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## **An ideal president's personality: understanding the expectations of Russian citizens**

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# **An ideal president's personality: understanding the expectations of Russian citizens**

## **Abstract**

*Previous research has examined public evaluations of political leaders and has formulated batteries of qualities attributed to an ideal president (e.g., Trent et al., 2017). However, the question remains how voters arrive at their vision of an ideal political leader, specifically, its relationship to the evaluations of the incumbent president, culturally shared values, and qualities primed by campaigns (Kinder et al., 1980). This research investigates voters' expectations in the Russian Federation. Next to the traits of an ideal president, this study examines the domains voters draw upon when formulating these expectations. We conducted 20 in-depth interviews with Russian voters which allowed us to compose an initial list of qualities of an ideal president, falling into four broad categories: leadership effectiveness, moral character, qualifications and sociability. Based on the in-depth interviews, we were also able to indicate the domains that the voters depart from in their expectations. We find that the respondents rely on comparative, contextual, functional sources in their reasoning, as well as the domain of leadership style. Furthermore, we conducted a follow-up study employing 450 structured interviews allowing to examine the commonness of personality expectations in a sample balanced by demographic characteristics. This permitted us to make a quantitative inventory of the prominent personality attributes of a prototypical Russian president, demonstrating that the respondents were much more likely to focus on specific leadership traits than they were to focus on social skills or qualifications.*

**Key words:** *Russia, political elites, ideal president, personality*

## Introduction

Campaign professionals have identified individual politicians and their personalities as pivotal for political campaigns (De Landtsheer, De Vries & Vertessen, 2008). Furthermore, a considerable amount of academic literature has recognized the importance of personality perceptions for evaluations of political leaders (Chen, Jing & Lee, 2014; McCurley & Mondak, 1995; Pancer, Brown & Barr, 1999; Trent, Short-Thompson, Mongeau, & Metzler, 2017). A number of studies have also utilized the concept of an ideal politician (or a prototypical politician) to detect which qualities citizens desire in their leaders (Kinder, Peters, Abelson & Fiske, 1980; Roets & Van Hiel, 2009; Trent et al., 2017). The above studies found features such as competence, integrity, trustworthiness, dynamism, strength, charisma and compassion to be essential for candidate evaluations. However, the existing research can still be complemented in three ways that will be addressed in this article. Firstly, while previous studies have examined the lists of characteristics that voters desire in politicians, less is known about how they arrive at their preferences (Kinder et al., 1980). Secondly, there is still little clarity concerning the structure and content of personal qualities voters value in politicians (Clifford, 2018). The reconciliation of social cognition theories and standards of personality assessment still forms a challenge for the existing research. And lastly, the examination of voters' expectations concerning leaders' personalities in hybrid political environments, such as the Russian Federation, has remained seldom (Shestopal, 2018; Grachev, Rogovsky & Rakitski, 2007).

Following these inconsistencies, we propose a mixed-methods study of how Russian voters imagine the ideal president's personality, and what sources they draw upon in their expectations. This study relies on the qualitative thematic analysis of 20 in-depth interviews combined with a quantitative analysis of 450 structured interviews. Our main objective was to examine how voters arrive at their vision of an ideal political leader. Specifically, this research is interested in the domains they draw upon when formulating these expectations (for instance, evaluations of the incumbent president, culturally shared values etc.) (Kinder et al., 1980). The secondary objective was to contribute to understanding on structure and content of traits that voters attribute to an ideal president. As this research is set in the Russian Federation, placing our findings in this specific context and connecting them to the evidence from other environments also presents a supplementary task. The qualitative analysis allowed us to formulate four broad themes covering personality characteristics of an ideal president:

leadership effectiveness, moral character, qualifications and sociability. This supports and complements previous findings in the area of leadership studies and social cognition theories. Next, the quantitative data from the structured interviews provides an overview of the specific traits most frequently discussed by respondents, such as knowledge, strength, self-control, consistency, honesty etc. While the mentioned four domains are consistent with earlier studies, the quantitative part of the study also shows that the respondents more frequently discussed specific leadership traits than social skills or qualifications. Furthermore, we map four types of sources that voters rely on when formulating these expectations upon the ideal president (comparative, functional, contextual, leadership style). The comparisons (1) included references to domestic and foreign politicians, celebrities, fictional characters and respondents' own personality traits. The respondents also reasoned in terms of the tasks attributed to the presidential role or in other words functional sources (2) of expectations. Those requirements included being an example for the citizens, performing as a face of the state, navigating the complexity of the international and domestic political landscape. The next theme, contextual sources (3) pointed at the situational factors that dictate the ideal personality for a president, such as current affairs, as well as broader political and cultural context. Lastly, the category of the leadership style (4) encompassed the current or anticipated leadership practices which are brought in relation to certain personality traits. This theme covered 'hands-on' control of the state as a governing mechanism, corruption, power abuse on behalf of authorities etc.

Theoretically, the originality of this study lies in connecting voters expectations to several theoretical perspectives (social cognition, personality frameworks), and examining the sources of voters expectations. The empirical strength of this study is related to the origin of the data, namely, in-depth (20) and structured interviews (450) collected in the Russian Federation. From the point of practical relevance, this research is interesting for tailoring political marketing campaigns according to voters' expectations. As noted by Roets and Van Hiel (2009), studies of appraised political personality can result in recommendations on how politicians can present themselves in a favorable manner. This then facilitates campaign messages informed by voters' expectations in an electoral context and the political culture in which they are implemented. However, aside from the pragmatic perspective, such research is of interest given normative considerations. Specifically, this study contributes to a greater awareness among campaign practitioners on how voters reason. Possibly, a deeper insight into voters expectations could motivate practitioners to reflect on the routines of elite recruitment, especially in a hybrid environment like the Russian Federation, which faces challenges of opposition weakness. Furthermore, the empirical basis of this study would indirectly advance

the understanding of the Russian political culture and go beyond stereotypical simplifications among academics and practitioners.

The article has been organized in the following way. Firstly, the literature section reviews the cumulative relevant insights around the topic of ideal presidential personality. This facilitates the identification of knowledge gaps and brings us to the research questions of this study. Secondly, we present an overview of the methods that were used to collect and analyze the data. Thirdly, the results section catalogs the qualities attributed to an ideal president and it lists the sources of voters' expectations. The subsequent section discusses the results in relation to previous studies. We complete the article by considering the limitations of the present work, and with suggestions for future research.

## **Theory**

The literature review below discusses the theoretical insights and findings of earlier research on voters' evaluations of political leaders and the concept of an ideal president in relation to political reasoning. We then formulate specific expectations regarding leaders in the Russian political setting. Subsequently, we briefly discuss the aspects of the political personality research that are relevant to the present study.

### *Audience's evaluations of political leaders*

To date, there is no consensus in academic literature on the specific dimensions that are instrumental for evaluating political leaders. Different studies utilize two–four dimensions to capture the qualities that are relevant to audience's assessment of political leaders. The section below synthesizes different approaches to this topic.

