

Leadership Attributes of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, The Eighth Malaysian Prime Minister

Ciri-ciri Kepimpinan Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Perdana Menteri Malaysia ke-8

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the leadership and personality traits of Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, the 8th Prime Minister of Malaysia, based on an open-ended response provided by Malaysian voters. Studying leadership contributes to a greater understanding of the leaders' role in society as they supposedly inspire others towards attaining citizenship goals. Still, if wrongly led, they would also damage the country. Leadership has gained importance as a field of study, although the focus is still Western-centric. There are studies on good and bad leaders covering various sectors. Despite the outcome of the recent 15th general election, Malaysia is still regarded as one of Asia's most politically stable countries, having had one-party leadership since independence. Studies on Malaysian leadership have been scarce. This study focuses on Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, a seasoned politician whose strategy brought him to occupy the highest office in Malaysia. The exploratory research using a qualitative approach probed how Malaysians perceived his leadership and personality traits when he was the Prime Minister. A research design using a questionnaire was used in this study to collect data on 822 respondents from a nationwide survey. The findings showed that Malaysians identified certain traits of leadership and their prime minister's personality. Still, there were differences in identifying them among the three racial groups in the country. The characteristics collected were then collapsed into categories to understand the Malaysian leader.

Keywords: Leadership; leadership attributes; personality; Muhyiddin Yassin; Malaysia

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini mengkaji ciri kepimpinan dan personaliti Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Perdana Menteri Malaysia ke-8, berdasarkan respons terbuka yang diberikan oleh pengundi Malaysia. Kajian kepimpinan menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang lebih besar tentang peranan yang dimainkan oleh pemimpin dalam masyarakat kerana mereka memberi inspirasi dalam mencapai matlamat rakyat. Kajian tentang kepimpinan semakin mendapat tempat walaupun tumpuan masih kepada penekanan ala Barat. Terdapat kajian tentang pemimpin yang baik dan sebaliknya meliputi pelbagai sektor. Malaysia dianggap sebagai salah sebuah negara paling stabil walaupun terdapat beberapa gangguan selepas Pilihan Raya Umum ke-15. Walaupun merupakan sebuah negara yang stabil, kajian tentang kepimpinan di Malaysia masih kurang. Kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, seorang ahli politik berpengalaman yang menyandang jawatan tertinggi di Malaysia. Kajian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif menilai bagaimana rakyat Malaysia melihat ciri-ciri kepimpinan dan personaliti beliau semasa beliau menjadi Perdana Menteri. Soal selidik digunakan dalam kajian ini dengan melibatkan 822 responden dari seluruh negara. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa rakyat Malaysia mengenal pasti ciri kepimpinan tertentu dan keperibadian Perdana Menteri mereka. Namun begitu, terdapat perbezaan dalam kalangan tiga kumpulan kaum di negara ini. Ciri-ciri ini kemudiannya dikategorikan bagi pemahaman yang lebih mendalam.

Kata kunci: Kepimpinan; ciri kepimpinan; personaliti; Muhyiddin Yassin; Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Leaders emerge in various ways, as leadership does not occur in a vacuum. In a democratic-elected country, leaders assume the office of the president

or the prime minister through the electoral process, which is different under a monarchical system when the monarchy appoints the offices. In an Islamic setting, leaders and their personality attributes take shape from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad

(PBUH) as an exemplary life. The Islamic personality shapes leaders into God-fearing persons to serve and protect the people they lead. Great leaders have good personality traits. Many Muslim societies fail when leaders neglect to abide by the teachings of the Quran and are found to be corrupted, inefficient, and self-indulgent.

Leadership traits are well recognised by their followers when in office. Often, scholars provide the qualities for respondents to choose from the list selected. This study takes a different approach by allowing respondents to identify the attributes of a leader of their own country, thus giving them the freedom to choose the traits they believe are associated with him. The study's objective is to know the characteristics Malaysians had on the leadership and personality traits of Muhyiddin Yassin when he was the country's prime minister.

Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin served the established United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in Johor in varied capacities. He became a member of parliament for the Pagoh constituency in the state. Muhyiddin later served in different ministerial portfolios, such as youth and sports, education, agriculture, and agro-based industries before becoming deputy Prime Minister in 2009 and was dropped in 2015. In 2020, he became the 8th Prime Minister of Malaysia.

OBJECTIVES

1. The objective of this study is to identify the leadership and personality traits of Muhyiddin Yassin.
2. To identify differences in the leadership and personality traits of Muhyiddin Yassin among the races.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scientific study of leadership as a most examined phenomenon in social science scholarship began in the 20th century. Numerous thinkers have written on various aspects of leadership. One early research began with Thomas Carlyle's "Great Man Theory." Although he did not mention the word leadership in his writing, Carlyle believed that "the history of the world was the biography of a great man". Hence, the focus on individual qualities tended to focus on leadership studies in the realm of the "Great Man" theory.

There are significant schools in the study of leadership, such as "The trait perspective, leadership behaviour, situational leadership, contingency school of leadership, relational school of leadership, path-goal theory, leader-member exchange theory, transformational leadership, team leadership, and the psychology model, sceptics-of-leadership school, information-processing school of leadership, the new leadership school, and biological & evolutionary school of leadership" (Al-Huzaim 2011; Antonakis & Day 2018). However, Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) have grouped the theories of the leader-follower relationship into the Transactional Model and the Transformational Approach.

Scholars' study political leadership at various levels, but attention is on the national rather than on other societal levels. Among the many types of leadership, citizens are more concerned with national political leaders and are more interested in learning about exemplary rather than deficient leaders (Junaidi Awang Besar, 2021).

Scholars have not agreed on an accepted definition of leadership, thus prompting one to define political leadership as "the power exercised by one or a few individuals to direct members of the nation toward actions (Jean Blondel, 1987: 3) or as Kellerman (2004), writing on (bad) leadership said, society would assume leadership to be in exercising "power, authority and influence" (pp. 1).

Kanat-Maymon, Elimelech and Roth (2020) define leadership as inspiring and motivating others to give their best effort and cooperation toward attaining a goal. Leadership is the ability to enable people to achieve desired goals and support them in a mission (Hoy & Miskel 2001).

Antonakis and Day (2018) propose the following definition:

Leadership is a formal or informal contextually rooted and goal-influencing process between a leader and a follower, groups of followers, or institutions. The science of leadership is the systematic study of this process. Its outcomes depend on the leader's traits and behaviours, the leader's characteristics, and observer attributions made regarding the effects of the entity led (pp. 5).

As reported by (Samimi et al. 2020), common leadership qualities that appear in most reviews are self-confidence, adjustment, sociability, integrity, persistence, and responsibility. Other traits include confidence, courage, fairness, accountability, God-fearing, helpful, good communication skills,

confidence, being presentable, and giving help to others in need.

Studies show that natural-born leaders who are courageous, brave, and cognizant of leadership's significance perceive leadership experience as necessary (Haraida & Blass 2019).

Creativity, strategic planning, and innovation bring impacts that define good leadership aspects (Hughes et al. 2018). Visionary leadership demands many skills such as decision-making, planning, giving influential talks, motivation, sharing leadership, honesty and integrity.

Common leadership qualities helpful in community building and development are self-confidence, adjustment, sociability, integrity, persistence, and responsibility (Lin, Kelemen & Kiyomiya 2017).

The vital function of leadership here is to aid and support followers in accomplishing a common task. However, every scholar has a way of defining who a leader is.

A leader performs many roles and undertakes many responsibilities for the people they lead. Hay and Dempster (2004) note that leadership is a complex job involving solid skills and qualities. In addition, the scholars single out several leadership qualities such as proper planning, reflection, problem-solving, team building, decision-making, goal setting, time management, project management resource allocation, effective communication networking, conflict resolution, diversity awareness, and self-confidence. Furthermore, according to Pierce and Newstrom (2006), a leader uses interpersonal skills to influence attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours. Earlier studies explored effective and ineffective leaders' characteristics (Kirkpatrick & Locke 1991; Lord, DeVader & Alliger 1986). An analysis of the relationship between individual qualities and leadership effectiveness showed a link between personal characteristics and leadership effectiveness (Hoffman et al. 2011).

