presidential campaign. They prove that politicians’ perceived personality traits influence the vote choice. As in previous studies this relation is moderated by the incumbency effect and citizens’ political awareness. Also a British article (Vivyan, & Wagner, 2015) analyses what voters want from their local Member of Parliament, in terms of personality traits.

In his meta-analysis from 2015, Reuben Kline underlines the fact that the BIG Five taxonomy helped the understanding of some political behaviors, such as political sophistication, political participation, political partisanship and political ideology (Kline, Bankert & Levitan, 2015, pp. 9). Also Mondack (Mondack, 2010) estimates that personality (evaluated through Big Five dimensions) has a direct and indirect influence over many political phenomena (e.g. political participation, attitudes and information). Mondack is one of the researchers who applies the Big Five model in the study of the political behavior.

Another interesting study, is the one of the authors Vecchione, Castro and Caprara (2011), conducted in Italy and Spain. They analyzed the importance of studying both voters and politicians’ perceived personality traits, as they observed a similarity between voters self-reported traits and politicians’ hetero-reported perceived traits (e.g. there were observed high scores of similarity for agreeability indices between respondents and politicians they evaluated). This theory of attraction between individuals and persons with similar perceived personality is very actual in the political psychology field. The authors use the Big Five model for the study of the traits similarity. They found that political choice is influenced more by voters’ personality and politicians’ perceived personality traits, than by sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, or income.
5. The study of political leaders’ psychobiography, in terms of their psychological profile of personality and their political brand (Immelman, 2010; Zavattaro, 2010; Winter, 2011). All the three studies I cited refer to President Barack Obama form the point of view of his political personality profile and the significance of the Obama “brand”.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The five research directions I identified are: the analysis of politicians’ work and performance – 2 articles; the cognitive approach in the study of the politicians’ personality – 4 articles; the role of mass-media channels in creating the perception regarding the politicians’ personality – 3 articles; the study of politicians’ perceived personality traits – 8 articles; psychological profiling of political leaders – 3 articles.

I believe the findings of this review are consistent with the previous theories, evidence and practice in the political psychology literature regarding the subject of the politician’s personality.

The novelty I believe to be the new approach in the study of politicians’ perceived personality traits (8 articles) by applying the taxonomy of the Big Five model from the field of personality psychology to the field of political psychology. Thus, it have been demonstrated for example that politicians’ personality traits are a good predictor for the vote decision (Castellani, & Alberici, 2012). The strength of this approach is the methodological rigor and the amount of evidence these studies present. However, one limitation I came upon is the fact that longitudinal and intercultural studies could bring more consistent information to the research (which was not the case for the articles in the synthesis).

In practice, it should be very interesting for the Romanian researchers to develop new studies that match these directions developed internationally and enrich the research designs with new variables according to the political and social reality of our country.
5. REFERENCES