A number of relevant studies are conceptually related in one way or another to the stereotype content model (SCM) (Clifford, 2018; Funk, 1999; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2007). This model helps to understand how people evaluate other individuals (including politicians) based on two dimensions. The SCM argues in favor of the two factors that carry relevance for social cognition, namely warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2007; Rosenberg, Nelson & Vivekananthan, 1968; Wojciszki, 2005). Warmth is related to the perception another person's social intentions (being friendly, trustworthy, moral). The dimension of competence captures this person's ability to fulfill these intentions (such as for instance, being efficient and persistent) (Fiske et al., 2007).

Interestingly, theoretically similar frameworks such as the Five-Factor Model (FFM) is also seen in the scarce studies of candidates' evaluations relying on two-dimensional personality frameworks (Caprara, Barbaranelli & Zimbardo, 1997; Caprara, Barbaranelli & Zimbardo, 2002). This model organizes individual differences into five dimensions or traits: Extroversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Costa & Widiger, 2002; Huddy, Sears & Levy, 2013). Caprara et al. (2002) argue that the public appraises politicians based on a simplified version of the Five-Factor Model. According to their findings, the voters' evaluations of politicians rely on two factors – Extraversion and Agreeableness. Caprara et al. (2002, p. 92) link these results to the two most dominant human social orientations: power/work/agency (at the core of the Extroversion factor of the FFM) and love/communion/well-being (at the core of Agreeableness).

However, later research has critiqued the two-dimensional SCM. Specifically, some studies have identified that the domain of warmth could be further separated into the factors of sociability and morality, which refer to essentially different sets of human qualities (Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi & Cherubini, 2011; Leach, Ellemers & Barreto, 2007). For that reason, it has been argued that the three-dimensional structure has greater explanatory power and is more suitable for research of how people judge each other (Clifford, 2018; Goodwin, 2015). Within the domain of warmth, Clifford (2018) identified the moral character as the strongest predictor of candidate evaluations. In addition, the SCM has shown to be systematically related to the dimensions of semantic differential proposed by Osgood (1957, 1977; Kervyn, Fiske & Yzerbyt, 2013), which also includes three dimensions. According to this model, political leaders (as well as other people) can be assessed on evaluation (e.g., good–bad); potency (e.g., strong–weak) and activity (e.g., active–passive). These dimensions were widely used for measuring attitudes with a high degree of cross-cultural universality.

Furthermore, prior to the prevalence of SCM, another influential study by Kinder et al. (1980) focused specifically on prototypes of political leaders. Kinder et al. (1980, 1986) identified a list of candidate characteristics attributed to an “ideal” president, forming four broad content dimensions: competence, integrity, empathy and leadership. Subsequent research sorted the specific qualities into even broader factors of leadership effectiveness, integrity and empathy (Funk, 1999). Despite the conceptual difference between these dimensions, they remain interrelated, collapsing into more specific characteristics (Funk, 1999).

To sum up, the stereotype content model (SCM) remains an influential theory within the field of political communication. The above studies apply either a twofold model based on the domains of warmth and competence or choose more specific dimensions (e.g. collapsing warmth into sociability and morality).

### *Ideal president in political reasoning*

Several studies show that people tend to have an idea of a prototypical president, or even an image with specific personality qualities linked to this concept (Kinder et al., 1980; Roets & Van Hiel, 2009; Trent et al. 2005; Trent et al., 2017). In addition, prior work has explored the idea of whether the prototypical images of ideal politicians are useful for comparing and evaluating the real-life candidates (Kinder et al., 1980; Sullivan et al., 1990). While the suggestion that voters compare the actual politicians to their conception of an ideal president might seem intuitively appealing, the existing research demonstrates more complexity in this process. To address this matter, we review the literature that accounts for the functions of presidential prototypes in political reasoning, the voters' characteristics and the contextual factors.

Numerous studies come to the conclusion that the process of evaluating presidential candidates is not uniform (Bittner, 2008; Kinder et al. 1980; Sullivan et al. 1990; Trent et al., 2017). In this regard, the work of Sullivan et al. (1990) describes the appraisal of actual political leaders as a comparative act that takes into account the assumptions about human nature in general, as well as a list of exaggerated expectations upon leaders as "superhuman". This means that on the one hand potential presidents are expected to be representative and relatable (so similar to a "normal" person), and on the other hand, they are supposed to rise above an average person's standard and carry some extraordinary qualities. Furthermore, this study points at the "incumbent bias", meaning that people use different standards to evaluate incumbent presidents than to evaluate new candidates (or challengers). This is consistent with the earlier findings of Kinder et al. (1980) that the citizens' idea of a prototypical president only has evaluative implications for the incumbent president. One of the explanations of these results is that the very image of the ideal president in the respondents' view draws from the assessments of the incumbent president. Another explanation of such findings is that the concept of an ideal president exposes something about the culture and conventionally shared views rather than about the appraisal of the real-life candidates (Kinder et al., 1980, Trent et al., 2017).



The above aspect touches upon the political context that is also discussed in literature as relevant for the evaluative consequences of voters expectations. In this regard, Kinder et al. (1980) have pointed at culturally shared values and qualities primed by political campaigns as potential routes for the exploration of how voters arrive at their vision of an ideal president. Similarly, Chhokar, Brodbeck and House (2007) take a comparative perspective when examining leadership practices across countries. Furthermore, other authors account for temporal aspects in research of the attributes of the idealized presidential candidate over time (Trent et al. 2005; 2017) by studying images of authorities in Russia (Shestopal, 2018). In a 28-year longitudinal study, Trent and colleagues (2017) conclude that the list of the favorable leader's characteristics remains generally stable across time. However, the relative importance of some attributes may vary depending on context and the public's expectations of issue-specific responses from their leaders (Trent et al., 2017, p. 295). Yet, when it comes to actual voting, Bittner (2008) concludes that the effect of the evaluations of a leader's individual qualities, namely their personalities, on the election outcome depends on the specific leaders and specific elections. A specific political context can also lead to an alteration in voters' expectations from a political leader's personality, as for instance the demand for strong leaders increasing in times of terrorist threats (Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009).

Additional explanations point at the importance of voters' characteristics. Kinder et al. (1980, p. 330) observe that Americans largely agree on a prototypical idea of a competent and trustworthy president. Trent et al. (2017) point at some demographic distinctions, namely, for example, that women have a longer list of requirements and attribute more importance to those requirements upon an ideal president than male respondents. Aside from supporting the findings on demographic differences the longitudinal work of Shestopal (2000a, 2000b, 2018) also points at the generational differences in political experience and perception in Russia. Furthermore, the ideological divide is also reflected in the qualities voters prefer in an ideal politician (Roets & Van Hiel, 2009; Trent et al., 2017). Additionally, US based research from Trent et al. (2017) found that Democrats attribute more importance to compassion than Republicans. Consistent with those findings, Roets and Van Hiel (2009) find that left-wing Belgian voters believe friendliness to be more important, while right-wing voters preferred politicians with high achievement drive. Furthermore, Caprara et al., (2007) indicate that voters prefer politicians with traits that are most similar to their own.

