



Personalization of Politics

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Introduction

Over the last decades, the “personalization of politics” has turned into one of the defining elements of the democratic process. The common wisdom that sees popular political leaders as a fundamental electoral asset for their own parties has found increasing support in the existing comparative literature. Equally crucial aspects, such as the relationship between personalization and the old media, have been repeatedly addressed by communication research. A growing body of evidence from the fields of personality psychology and leadership studies has further refined our understanding of the role of individuals—politicians and voters alike—in driving this trend across time. Finally, institutional research dealing with parties, electoral systems, and cabinets has specified the structural transformations that fostered the personalization of politics in Western democracies and beyond. This article summarizes the growing body of available knowledge on the topic focusing, in turn, on General Overviews on personalization and politics; Electoral Research: Leader Effects on Voter Behavior and voting behavior; Personality Psychology and leadership studies; Party Politics; Political Communication; and Institutions: Primaries, Electoral Systems, and Executives and electoral systems.

General Overviews

The works cited in this section provide a general overview on the personalization of politics. Rahat and Sheafer 2007 and McAllister 2007 clarify the fundamental concepts and theoretical framework underlying the thesis. They offer a thorough account of the personalization of politics, focusing both on its causes and on its potential consequences. Similarly, Poguntke and Webb 2005, an edited volume, looks primarily at the institutional transformations affecting modern parliamentary democracies as a consequence of personalization. Karvonen 2010; Aarts, et al. 2011; and Lobo and Curtice 2014 draw on the theoretical contributes of these seminal studies and test the personalization of politics theory in a number of contexts. The authors take a comparative approach and systematically assess different dimensions of the phenomena, including variations at the individual and institutional levels.

Aarts, Kees, André Blais, and Hermann Schmitt, eds. *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Featuring a team of international experts and a wide range of data sources from nine Western democracies, this volume investigates aspects such as the role of television in the process of personalization, the actual weight of party leader evaluations within the voting equation, the role of electoral systems, the characteristics of parties, voters, and leaders and their relationship with electoral personalization.

Adam, Silke, and Michaela Maier. “Personalization of Politics: A Critical Review and Agenda for Research.” *Annals of the International Communication Association* 34.1 (2010): 213–257.

Presents an agenda for future research from a political communication angle. Highlights some of the methodological problems in current personalization research and the generalized lack of analyses dealing with the impacts of systemic and contextual variables.

Cross, William P., Richard S. Katz, and Scott Pruyers, eds. *The Personalization of Democratic Politics and the Challenge for Political Parties*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

A recent take on the phenomenon in an edited volume with chapters covering various aspects of personalism and personalization and how they affect contemporary politics.

Karvonen, Lauri. *The Personalisation of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies*. Colchester, UK: European Consortium for Political Research, 2010.

Summarizes evidence from numerous preexisting studies to draw a general assessment of the institutional, electoral, and media dimension of personalization. Limited positive evidence in favor of the personalization of politics results in a rather skeptic outlook.

Lobo, Marina C., and John Curtice, eds. *Personality Politics? The Role of Leader Evaluations in Democratic Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

As previous studies established that leaders do matter, this edited volume moves on to a second set of questions in the personalization of politics research: What constitutes the origin of these evaluations? In which institutional contexts are leaders more prominent? To which kind of voters? What is it about leaders that matters?

McAllister, Ian. "The Personalization of Politics." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Edited by Russell J. Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, 571–588. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

The most quoted piece on the personalization of politics so far. The author offers a threefold characterization of the causes of personalization, investigating, in turn, the role of institutional transformations (electoral reform), the growth of electronic media (and, in particular, the role of "political priming" by television), and the decline of parties and electoral participation.

Poguntke, Thomas, and Paul Webb, eds. *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

A fundamental volume about how Western parliamentary democracies are gradually resembling presidential regimes, without changing their formal structures. Authors argue that transformations occurred at the executive, party, and electoral levels.

Rahat, Gideon, and Ofer Kenig. *From Party Politics to Personalized Politics? Party Change and Political Personalization in Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

An important contribution on the link between party change and the personalization of politics. This cross-national analysis focuses on the general trends of party change in Western democracies while, at the same time, accounting for variance across countries.

Rahat, Gideon, and Tamir Sheafer. "The Personalization (s) of Politics: Israel, 1949–2003." *Political Communication* 24.1 (2007): 65–80.

Despite the focus on the Israeli case, it offers a substantial contribute to the general literature through conceptual definition and operationalization of the different dimensions of personalization: institutional personalization, media personalization, and behavioral personalization (along the lines of McAllister 2007). It has the merit of further elaborating on certain subdimensions (i.e., personalization in the behavior of politicians and of the public).

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