Leaders emerge in many settings. It can occur through nominations, community appreciation, or the electoral process. Leadership does not spring from a vacuum but emerges within a socio-political context. There is a saying that a leader is a person of the time or belongs to a particular group. Time allows one to exhibit leadership in a given position, but sometimes the leader does not exercise it. The leader, as presently examined, emerged through a dynamic electoral process. Leaders in a democracy appear after going through the electoral process,

unlike other political systems where leaders are appointed by a higher authority (Monarchy) or by self-proclamation (military dictatorship). Muhyiddin Yassin won the party, the state, and the federal elections to qualify himself to be the leader at various levels. In the Malaysian context, Muhyiddin climbed up the ladder in his party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), by contesting multiple elections to gain recognition as the Minister or the Chief Minister as the case might be (Ahmad Kamal Ariffin Mohd Rus, Mohamad Khairul Anuar Mohd Rosli & Siti Norul Aqillah Johar, 2021). He made a name for himself as a political leader.

He was Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia (2009-2015) and a Minister of Home Affairs (2018-2020), among other political and managerial responsibilities. Effective and competent leaders have physical and psychological qualities that differentiate them from non-leaders (Haslam, Reicher & Platow 2020). Muhyiddin Yassin replaced Mahathir Mohamad in 2020 as the eighth Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Tan Sri Muhyiddin, president of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), was sworn in as the eighth Malaysian prime minister when he formed a new ruling coalition bringing other parties on board to start the new government: Parti Islam Malaysia (PAS), United Malays National Organization (UMNO), Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), Homeland Solidarity Party (STAR) and Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM). It was a new coalition, but electors criticised the formation of the new government as it was not due to the outcome of the general election.

Jaes et al. (2021) observed Muhyiddin as soft-spoken yet calm and hardworking, related to the wisdom embedded in Malay and Asian cultural values. Muhyiddin Yassin is known for his humbleness and core conservative beliefs as a leader (Koo & Park 2018).

METHODOLOGY

VARIOUS WAYS TO IDENTIFY LEADERSHIP TRAITS

Different fields of study require specific methodologies, which is the same in studying leadership. Scholars use various methods to research leadership qualities and skills in correspondence

with the theories that have driven their research. Over the years, research has elaborated on the theoretical and empirical relations between different leadership styles and political models of government. Leadership studies are significant as they are central to all human activities, with the leader clarifying the goals for the group of individuals to accomplish specific goals.

Data collection through various methods is always an issue in describing and analysing leaders. The methods used are varied, but they include surveys, field experiments, focus groups, content analysis and interviews. Three well-known studies on Malay political leadership were conducted using the historical process by analysing the contributions of Malay political leaders within the societal context in which they emerged (Shome 2002; Razack 2017; Suleyman Temiz & Arshad Islam 2019). A key point in data collection was to hold discussions with different persons who know or have worked with the said leaders, holding group discussions and data derived from the surveys conducted over the years. Observers collected the attributes from reports written by columnists and analysts or as reported in the media.

We would mention some methodologies relevant to the present study as other approaches in leadership are too numerous to list and discuss. The main focus relevant to the present study is Institutional Analysis. It takes on an understanding of institutions to account for the rise of leadership in a democratic system of government (Helms 2014). Presidential and parliamentary electoral procedures that provide periodic elections appear similar, yet these two forms of government, involving different resources and commitments, often demand various campaigns. The parliamentary system of government, which Malaysia developed from the British Westminster, provided the fundamentals for the growth of party, state and federal elections. An Institutional Analysis would provide a background for the rise of Malaysian leaders. In the present study, we offered how Muhyiddin Yassin struggled to move up the party ladder, and then by winning in the state and federal elections, he went on to occupy the posts of state Chief Minister and, later, the deputy Prime Minister (Mohamad Fairuz Mat Ali & Mohammad Agus Yusoff, 2022). During General Election 15 (GE15), Pakatan Harapan captured enough seats to form the Government.