### *Expectations upon leaders and contextual factors in Russia*

Based on the above arguments, the current study takes into account the Russian political context. The Russian political system can be described as a hybrid combination of democratic and authoritarian features that have solidified in the recent decades (Baturu & Elkind, 2016; Gorshkov, 2016; Levitsky & Way, 2000; Reisinger & Moraski, 2017; Sakwa, Hale, & White, 2019; Sperling, 2018; White & Herzog, 2016). Concerning the specific expectations of leaders in the Russian context, it is worth noting that we are limited by the scarcity of the research of desired presidential attributes in Russia. However, there are several studies that address the non-role specific attributes of leaders in Russia. Grachev et al. (2007, p. 822) suggest that universal standards of charismatic, value based, and team-oriented leadership also apply in Russia. However, these standards matter less than in most other countries. In addition, based on a media analysis, this study was able to construct a typical Russian leadership profile conveyed in local media (Grachev et al., 2007, p. 825). The image of a Russian leader in general contains references to the action-oriented, energetic, hard-working personality, who can adapt in changing circumstances, and who is to demonstrate a certain degree of control over the situation.

Next, several authors (Grachev, et al., 2007; Kinder et al. 1980; Shestopal, 2016a; Weber, 2002) mention that the idea of leadership absorbs the stereotypes of heroes and rests on culturally-shared values. Specifically, Shestopal (2016a) notes that expectations of political leadership in Russia are rooted in religion among other things. The Orthodox belief in the divinity of political rule contributes to the idealization and personalization of presidential power. Even in the light of democratic transformations, the president presents, as head of the state, a paternalistic authority in a logical continuation of monarchist traditions (Pivovarov, 2001; Shestopal 2016a). This is further accompanied by what Shestopal (2016a) describes as “alienation of power”, which means that citizens regard the government as a complicated bureaucratic apparatus that functions at some distance from the population.

Lastly, as suggested by Kinder et al. (1980) the presidential prototypes are related to the evaluations of the incumbent president; in Russia’s case – Vladimir Putin. Several authors describe Putin’s governing in terms of sustained political order, Russia’s consistent development, and remediation of what is presented as the dark 1990s (Gorshkov, 2016, p.127; Dutkiewicz et al., 2016; Sakwa et al., 2019, p. 11). While authorities under Putin are still seen as alienated and non-reliable (Shestopal 2016b), the current elite and specifically the president is credited for the restoration of stability after the turbulence of the 1990s. In addition, Dutkiewicz et al. (2016) point at the paradox of Putin’s governing, namely that he managed to present himself as an opposition against the flaws in the system that led to his incumbency in

the first place. Furthermore, the current Russian political landscape is characterized by “conservative mobilization” with patriotism at its core (Dutkiewicz et al., 2016, p. 6). In line with that, Shestopal (2016a) notes that Russian patriotism arises from opposition to outside forces and acknowledgment of Russia as a great world power. Russia is presented as the guardian of more rigid morals as opposed to the threat of loosening norms and chaos (Fyodorov, 2019, p. 175; Shestopal, 2016b).

### *Defining personality*

The studies of voter’s evaluations typically include attributes related to a leader’s personality (such as being honest, humble, open-minded etc.). However, it appears that the content categories in the voter’s evaluations reported by the above studies are rarely, if at all, brought in relation to categories commonly used in personality research. Therefore, it currently remains difficult to connect attributes from candidate evaluations to the standards of personality research. To avoid this shortcoming and remain clear in our theoretical standing, we give a general definition of personality and its elements as intended to apply in this research.

Huddy et al. (2013, p. 8) define personality as “a collection of relatively persistent individual differences that transcend specific situations and contribute to the observed stability of attitudes and behavior”. The political personality theorists discuss such elements as *traits*, *motives*, *cognitions* and *social contexts* (Caprara & Vecchione, 2013; Schafer, 2000; Winter, 2013). In line with this idea, Winter (2003; 2013) has suggested a framework that relies on the above four elements, covering not only patterns of behavior (*traits*), but also *motivational* dispositions, *cognitions* (such as for values and attitudes) and *social contexts*, referring to the enduring and short-term environments that shape an individual and that become incorporated in personality. Therefore, the present study is interested in the attributes of an ideal leader that are covered by this definition of personality. For the specific characteristics we use two personality frameworks that were previously applied extensively for the research of personality in politics. In particular, we rely on the Five Factor Model (FFM) (Caprara et al., 2002; Costa & Widiger 2002) and the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC) (Immelman, 1993, 1998, 2005; Millon, 1994). The appendix gives an overview of personality attributes posited by these two models.

In summary, previous research has formulated batteries of qualities related to positive leader evaluations. Furthermore, the stereotype content model has shown to be relevant for

studies of expectations of the ideal candidate, covering the universal domains of social cognition – warmth (alternatively, sociability and morality) and competence. Despite the expected stability of the “symbolic demands” made regarding presidents (Kinder et al., 1980; Trent et al., 2017), there is some evidence that the ideal candidate conception and actual candidate evaluations are sensitive to contextual alterations (Bittner, 2008). For that reason, the present research proposes to not only explore the traits that the Russian respondents reportedly desired in a president, but also to examine how they arrive at their conceptions of an ideal president. Building upon previous research, the present work focuses on a diverse political environment and is based on a more advanced theoretical foundation, accounting for personality research and social cognition studies. Drawing upon the above literature, we formulate the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the prominent personality qualities in the respondents’ descriptions of an ideal president?

**RQ2:** What sources do voters draw upon in their perceptions of an ideal president’s personality?

## **Method**

To address the above questions, we propose a series of in-depth (20) and structured (450) interviews among Russian voters focusing on the personality characteristics they find important in their ideal president. The interviews were organized and conducted with the organizational support of the Faculty of Political Science, Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU), Russian Federation in October–December 2019. For pragmatic reasons, the recruitment of participants occurred in Moscow and several regions<sup>1</sup> through personal networks of the undergraduate students at the MSU. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary without reimbursement for the respondents. This study employed snowball sampling combined with several practices from the generic purposive sampling approach; specifically, recruiting participants that match a set of desired criteria (sample balanced by gender, age, and education) (Bryman, 2016; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). As the expectations from political leaders might differ in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and ideological preference of respondents (Caprara et al., 2007; Trent, et al, 2005; Shestopal, 2015; 2018), this heterogeneous sample might allow us to generate further expectations concerning the

<sup>1</sup> Kemerovo, Brjansk, Ivanovo and Bashkortostan.

variation and commonalities between the groups of respondents (Bosley, Arnold, & Cohen, 2009; Bryman, 2016).

### **Qualitative design<sup>2</sup>**

The first aspect of this research opted for a qualitative research design (RQ1 and RQ2) to address objectives related to the definitions and attitudes around the research topic (personality of an ideal president) as they arise from the perspective of the interviewees. The semi-structured interview guide was flexible enough to allow following up on aspects identified as important by the respondents themselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This way, we were able to recover not only the personality qualities linked to the notion of an ideal candidate from the respondent's answers but also explore other relevant concepts by probing more complex answers. The interview guide was pre-tested with two respondents and adjusted to avoid ambiguities. The participants were Russian citizens older than 18 years old (age of admission to the elections). The qualitative study sample consisted of 20 individuals (10 males and 10 females), between 18 and 76 years old ( $M^3 = 43$ ) with diverse levels of education.

