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Why Al Gore Will Not Be Elected President in 2000

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Unlike President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore possesses well-consolidated character integrity; however, its outward expression in discernable personality traits does not auger well for his candidacy in an era where political campaigns are governed by saturation television coverage and the boundaries between leadership and celebrity have become increasingly blurred. For that reason, I predict that Al Gore will not be elected president of the United States in 2000 — provided the Republicans field an outgoing, relatively extraverted, charismatic candidate.

In support of this contention, I quote and paraphrase from the abstract of my 1998 study of Gore, after which I will present my "worst-case" scenario for a prospective Gore presidency. I conclude with some observations on emerging electoral trends framed as personality effects in the context of the growing impact of television on election outcomes.

Al Gore's Personality Profile

I found Gore "to be primarily conscientious/dutiful and introverted/alooof." Based on the *Millon Index of Personality Styles Manual*, Simonton's "Presidential Style: Biography, Personality, and Performance," and the five-factor model of Costa and McCrae, it can be inferred "that Gore is highly deliberative/conscientious, somewhat lacking in interpersonal/ agreeableness, and low in charisma/extraversion." If we turn to Renshon's *The Psychological Assessment of Presidential Candidates*, we find that "Gore's profile suggests that his ambition is rooted in a sense of duty; that his character integrity is well consolidated; and," to conclude, "that his interpersonal relatedness is marked more by detachment than by a tendency to move toward, away from, or against others."

“Conscientiousness and low susceptibility to ethical transgression” are Gore’s “major personality strengths.” On the other hand, “his major personality-based limitations,” which would affect his performance as president, “are deficits in the political skills of interpersonal, charisma, and spontaneity, and his self-defeating propensity,” as I pointed out last year when I presented Gore’s profile at the International Society of Political Psychology meeting in Montreal, “for tenaciously pursuing a pet policy or dogmatically advancing some central principle in defiance of legislative or public disapproval.”

A Personality-Based Assessment of Political Risks

In the unlikely event that Gore should succeed Clinton as president, my tentative “worst-case” prediction is that by virtue of the moralistically conscientious features in his profile he may be inclined, like Woodrow Wilson, to relentlessly advance a defining policy or program in which he has a vested interest (e.g., the environment, government efficiency, or the high-tech industry). Such single-minded, dogged determination incurs the risk of alienating some constituencies and diverting inordinate energy, attention, and resources from other endeavors, tasks, and duties.

The prominence of the introverted component in his personality style could further erode his support if a President Gore were to withdraw to the Oval Office and disregard the important presidential tasks of coalition building and public relations.

Regarding the risk of scandal, there will be none of consequence that personally involves the president. Respectful, dutiful personalities are much too scrupulous in matters of morality and ethics; in fact, like Woodrow Wilson, they run the risk of being overly moralistic, if not condescending. Finally, Gore’s introversion, in stark contrast to the narcissistic, outgoing pattern exemplified by Clinton, is associated with meager affective and erotic needs, which attenuates the risk for sexual misconduct — even without factoring in the potentiating effect of the principled scruples of the conscientious character. The dominance of conscientious features in Gore’s profile suggests that he is not likely to be a visionary president or a transformational leader.

Polls versus Personality and Electoral Trends

The 2000 election is far too distant to attach great significance to polls, which fluctuate with the vagaries of the moment (although even at this early stage Gore is lagging behind likely Republican contenders). Polls change, but personality does not. What, then, can we learn from an analysis of long-term electoral trends, framed as personality effects? The extraversion–introversion dimension, as shown by factor-analytic studies, is a key personality attribute in impression formation. In addition, extraversion is a major element in interpersonal, charisma, personal charm, and warmth.

The data displayed in the table below highlight the importance of extraversion with reference to electoral success: First, starting with Franklin D. Roosevelt, nearly every U.S. president has been

extraverted relative to other U.S. presidents, except for Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford (a never-elected president), and Jimmy Carter (an anomaly stemming from the Watergate scandal). Second, despite the lack of empirical data for defeated candidates Barry Goldwater, Hubert Humphrey, George McGovern, and Walter Mondale, it can be confidently speculated that, at least since John F. Kennedy, the more outgoing candidate has consistently won the presidency, once again with the exception of Nixon, who was almost certainly less outgoing than Humphrey (1968) and McGovern (1972).

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20th-Century Presidents in Descending Order of Relative Extraversion

President	Deviation from Mean	Rank	Classification
Theodore Roosevelt	2.28	1	Extravert ++
Franklin D. Roosevelt	1.78	2	Extravert +
Bill Clinton	1.38	3	Extravert +
John F. Kennedy	1.27	4	Extravert +
Lyndon B. Johnson	1.23	6	Extravert +
Ronald Reagan	0.91	7	Extravert
Harry Truman	0.89	8	Extravert
Warren Harding	0.30	11	Extravert -
Dwight D. Eisenhower	0.25	12	Extravert -
Woodrow Wilson	0.14	16	Extravert -
George Bush	0.06	18	Extravert -
Jimmy Carter	-0.04	22	Introvert -
Gerald Ford	-0.05	23	Introvert -
William Taft	-0.16	26	Introvert -
(Bob Dole)	(-0.52)	---	(Introvert)
Richard M. Nixon	-1.01	37	Introvert +
Herbert Hoover	-1.43	40	Introvert +
Calvin Coolidge	-2.27	41	Introvert ++

Note: Adapted from S. Rubenzer, T. Faschingbauer, and D. Ones, D., *Personality scores and portraits of U.S. presidents*. (Paper presented at the 104th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, August 1996).