Muhyiddin and party leaders later organised with other opposition leaders to create the new Perikatan Nasional government to replace Pakatan Harapan, which had lost its majority parliamentary seats.

Another approach is the historical and intellectual context where party circumstances map out to trace the rise of leaders. Different parties set different avenues for leaders to rise. Yet, at the same time, one must also recognise that the national electoral system and history determine the present system of government (Lobo, 2014). A long-established multi-party system has its leadership development pattern compared to a newly established governing system.

Studying leadership is better understood within a context. The socio-political context is significant for scholars to know how individuals rising to be leaders must consider their followers' cultural and psychological backgrounds to enable them to lead. Some leaders seize the opportunity to turn events to their advantage, while others follow the events, in what 't Hart (2014) would term "event-making" and "eventful" leadership. Context, therefore, provides the circumstances under which leaders shape society or forces in society shape the leaders. A leader exhibits his qualities by providing leadership rather than being led by society's more significant events. 't Hart (2014) discusses the qualities of leadership of an "event-making" and an "eventful" lead leader. The event-making hero type has been the subject of much research by scholars who are preoccupied with leaders' drives, skills, and deeds ('t Hart 2014).

Studying leadership attributes and traits is another approach used by scholars. The socio-political and psychological course traces the characteristics of leaders. Besides the beliefs, style sets the tone and pattern for leadership (Hermann 2014). The psychological theories of leadership have numerous other models to provide a broad spectrum of ideas and account for the various methodologies involved (Reicher, Haslam & Platow 2020, 2014). The psychological theories of leadership draw a series of experiments and observations to study leadership qualities.

The trait-based theories of influential leaders are mainly psychological and sociological postulations of specific leadership characteristics. The field has gone beyond the "Big Five" framework of personality traits associated with effective political

leadership. Nevertheless, specific characteristics remain constant based on Western lead research, requiring input from another perspective.

Studies have used different methodologies to identify traits of leaders, some using the items that scholars have compiled. The big five traits of the personality, earlier compiled by Stogdill (1974), are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Blondell 2014), which are often used as the ten-item personality inventory (Boston et al. 2018), and often used in political science. Studies have developed the big ten personalities on where scholars often base their studies.

Traits studies build their strengths and weaknesses; some scholars stressed that performance, behaviour and studying cases are more important than identifying the traits of leaders. Others acknowledge the significance of characteristics studies as they reflect the behaviour of leaders (Kellerman, 2004), thus indicating the possible exercise of good and bad leadership. Various studies have identified different qualities that leaders possess, such as sociability, intelligence, persistence, level of energy and adaptability (Kellerman 2004).

Leadership takes on various styles. The different leadership styles are transformational, autocratic, strategic, Laissez-Faire, democratic, bureaucratic, coach-style, and transactional. Personality always predicts good potential in leaders who acquire different dimensions of empathy and integrity into their leadership styles.

The effectiveness of leadership is perceived by the personality exhibited. With big personality traits, the roles of leaders change to strength and integrity, and the followers get a good perspective about their leaders. The five attributes of personality and effective leadership are related to having better leadership performance (Bentz 1990; Hogan 1994; and Stogdill 1948).

Being strategic and visionary are essential characteristics of a good leader (Nwachukwu et al. 2017). In addition, they considered all the problems and the solutions that a leader must do. Visionary leadership demands decision-making, planning, the ability to give influential talks and motivation.

A different approach was made in this study. The trait-based theories become relevant because this study would go to the basics by asking respondents (regarded as followers) to name the

leadership characteristics rather than asking them for their agreement on a selected list of these attributes. Hence survey would be the research method with the questionnaire administered to the respondents.

A total of 822 Malaysian voters were interviewed between March 8 and March 22, 2021. The researcher currently administered the questionnaire to 822 Malaysian voters, using the survey method by posing two open-ended questions asking respondents to provide leadership and personality traits associated with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. The respondents made two choices, each for leadership and the other for personality traits, to estimate whether there would be differences in the first and second choices. The second premise was that people would have different personalities and leadership traits. The respondents were asked to name the characteristics of leaders that would not guide them to answer what would happen in close-ended questions.