### *Procedure*

The average duration of the interviews was 38 minutes. Each interview started with a short explanation of the course of the conversation, overview of the information sheet and the signing of the consent form. We began the conversation by asking the respondents about their interest in politics, what aspects of political life they find worth their attention, and what aspects they are less interested in and why. After that, we familiarized the respondents with the main topic of the interview by asking them to discuss the characteristics they believed to be important for an ideal president. At this stage, we avoided imposing meaning and relied solely on the characteristics mentioned by the respondents themselves. We began probing for elaboration and clarifications of the answers, for instance asking to give examples of situations when a president should exert certain personality characteristics. To stimulate the discussion, we asked the participants to rank the aforementioned personality characteristics and reflect on why they attribute importance to those qualities.

<sup>2</sup> This study has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Antwerp with positive advice on 20/11/2019

<sup>3</sup> Mean age

Subsequently, we moved to the exercises with stimulation material based on the concepts from the existing research. The respondents were invited to read cards, each containing a description of a fictional political leaders' personality. The descriptions varied in characteristics related to competence and warmth (sociability as well as morality), which have been shown to be relevant for evaluations of other people in previous studies (Clifford, 2018; Fiske et al., 2007; Leach et al., 2007). Then the respondents were asked to choose a leader that they believe would make the best president, followed by an inquiry to motivate their preference. This part of the interview was only directed on the second research question (RQ2), namely the sources that voters depart from in their requirements upon an ideal president. Therefore, this part of the interview was only used for the respective part of the analysis (RQ2), to avoid primed answers about the personality preferred in an ideal president (RQ1).

At the end of the interview respondents completed a short questionnaire, mapping participants' age, gender, education, interest in politics, ideological preference.

### *Analysis*

The recorded interviews were transcribed, and analyzed, based on the pseudonymized data. The qualitative analysis was conducted in the NVivo software via open (descriptive) and then thematic coding. We began with the open coding, developing the codes inductively from the data. After that we searched for recurring themes. In this process, we relied both on previous research (Caprara et al., 2011; Clifford, 2018; Funk, 1999; Immelman, 1993; Kinder et al., 1980), as well as new themes that were not covered by the concepts from prior investigations. This procedure allowed us to nuance the categories from the existing studies and left space for inductive category development. In addition, this approach was preferable as our data originates from the interviews with Russian respondents and could possibly contain new patterns differing from the findings of previous research. Subsequently, we have organized the codes according to categories available from the personality frameworks (Caprara et al., 2002; Costa & Widiger 2002; Immelman, 1993, 1998, 2005; Millon, 1994), candidate evaluation studies (Clifford, 2018; Funk, 1999; Kinder, 1986) and inductively established additional relevant categories emerging from the data. This took several rounds of restructuring and merging of the categories, after which we formulated a final list of four overarching themes for research question 1 (personality qualities of an ideal president).

Concerning the research question 2, due to the scarcity of previous research on the sources of voters' requirements upon ideal president, the themes almost entirely originated

from our own data. Additionally, the combination of deductive and inductive coding allowed us to address the relationship between the specific traits and sources of expectations (e.g., what personality traits are related to which presidential tasks).

### **Quantitative design**

For the quantitative analysis, a heterogeneous sample of 450 structured interviews Russian citizens was collected by our partners at the Moscow State University. The sample consisted of 51% females and 49% males. The age of participants was coded in categories<sup>4</sup>. The majority of respondents (67%) was highly educated. One third had general education (secondary school) and 2% had unfinished general education. Subsequently, these data could be linked to the interview data to ascertain differences in demographic groups.

The interviews comprised open and closed questions on various attributes of an ideal president as well as perceived qualities of real-life politicians. Taking into account our research objectives, we were primarily interested in the open-ended questions addressing personality qualities of an ideal president.<sup>5</sup> The available items did not measure the extent to which certain traits should be pronounced in the ideal candidate according to respondents, which limited our options for analysis. However, it was possible to code the presence or absence of specific characteristics in the description provided by the respondents. To tackle the above research questions, we have conducted a quantitative thematic analysis of respondents' answers with predefined categories constructed in the qualitative part of this study (while leaving space for additional category development). The goal of our thematic analysis was to categorize all instances of the phenomenon under consideration, namely the personality qualities that the respondents attributed to the concept of an ideal president (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Additional measures available to us included the respondent's political interest measured on a scale of 5 ranging from "don't follow politics at all" to "very interested" and ideological preference (ideological orientation preferred in a president, "What ideological preference should an ideal president have?").

<sup>4</sup> 18-25, 26-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 70 years of age and older.

<sup>5</sup> Items from the structured interview guide administered to 450 respondents:

1. "I believe an ideal president should be...";
2. "What qualities do you think an ideal president should have? Why?";
3. "What qualities are completely unacceptable for an ideal president? Why?";

## Results

The results section is organized in two parts. We first part addresses the personality of an ideal president in our respondents' view (RQ1). The next part discusses the sources that our respondents drew upon in their expectations of an ideal president (RQ2).

### *Personality of an ideal president*

In this section, we first look at what personality qualities the respondents use to describe an ideal president. For the first research question (RQ1) we discuss the substantive categories that have emerged from the qualitative analysis of the in-depth interviews (N=20). Based on the thematic analysis, we were able to formulate four broad themes covering personality characteristics of an ideal president: leadership effectiveness, moral character, qualifications and sociability. These contained further specific personality traits. The quantitative data from the structured interviews allows us to also report what personality qualities are most frequently attributed to the concept of an ideal president (N=450). Table 1 reports the relative frequencies of the four broad themes among the personality qualities that voters ascribe to an ideal president. Table 2 provides an overview of the four overarching themes that resulted from the qualitative analysis, collapsing into more specific personality characteristics.

[Table 1 near here]

### *Leadership effectiveness*

The personality qualities in this theme cover the president's fitness to execute their job as a leader in an adequate manner (Fiske et al., 2007). The most popular personality characteristic of an ideal president in this theme was strength of character (58.4%). In particular, the president must be decisive, able to take tough decisions and defend one's choices. The next trait mentioned by the majority of respondents (57.7%) was self-control. This way, the president should carefully weigh words and actions, react calmly and not be easily provoked. Furthermore, according to the Russian voters, the ideal president must be consistent in order to grant predictability in political life. This way, one must stick to their promises and declared convictions:

*"It shouldn't be someone who's led by his mood. I mean, his decisions should not depend on the fact that he woke up today, got off the wrong foot, he feels shitty, he is angry with everyone, so today he acts accordingly. And tomorrow, suddenly the sun is shining, the birds are singing, he feels good - and he is like "okay, let's do things differently". I mean, there must be consistency in decisions."*



Next, an ideal president must command respect. The respondents imagine an ideal president as an influential person that projects confidence and easily convinces people to follow. In their reasoning about these characteristics respondents mentioned that a person who makes a fool of oneself and does not match the required high status would fail at this role. Moving on to the other qualities, ideally a president should be capable, meaning that this person is expected to have enough energy, be efficient and hard-working. Notably, the respondents related this quality to age and health condition. Next, they indicated pragmatism as an important feature for a prototypical president. Open-mindedness, capturing adaptivity in new situations and ability to listen to other opinions also made it into the list. Turning to the less frequently mentioned qualities, some respondents (17.8%) also suggested that having grip and control over the situation is essential, specifically that a good president must check the work of others, acting like a “master of the house”. The other less frequently mentioned characteristics were independence and foresight:

*“He shouldn’t be fawning upon the government, neither upon the officials, nor the oligarchs. He says: “I think that’s the right way” and he does so. There are many opinions, and you will not be able to please everyone. But as state man, well, in particular the president, he must work for the good of the country.”*

#### *Moral character*

The characteristics reviewed below focus on the ideal president’s positive social intentions and stressed moral standards. Honesty and integrity took a central place in respondents’ answers (57.7%). Here various aspects of these qualities were formulated in a reverse way, meaning that the respondents departed from personality characteristics that they dislike in order to then flip them and formulate the description of the prototypical president. This way, lying, vanity and pretension, and putting on a show were contrasted by aspired sincerity and openness. Next, loyalty was judged as an important moral quality. Following the logic of Clifford (2018), this category also encompassed patriotism as a form of group loyalty that people experience with a positive moral connotation (social-good directed at one’s own group). Thus, according to the respondents, a would-be president should love and protect one’s people and motherland at all costs. In that regard, helping the domestic population before helping the rest of the world was also mentioned here. Interestingly, some respondents reasoned about loyalty in terms of common identity of the president with the Russian people and their leader understanding traditions and truly belonging to the nation as a group:

*“...be a patriot of one’s country and [...] well, let’s say, a man who understands to some extent the needs of the people, the problems of his own country. Well, probably that’s what patriotism means.”*

[Table 2 near here]

Furthermore, the respondents discussed fairness in their vision of the ideal president. Similar to moral qualities reviewed above, the respondents departed from what should be avoided, namely biases, favoritism and personal attachments. This way, the president should be impartial and differentiate private preference from duty:

*“When you are the head of state, you should embody its interests [...]. This also applies to such things as gluttony, love of money – all these categories, when you take care of yourself, while neglecting the state. In general, that’s not cool.”*

The forthcoming qualities were less abstract and included staying in touch with the people (being responsive and relatable) and not being selfish. Lastly, the virtue of kindness was judged desirable for a president, covering empathy, humane attitude and in general doing good things for other people.

### *Qualifications*

Another cluster of ideal presidential characteristics referred to professional qualifications. This group encompasses the president’s substantive competence (knowledge and experience) and cognitive abilities (intelligence). Knowledge turned out to be overall the most frequently mentioned characteristic across all themes (69.3%). This included the quality of the president’s education, hands-on insight into political life, professionalism and general erudition:

*“... first of all, this should be a professional person: a person who knows the material, grasps what is happening, can be on the same level and, and let’s say, understands the language of professional people in the field of economics and law.”*

Ideally, a president should possess versatile all-round knowledge, have an outstanding expertise in politically relevant areas, and be a broadly cultured, well-read person. Interestingly, some respondents linked these characteristics to the president’s social background, namely the family and social circle in which the president was raised (and therefore access to formal education). Others put emphasis on self-study, natural

inquisitiveness and adaptivity. In that case, respondents brought versatility in knowledge in relation to open-mindedness. By preference knowledge should also be complemented by high overall intelligence:

*“... a qualified politician, who is not a man of the people... is much less evil than a stupid man with a common background.”*

Practical experience was also discussed among the characteristics that make a person qualified for the president’s job; however, it was mentioned with less frequency (11.8% of respondents).

### *Sociability*

Lastly, the theme of sociability also came up in the interviews. Within this topic we have distinguished two aspects. Firstly, the ideal president is expected to be cooperative which broadly points at doing well in interpersonal communication. This entails being communicative, easy going and friendly. Secondly, charisma is the next feature of a prototypical president. In other words, they should easily win people over by being charming, animated, humorous and overall likable:

*“...and be able to present yourself in public. That is, he must be able to behave so to say in front of the camera, with a larger gathering of people, be able to take the attention of the public and work with it correctly.”*

The above views surfaced mainly in relation to their instrumental value for a politician as public persona, namely being able to charm others, freely and elegantly word their views and successfully interact with a team or partners.

### **Sources of expectations**

In this section we describe the types of sources (in other words, ways of reasoning) that our respondents drew upon in their expectations about an ideal president. Some of our findings overlap with the observations made in previous studies, such as for instance that voters rely on culturally shared values or the image of the incumbent president in their requirements upon an ideal president (Kinder et al., 1980). However, earlier research has not yet elaborated those ideas in detail, so our findings mainly originate from our own data. We were able to distinguish four types of sources, namely comparative (1), functional (2), contextual (3) and

leadership style (4). Next to identifying the sources of expectations, we also inspect their relationship to the specific trait categories.

First of all, the respondents relied on **comparative sources (1)** when discussing the qualities that they find important in an ideal president. The quotes coded under this theme covered to whom the voters compare an ideal president. In their argumentation of why certain characteristics are preferred in a president, they created a frame of reference consisting of well-known (political) figures or people in their environment. This way, the respondents attempted to estimate similarities or differences between an ideal president and, for example, currently functioning domestic politicians. The comparisons included references to the incumbent president, to prominent domestic politicians and to former leadership of Russia, as well as to foreign politicians:

*“I personally have a lot of respect for [ ...] Thatcher, yes. The way she ruled. She, surely, was very tough, in a way she even went too far. But she changed the country a lot, she showed how it’s done, and if it was necessary to send troops to another country, she would send them and give grounds for it.”*

*“For example, Boris Nemtsov [...]. In a country like the USA, he would have definitely won the election from Putin, 100%. In a country like Russia, his qualities have led him to be rejected by the system, right? [...] Because if you compare Putin to Nemtsov, who seems more like a president?”*

[Table 3 near here]

Interestingly, the comparisons went beyond the political context and extended to the domain of pop-culture (celebrities, fictional characters). Furthermore, respondents’ own personality traits also appeared in the comparative reasoning set side by side with those preferred in an ideal president (what they would do if they were a president). The comparisons varied in abstraction, starting with actual behaviors of specific individuals and moving up to broad evaluations of politicians or even people in general. In other words, the contrast between what is and what should be guided their reasoning. In some cases, respondents would directly move up to the abstract concept of an ideal president with their distinct unique expectations upon this role. Thus, in the comparative pattern of reasoning, the respondents borrowed qualities appraised in other individuals or familiar conventional abstract positive traits and applied them to their vision of an ideal president.

