

Leaders' personalities and the outcomes of democratic elections.

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Leaders' Personalities and the Outcomes of Democratic Elections

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Abstract

A widely held belief concerning democratic elections is that the votes of many individuals are influenced by their assessments of the competing candidates' personalities and other personal characteristics and that, as a consequence, the outcomes of entire democratic elections are often decided by 'personality factors' of this type. Experts on the electoral politics of six countries – the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Canada and Russia – set out to assess how far this emphasis on personality and personal characteristics is actually warranted by the available empirical evidence. Using a variety of methodologies, the authors seek to isolate and weigh the role played by personality both in influencing individual voters' behaviour and in deciding election outcomes. They conclude that, even with regard to the United States, the impact of personality on individual voters' decisions is usually quite small and that, more often than not, it cancels out. They also conclude that, largely for those reasons, the number of elections whose

outcomes have been determined by voters' assessments of the candidates is likewise quite small : much smaller than is usually supposed. Moreover, there are no signs that the importance of personality factors in determining election outcomes is increasing over time.

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