FINDINGS

A total of 822 respondents were involved in this nationwide face-to-face study. When the open-ended questions were posed, the respondents provided 30 leadership traits relating to Muhyiddin Yassin as the first and 32 as the second. Among the items, 18 were positive, and 12 were negative.

Table 1 presents qualities of leadership that are associated with Muhyiddin Yassin. For the first choice, respondents believed their Prime Minister was firm/brave (11.9%), people-oriented (11.3%), and responsible (7.2%). A total of eight per cent did not have any response on leadership qualities. The breadth of traits shared by the respondents on Muhyiddin reflected the various opinions on the country's leader. This finding could be related to a divided opinion regarding the leadership qualities of Muhyiddin.

Respondents believed their Prime Minister was trustworthy and had an Islamic personality, which added up to 14.4 per cent. Other attributes, such as being fair, double-standard, charismatic, and weak/weak indecision, totalled 17.1 per cent. Further, respondents indicated that Muhyiddin was an experienced leader, confident & was a visionary, calm/patient, charming/respectable, efficient (20.1%), intelligent/educated, yet regarded as an

TABLE 1. Qualities of leadership associated with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yasin (TSMY) as the first choice

Leadership Qualities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Firm/Brave	98	11.9
People-oriented	93	11.3
Perform the task given	59	7.2
Trustworthy	40	4.9
Islamic Personality	38	4.6
Kind	38	4.6
Fair	32	3.9
Cronyism/Double standard	30	3.6
Charismatic	28	3.4
Weak/ Weak in making a decision	26	3.2
Concerned	25	3.0
Experienced	23	2.8
Confident & visionary	22	2.7
Traitor	22	2.7
Intelligent/Educated	21	2.6
Impostor	21	2.6
Calm/Patience	19	2.3
Charming/Respectable	19	2.3
Efficient	17	2.1
Soft-spoken	15	1.8
Untrustworthy	12	1.5
Good at talking rather than work	10	1.2
Responsible	9	1.1
Hardworking	9	1.1
Extravagant	7	0.9
Unfair/Irresponsible	7	0.9
Autocratic	7	0.9
Others	5	0.6
Ego/Arrogant	3	0.4
Coward	2	0.2
Using religion as a cover-up	1	0.1
No response	64	7.8
Total	822	100.0

impostor and a traitor. He was soft-spoken, good at working, responsible, and hardworking (6.7%), yet he was untrustworthy. His other qualities were extravagant, unfair/irresponsible, autocratic, ego/arrogant, cowardly, and using religion as a cover-up (2.5%). It can be summarised that three traits predominate. Respondents singled out three features to reflect Muhyiddin's leadership: firm/brave, people-oriented and performance (of responsibility) entrusted to him. The three traits accounted for an overall 30.4 per cent.

MUHYIDDIN YASSIN'S LEADERSHIP QUALITIES BY THE SECOND CHOICE

The study gave the respondents a second choice to identify the leadership traits of their leader (Table 2). The study reported the top three traits: People-oriented, Firm/Brave, Confident and Visionary. There were minor differences between the first and second choices on the leadership traits of Muhyiddin Yassin. Table 2 suggests that respondents hold specific characteristics of leadership.

TABLE 2. Qualities of leadership associated with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yasin (TSMY) as the second choice

Leadership Qualities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
People-oriented	102	12.4
Firm/Brave	66	8.0
Confident & visionary	55	6.7
Perform the task given	47	5.7
Responsible	33	4.0
Trustworthy	32	3.9
Concerned	30	3.6
Weak/ Weak in making decision	29	3.5
Kind	27	3.3
Fair	25	3.0
Islamic Personality	21	2.6
Intelligent/Educated	21	2.6
Charismatic	17	2.1
Soft spoken	17	2.1
Charming/Respectable	17	2.1
Calm/Patience	16	1.9
Traitor	16	1.9
Ego/Arrogant	14	1.7
Efficient	13	1.6
Generous/ Clean from bribe	13	1.6
Cronyism/Double standard	12	1.5
Impostor	11	1.3
Unfair/Irresponsible	11	1.3
Extravagant	10	1.2
Good at talking rather than do the work	8	1.0
Untrustworthy	8	1.0
Corrupt	8	1.0
Experienced	7	.9
Autocratic	7	.9
Hardworking	4	.5
Family-oriented	1	.1
Coward	1	.1
Others	24	2.9
No response	99	12.0
Total	822	100.0