A following way in which the respondents reasoned about the personality of an ideal president was via the tasks that they believed to be at the core of the presidential role. We

have labeled these sources of expectations as **functional (2)**. The citizens justified their preference for certain personality qualities based on their functional role requirements of a president. Those requirements ranged from symbolic or formal tasks to responsibilities dictated by a particular context. To begin with, the Russian citizens in our study mentioned two symbolic functions that an ideal president is expected to fulfill paired with the required personality qualities. The first function is for a president to be an example for the citizens and is directed at the domestic public. An ideal president is expected to demonstrate socially desirable behaviors and reinforce positive conduct among citizens. This way, this function often appeared linked to moral character in the respondents' reasoning:

*“(Ideal president) ...should show people some kind of a fairway by his own example, by his own way of life. And if he is prone to some kind of [...] well, I wouldn't say "immoral" behavior, but that's possible too. I get it, but then this is unacceptable.”*

The second function is for the president to perform as a face of the state and is aimed at external international observers. Representing the country, preserving Russia's dignity and making sure the citizens do not have to feel embarrassed for their leader were mentioned here:

*“Well, when a person [...] cannot measure up to an event. Or, when he, as sometimes happened with the former presidents, might show up not sober, then, perhaps, this is what causes most negative emotions for me personally...”*

This task was brought in relation to one's ability to command respect, defend one's views (strength of character) and exert self-control. Moving on to more specific tasks, the respondents believe that leading international negotiations or dealing with domestic interest groups, as well as handling Russia's size and diversity also requires certain personality qualities (namely a combination of strong character with cooperativeness and open-mindedness). Furthermore, the respondents were concerned about the president managing the workload and delegating tasks in a team. In this case, the respective personality traits included being capable, hard-working, and cooperative. Hence, according to our findings, the formal and symbolic 'job description' translates into the list of personality attributes that an ideal president is expected to possess as an irreplaceable key figure in the political landscape. In this case, the respective personality traits included being capable, hard-working, and cooperative.

The next theme that emerged from the analysis was **contextual sources (3)**. Perceptions of the political context in Russia seemed to contribute to the requirements of an

ideal president. This theme indicated the link between the image of an aspired president and the actual situational factors that dictate what personality he or she should have. Firstly, respondents covered current affairs, topical issues and urgent problems, such as for example the most recent domestic news or international affairs:

*“.. if Siberia is on fire, do not say: ‘Well, it’s constantly on fire. You’re just not informed - this is normal’ [...] Empathy, there must be real empathy.”*

*“... even such a thing as returning Crimea to Russia really means security. Well, if there were American bases there, the Black Sea would be out of reach, we would have a constant threat ...”*

Secondly, the broader political context also had played a part in respondents’ reasoning. This type of reasoning helped respondents formulate requirements upon president based on perception of Russian politics in general, Russian identity, broad features defined by culture, ruling traditions, and perception of their country as a collective:

*“This is not the president I want. This is the ideal president for the country.”*

*“In **our case**, one should be stricter, yes [...]. And then most people embrace it. Well, maybe it also has to do with the Soviet past...”*

Thus, the respondents considered the contextual factors relevant to their expectations of an ideal president’s personality, including both immediate situations as well as the broad political context.

Lastly, the anticipated **leadership style (4)** formed another reoccurring theme. This category encompasses the current or anticipated undesirable leadership practices, such as corruption, chaos in political system, eradication of competition in politics or power abuse on behalf of authorities. Respondents connect these instances to specific personality characteristics that led or could lead to unfavorable consequences in the future:

*“...it seems to me that even though they are fighting corruption, we still have it. Therefore, certainly honesty is important.”*

Several problems (e.g., corruption) were related to lack of morality, specifically fairness and honesty. Remarkably, some respondents made a link between excess cooperativeness (sociability) and a potential corruption. In this reasoning, being too friendly and overly close with the team raises suspicions about informal cliques and president engaging in non-transparent dealing with a select circle. Next, ideal president’s personality is perceived as a

warranty to resist the challenges. Specifically, such qualities as independence, knowledge, grip and control over the situation are expected to prevent potential problems. There were also suggestions that the president is the one person accountable for the whole country, and therefore in some cases must take ‘hands-on’ control of the state to prevent chaos. While this sub-theme was consistently mentioned by the respondents, there was no attitudinal unity concerning whether it is desirable or problematic for a president to occasionally make unilateral decisions.

On the one hand, some respondents argued that once the president personally gets involved in, for example, local matters, things are more likely to be resolved in a more efficient way. In some instances, respondents criticized the president’s social circle and even used images of a ‘good tsar’, undermined by his courtiers on the local level (if only the president knew what was going on, he would fix things):

*“It seems to me that he is fulfilling his duties [...] But the only bad thing now is that he has to be on the spot to solve things. And where are the others? Well he comes ... Now the master will come, and the master will judge us. He helps everyone, people turn to him. He is also not three-core. And what about all the others - where are they? What about them?”*

Other respondents problematized the ‘hands-on’ control of the state even further. According to this view, the very fact that the president needs to get involved in order to resolve problems demonstrates the absence of reliable delegating mechanisms. Furthermore, too much control in combination with such traits as selfishness were linked to possible abuse of power by one person (specifically ‘authoritarianisation’, attempts to stay in office and control state resources no matter what).

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Prior studies have noted the importance of individual candidates and their perceived (as well as desired) personal qualities for political campaigning and electoral choice. This article aimed to deepen the understanding of how voters reason concerning the personality of an ideal president. The first research question in this study sought to identify what personality qualities are prominent in the Russian voters’ descriptions of an ideal president. The second research question examined what sources voters draw upon in their perceptions of an ideal president’s personality. Below we situate our findings in the existing literature on the topic and discuss them in relation to the Russian political context.

Similar to studies on social cognition, next to specific characteristics we were able to identify four overarching themes in voters' expectations about the personality of an ideal president. The qualitative analysis resulted in four groups of characteristics: **leadership effectiveness, moral character, qualifications** and **sociability**. This is divergent from some studies that opt for a twofold structure (Fiske et al., 2002; Fiske et al., 2007; Rosenberg, et al., 1968), and consistent with the work that selects more than two substantive domains to explain presidential character (Brambilla et al., 2011; Goodwin, 2015; Clifford, 2018; Funk, 1999; Kinder, 1986; Osgood, 1957; 1977). The current study used the separate domains of moral character and sociability (instead of one joint domain of warmth) as probing for complex respondents' answers demonstrated a conceptual split between these two themes. Merging those would result in a loss of meaning, specifically not making a distinction between a person's social intentions (moral good) and a person's social skills. Concerning the domain of competence, our qualitative analysis resulted into separation of professional qualifications (or substantive competence, e.g., knowledge and experience) and leadership effectiveness (can be interpreted as competence purely related to one's character). Similar approaches can also be found in other studies (Clifford, 2018; Kinder, 1986).

Our respondents described the personality of an ideal president in terms of the above four domains. The references to each domain varied in frequency. Leadership effectiveness turned out to be most frequently mentioned relative to the other three domains (43%). Moral character was the second most prominent dimension in the respondents' answers (32.9%), followed by qualifications (16.2%) and sociability (6.4%). Interestingly, the quantitative part of the study also showed that voters less frequently include sociability in their description of a prototypical president when compared with the other three domains. Conceptually, this is consistent with Clifford (2018) who finds that moral character is more important for candidate evaluations than sociability. Prior studies go even further and note that moral character is the strongest predictor of interpersonal evaluations and candidate appraisal across all domains (Brambilla et al., 2011; Clifford, 2018; Goodwin, 2015). Yet, this is not the case in the current study with leadership effectiveness (and not moral character) being the most frequent theme in respondents' reasoning. Our findings are thus to some extent similar to those by Chen et al. (2014), who found that trustworthiness (a morally-loaded trait) increased the chances of winning elections, but only for those politicians who were perceived as competent by voters. It is necessary to note that unlike previous studies, the current research did not look at the importance ratings, which of course limits the applicability of the above interpretations.