LEADERSHIP TRAITS ASSESSMENT BY RACE

The study then divided the traits given by the three races into positive and negative characteristics. Slight differences were noted when different race groups assessed the leadership of Muhyiddin (see Table 3). Two traits were common among the

three races: Muhyiddin being firm and brave and his administration being people-oriented. It was in the third most mentioned trait that the three races differed. The Malays assessed him as performing the task entrusted, but the Chinese said he was confident and visionary, and the Indians called him charismatic.

TABLE 3. Leadership qualities by race associated with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

Top 3 positive qualities			
No.	Malay/Bumiputera	Chinese	Indian/others
1	Firm/Brave	Firm/Brave	People-oriented
2	People-oriented	People-oriented	Firm/Brave
3	Perform the Task given	Confident & visionary	Charismatic
Top 3 negative qualities			
No.	Malay/Bumiputera	Chinese	Indian/others
1	Autocratic	Unfair/Irresponsible	Unfair/Irresponsible
2	Extravagant	Coward	Autocratic
3	Coward	Using religious cover-up	Traitor

There were also negative leadership traits, but the three races differed. The Malays claimed that he was of top quality and was autocratic, but the Indians and the Chinese said he was unfair in his dealings with the people. The second trait mentioned by the Malays was his extravagant manner, as he was known to have spent people's money. At the same time, the Chinese said he was a coward in making decisions, while the Indians labelled him as autocratic.

The Chinese were unhappy with Muhyiddin for running away from the Pakatan Harapan government and forming a new one. His new government saw the fall of the government led by

Pakatan Harapan. Hence, to the Chinese, Muhyiddin Yassin was a coward in abandoning the previous government.

PERSONALITY TRAITS

The study collected 34 trait items for the first choice and 33 for the second choice on his personality. Among the items, 20 were positive, and 14 were negative traits describing Muhyiddin Yassin (Figure 1).

The top three personality qualities associated with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin were kind, firm/and brave, but he was weak in decision-making.

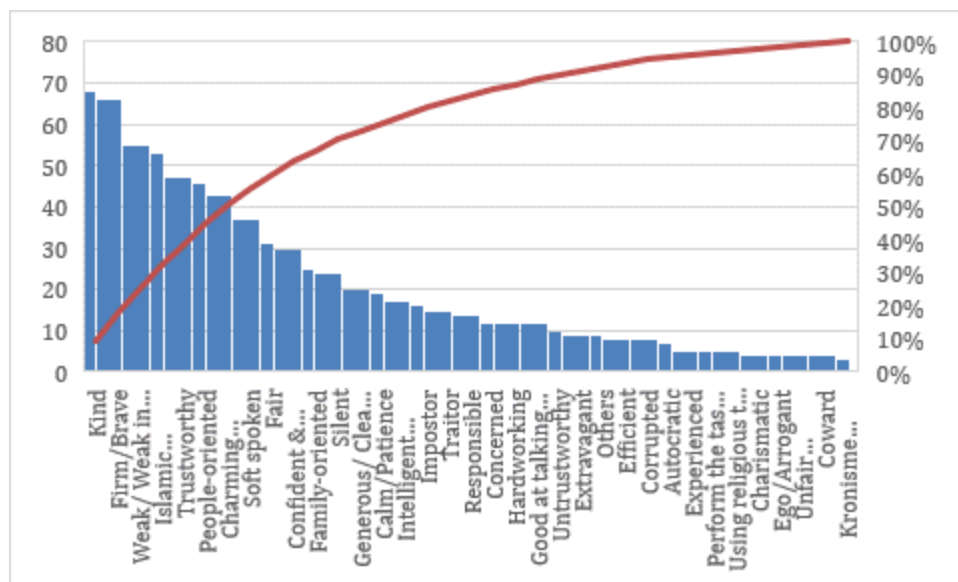


FIGURE 1. Bar chart showing first choice personality qualities with associated Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

The second choice of the top three personality traits associated with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin was

he was firm/brave, followed by being trustworthy and soft-spoken.

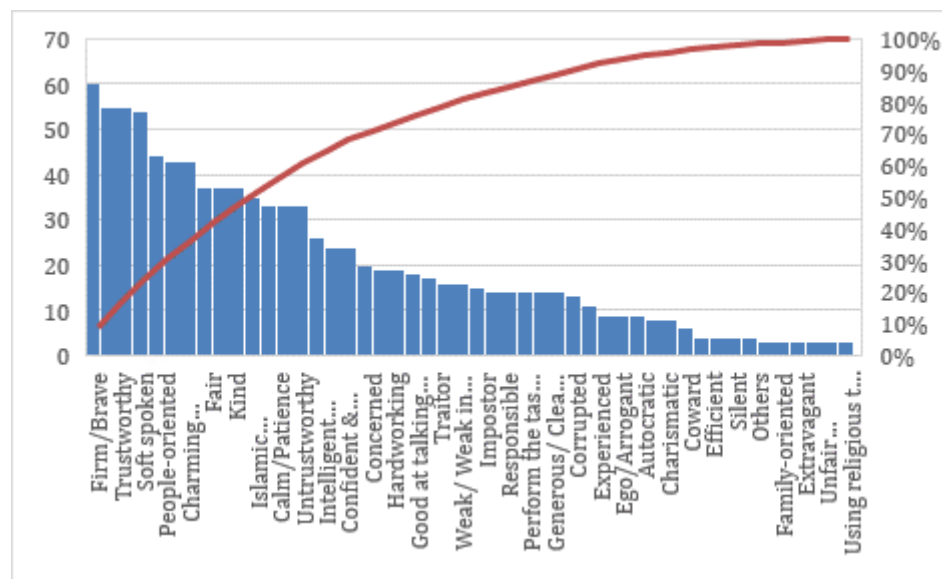


FIGURE 2. Bar chart showing second choice personality qualities with associated Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

There were also positive and negative personality traits, but the races were pronounced differently in the top three. The Malays accepted the top positive traits as firm and brave, followed by

his kindness and Islamic personality. The Chinese singled out his kindness as the ultimate positive trait, followed by being a people-oriented and soft-spoken person. To the Indians, Muhyiddin Yassin was a kind leader, soft-spoken and firm/brave.

TABLE 4. Personality qualities by race associated with Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

Top 3 positive qualities			
No.	Malay/Bumiputera	Chinese	Indian/others
1	Firm/brave	Kind	Kind
2	Kind	People-oriented	Soft-spoken
3	Islamic Personality	Soft-spoken	Firm/Brave
Top 3 negative qualities			
No.	Malay/Bumiputera	Chinese	Indian/others
1	Double standard	Weak in making a decision	Weak in making a decision
2	Coward	Ego/Arrogant	Imposter
3	Using religion to cover-up	Unfair/Irresponsible	Unfair/irresponsible

On the negative side, the Malays labelled his double standard in establishing the government as a coward and not as religious as he claimed to be. To

the Chinese, Muhyiddin is weak in making decisions and is arrogant and not responsible for traits like the ones given by the Indians, except for his trait as an imposter.

DIMENSIONS OF LEADERSHIP

After going through the open-ended questions, the study collected 30 items on the leadership qualities of Muhyiddin, given as the first choice. It was decided that the traits be grouped into four meaningful dimensions as a guideline for future studies on leadership.

Our earlier research on Adenan Satem (Syed Arabi Idid & Manimaran, 2023, forthcoming) reduced his leadership traits into intrinsic leadership, administrative leadership, compassion and integrity. Likewise, we sorted out the various characteristics in this study to categorise them into four dimensions. An earlier study by Kinder (1983, 1986) divided candidate trait ratings into four content dimensions: competence, leadership, integrity, and empathy. We would postulate that our four dimensions for Adenan Satem would apply to Malaysian leadership trait dimensions.