The fact that the broad domains can be further collapsed into more specific traits permits composing a more detailed profile of the ideal president based on the most frequently-mentioned qualities. Based on the qualities that were mentioned by 50% or more of the respondents, the ideal Russian president should be knowledgeable, strong, controlled, honest, loyal and fair. The first three qualities fall under the themes of qualifications and leadership effectiveness, and the last three are covered by the domain of moral character. The most frequent characteristic of knowledge was also found relevant for candidate evaluations in studies by Funk (1999), Kinder (1986), and Clifford (2018). Next, the strength of character can be related to the dominance (Immelman, 1993, 2005; Millon, 1994) and Extroversion (Caprara et al., 2002; Costa & Widiger 2002). Similar characteristics also appeared in Trent et al. (2017) (e.g. energetic and aggressive leader) among the consistent attributes of an ideal presidential candidate.

The next most-prevalent trait, having control over one's emotions and behavior, conceptually overlaps with Emotional stability from the FFM. The other popular characteristics of honesty, loyalty or fairness found their exact or almost exact matches in the candidate evaluation frameworks under the domain of morality (Clifford, 2018; Funk, 1999; Kinder, 1986). While we have departed from the open coding with labels and definitions used by the respondents, there were evident conceptual similarities between our findings and the categories used in personality frameworks. This way, the expectation that a president should be consistent (be responsible, stick to his convictions, finish tasks) goes in line with the factor of Conscientiousness in the FFM. Similarly, commanding respect can be related to the facets of Energy (Extroversion) factor in the FFM (Caprara et al., 2002; Costa & Widiger 2002) and the attributes of dominance in the MIDC (Immelman, 1993, 2005; Millon, 1994). A number of personality qualities in this study could be related to both personality frameworks as well as the social cognition research. In this regard, the morally loaded traits are of increased interest. The exact requirements, such as staying in touch with voters were carved in a very specific formulation and appeared to be a combination of several domains (e.g. open-mindedness, cooperativeness, and loyalty).

Therefore, personality and social cognition frameworks are useful for understanding the content of voters' expectations from political leaders' personalities and organizing them in terms of broad domains. However, it appears appropriate to use lower order facets or more specific traits to capture the exact preferences and focus on the less abstract yet politically relevant traits, which is consistent with the suggestions from prior research (Roets & Van Hiel, 2009). Moreover, elsewhere it was noted that FFM's broad factors lose their explanatory

power when applied to the political domain. In this regard, blends of the conventional factors (Caprara et al., 1997) or lower order traits of the FFM have shown relevance for the research of personality in politics (Judge, Bono, Ilies & Gerhardt, 2002), which also seems to be the case in the present study.

The second research question examined the sources voters rely on in their expectations concerning the ideal president's personality. The results of the qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews demonstrated four groups of sources that the respondents drew upon; namely **contextual, comparative, functional** and **leadership style**. While the sources of expectations have not been studied explicitly before, several earlier studies have suggested this research path as worthwhile for future research. In particular, our findings confirm the expectations of Kinder et al. (1980) that the (expected) qualities in the ideal leader's personality draw from the evaluations of the incumbent president as well as culturally shared beliefs around leadership. In addition, Funk (1999) and Bittner (2008) discussed the relevance of the specific electoral context for candidate evaluations.

Lastly, we relate our findings to the Russian political context. The expectations of a knowledgeable, strong, controlled, honest, loyal and fair leader match the patriotic tendencies and the trends of "conservative mobilization" that were identified as characteristic for the current Russian political context (Dutkiewicz et al., 2016). Gorshkov (2016) notes that these trends in political culture translate into demands upon a president who would have to respond to the increased value of patriotism. Based on the present study, we can confirm the importance of in-group loyalty (patriotism) and complement the list of requirements by other high moral standards (honesty, fairness), as well as most importantly substantive (knowledge) and leadership effectiveness (strength, self-control). Next, the portrait of the Russian ideal president dwells on comparisons to the incumbent president and individual leaders (domestic, international, historical and even fictional), which might be related to the personalization of presidential power in the Russian context (Shestopal, 2016a). Furthermore, the problematization of the president's social circle emerged of as one of the sources of expectations of the ideal president. This is consistent with the trend of "alienation of power" identified by Shestopal (2016a) and the relative popularity of incumbent President Putin (Fyodorov 2019, p. 178). Our findings confirm this separation between the positive image of an individual leader (the president) and the perception of a flawed governmental apparatus.

To conclude, this study explored what voters believe to be ideal for the personality profile of a president, and how they arrive at this vision. In the current research, the broad domains of leadership effectiveness and morality turned out to be the most prominent in the

respondents answers. Our findings support the applicability of these or theoretically similar dimensions (used in previous research) across contexts, including the hybrid Russian environment. Interestingly, we have also observed a relatively low frequency of mentions of sociability as an overarching theme. In this regard, the qualitative part of the study demonstrates the complexity of reasoning behind the list of prominent and less prominent traits. This way we have found that sociability has negative connotations as respondents associate it with the rise of informal cliques and lack of transparency in elite recruitment, which might be unique to the Russian context. When it comes to the more specific attributes of an ideal president, the voters were most concerned about the president's knowledge, strength of character, ability to control oneself, honesty, loyalty and fairness. The discovered personality attributes comprised a combination of traits mentioned in the earlier work based on personality frameworks and social cognition theories, as well as inductively derived personality attributes. Furthermore, we indicated the four sources that the voters' expectations relied upon; namely, they relied on contextual, comparative, functional and leadership style-related considerations. Therefore, respondents' requirements of an ideal president were derived from the comparisons to the incumbent president and other prominent politicians, voters' views on the task of the president, their perceptions of the political context, and their ideas of potential problems.

Finally, we formulate the limitations and suggestions for further research. First, although the sampling technique used for the structured interviews (snowball sampling combined with generic purposive sampling) resulted in a sample balanced by demographic criteria, it was not representative of the country as a whole (Bryman, 2016). To develop a fuller picture, additional studies using random sampling will be needed. This way, highly educated respondents were overrepresented in our study taking up 67.1 % of our sample as opposed to 26.7 % in the microcensus (Rosstat, 2015, see Appendix D). With concerns to the direction of the possible bias in our study, previous research showing relationship between education and political views (Kinder, 2013; Sears & Brown, 2013). For example, political sophistication and political engagement are generally greater among the better educated. The next limitation has to do with our work relying on the relative frequencies and not on the measures of preference. While this approach has an advantage of not imposing meaning on the respondents during the interviews (by for instance administering lists of traits), it complicated the processing of the data and limits the interpretation of our results. Furthermore, one of the challenges for this study was in the recruitment of the participants for the qualitative part of the study that required more in-depth conversations covering one's

political preferences which for some respondents turned out to be a sensitive topic. Chhokar et al. (2007, p. 811) made a similar observation concerning interviewing people in Russia, noting that respondents were hesitant to answer some questions and share personal data (e.g., to sign the consent forms).

The question remains whether our findings are influenced by Vladimir Putin's perceived traits. Given the objective to inductively construct and validate the profile of an ideal president, we opted for the research design with open interview questions. This resulted in the abundance and richness of data provided by the respondents. However, we have also observed respondents' reluctance to participate in interviews with open questions (which were experienced as more personal than closed question surveys) when they assumed would need to evaluate President Putin. This way, this study is limited by the absence of data on how the pro-Putin and anti-Putin voters differ in their vision of an ideal president. Nevertheless, it is possible to link our results to the existing literature on the perception of Putin. Shestopal (2018) identifies strength, activity, and independence of political views as the traits dominating Putin's perception after 2014. Furthermore, loyalty to Russia and the well-being of Russian society are perceived as Putin's motive in politics. The importance of strength and loyalty in the perception of Vladimir Putin is consistent with the image of an ideal president in our study. However, interestingly 'independence' attributed to Putin in this study was found in our results with relatively low frequency (mentioned by 16% of respondents). The same applies to activity which roughly matches the characteristic 'capable' in our study with only one third of respondents mentioning it in their description of an ideal president as opposed to other characteristics (e.g. more than two thirds mention knowledge, and more than a half of respondents discuss self-control, strength and integrity).

While this work contributed to insight into the voters' reasoning on the subject of an ideal president's personality, several questions remain unanswered at present. In particular, it is essential to note that we are aware of the importance of emotions in the perceptions and expectations related to personality in politics, as well as their mediated character (via appearance, media) (Chen et al., 2014; De Landtsheer et al., 2008; Shestopal, 2018; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren & Hall, 2005). While the current study primarily focuses on cognition, the affective aspect of the voters' expectations of prototypical presidential personality could be addressed in detail by forthcoming studies. Next, future research could benefit from adapting a comparative cross-cultural perspective in the study of preferred presidential personality. Additionally, the connection between the prototypical president and the evaluations of real politicians remains ambiguous. A problematic point here is the distinction

between evaluations of specific leaders and abstract qualities of an ideal candidate. Future research could further explore the applicability of the conception of an “ideal president” to real world leaders.

## Appendix

### Appendix A. The Five-Factor Model facets

<b>Neuroticism</b> (reverse: Emotional Stability)	<b>Extraversion</b>	<b>Openness to Experience</b>	<b>Agreeableness</b>	<b>Conscientiousness</b>
Anxiety	Warmth	Fantasy	Trust	Competence
Angry hostility	Gregariousness	Aesthetics	Straightforwardness	Order
Depression	Assertiveness	Feelings	Altruism	Dutifulness
Self-consciousness	Activity	Actions	Compliance	Achievement striving
Impulsiveness	Excitement seeking	Ideas	Modesty	Self-discipline
Vulnerability	Positive emotions	Values	Tender mindedness	Deliberation

*Note:* Adapted from Widiger and Costa (2002)

### Appendix B. Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC) patterns and prototypal features

<b>MIDC Patterns</b>	<b>Prototypal features</b>
Dominant	strong-willed, commanding, assertive, competitive, opinionated
Dauntless	adventurous, individualistic, venturesome, nonconformist
Ambitious	confident, socially poised, self-promoting
Outgoing	warm, congenial, sociable, gregarious
Accommodating	devoted, conciliatory, cooperative, compliant, agreeable
Aggrieved	humble, unpretentious, deferential
Contentious	cynical, headstrong, resolute
Conscientious	earnest, polite, respectful, dutiful, dependable, principled
Reticent	watchful, private, socially reserved, circumspect
Retiring	self-contained, unsociable, reserved, solitary

*Note.* Adapted from Immelman (1993, 2005) and Millon (1994). This overview relies of the descriptions of the patterns in their normal, well-adjusted variants. The descriptions of maladaptive variants are not included. Similarly, this overview excludes the Erratic and Distrusting patterns. These patterns conceptually constitute a decompensated, structurally defective extension of normal patterns, and therefore we do not expect them to be relevant for the study of ideal president's personality.

*Appendix C. Descriptive statistics: gender and age (quantitative sample and population)*  
(Rosstat, 2019).

	<b>Population</b>		<b>Sample</b>	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>Gender</b>				
Female (all ages)	78 654 907	53.6		
Female (older than 18)	63 906 033	54.9	230	51.1
Male (all ages)	68 109 748	46.4		
Male (older than 18)	52 565 716	45.1	220	48.9
<b>Age</b>				
70+	12 684 925	10.9	34	7.6
61-70	17 588 186	15.1	55	12.2
51-60	19 925 477	17.1	59	13.1
41-50	20 016 141	17.2	81	18.0
31-40	24 286 573	20.85	68	15.1
Total (all ages)	146 764 655	100	450	100
	(2019)			
Total (older than 18)	116 471 749	100	450	100

*Appendix D. Descriptive statistics: education in quantitative sample and according to microcensus*  
(Rosstat, 2015)

	<b>Microcensus</b>		<b>Sample</b>	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>Education</b>				
Higher education	460 803	26.7	302	67.1
General education (secondary school)	1 074 593	62.2	139	30.8
Unfinished general education	191 229	11.1	9	2.0
Total	1 726 625	100	450	100

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## Tables and Figures

*Table 1.* Personality qualities that voters ascribe to an ideal president (RQ1)

Theme	Number of mentions	Relative frequency, %
<b>I. Leadership effectiveness</b>	1465	43.1
<b>II. Moral character</b>	1189	32.9
<b>III. Qualifications</b>	534	16.2
<b>IV. Sociability</b>	212	6.4
Total	3400	100%

*Note:* Number of mentions (number of times coded) and relative frequencies per theme.

Table 2. Personality qualities ascribed to an ideal president (RQ1). Percentage of respondents attributing the characteristic to an ideal president and number of mentions (RQ13).

	% respondents naming the characteristic	Number of mentions
<b>I. Leadership effectiveness:</b>		1465
Strong	58.4	262
Controlled	57.7	259
Consistent	43.2	194
Commands respect	41.9	188
Capable	32.7	147
Pragmatic	24.5	110
Open-minded	19.4	87
Has a grip and control	17.8	80
Independent	16	72
Foresight	14.7	66
<b>II. Moral character:</b>		1189
Honesty / Integrity	57.7	259
Loyalty	51	229
Fair	49.9	118
Stays in touch, responsive	34.3	154
Not selfish	33.4	150
Kindness	24.3	109
<b>III. Qualifications:</b>		534
Knowledgeable	69.3	311
Intelligent	37.9	170
Experienced	11.8	53
<b>IV. Sociability:</b>		212
Cooperative	26.7	120
Charismatic	20.5	92
Total	100%	3400

Note. In descending order per theme.

*Table 3.* Sources that voters draw upon in their expectations of an ideal president's personality (RQ2)

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<b>1. Comparative:</b>	<b>3. Contextual:</b>
Incumbent president	Current policy issues
Domestic politicians	National context
Former leadership	
World political figures	
Pop culture	
Compared to me	
Compared to most people	
Unique expectations	
<b>2. Functional:</b>	<b>4. Leadership style:</b>
Example for others	Corruption
Face of the state	'Manual' control of the state
Handle Russia's size and diversity	Power abuse
Handle workload	President's social circle is problematic
International negotiations	
Settle domestic interest groups	
Teamwork, delegating	

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