In this study, we would do the same thing by re-grouping the 30 traits into four dimensions: intrinsic leadership, administrative leadership, compassionate, and integrity.

TRAITS OF LEADERSHIP BASED ON FIRST CHOICE

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP

The study collected ten traits under this Administrative Leadership totalling 34 per cent.

Firm (11.9), Responsible (1.1), Efficient (2.1), Experience (2.8), Performs the Task given (7.2), Talk no work (1.2), Weak in Administration (3.2), Autocratic (0.9) Hardworking (1.1), Intelligent/Educated (2.6) = 34.1.

INTEGRITY LEADERSHIP

The Integrity leadership collected ten traits giving a total of 23 per cent. Fair (3.9), Respectable (2.3), Double Standard (3.6), Traitor (2.7), Imposter (2.6), Untrustworthy (1.5), Extravagant (0.7), Irresponsible (0.9), Trustworthy (4.9), Using Religious Cover up (0.1) = 23.2.

INTRINSIC LEADERSHIP

These are the characteristics that are inherent in the leader. The collected percentages totalled 20.1 per cent of the overall percentages of the traits recorded for Muhyiddin Yassin. Kind (4.6), Visionary (2.7), Charismatic (3.4), Soft-Spoken (1.8), Arrogance (0.5), Coward (0.2), Calm/Patience (2.3), Islamic Personality (4.6) = 20.1.

COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

The study collected only two traits, giving a total of 14 per cent, but being People-Oriented (11.3%) and Concerned (3%) showed a percentage of 14.3.

The other traits not included were miscellaneous: Others (0.6), no response. (7.8).

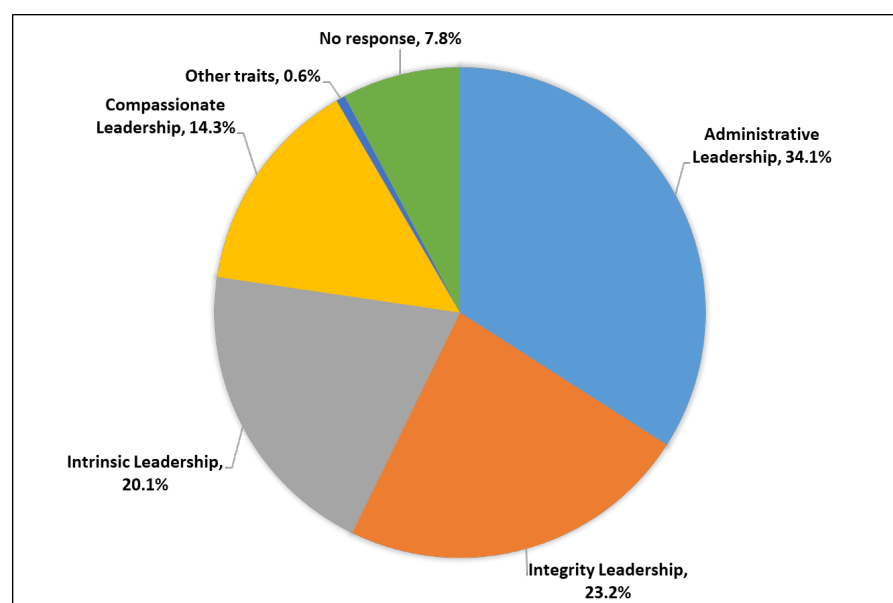


FIGURE 3. Pie chart showing first choice leadership qualities with associated Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

Based on the first choice, Malaysians associated Muhyiddin with administrative leadership (34%), followed by integrity leadership (23%), intrinsic leadership (20%) and compassionate leadership (14%), giving a total of 91 per cent.

The study then grouped the individual traits into four dimensions based on the second choice made by respondents (Figure 4).

TRAITS OF LEADERSHIP BASED ON SECOND CHOICE

ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP

A total of 11 items gave a total of 30 per cent. Firm (8.0), responsible (4.0), efficient (1.6), experience (0.9), performs the task given (5.7), talk no work (1.0), weak in administration (3.5), autocratic (0.9) hardworking (0.5), corruption (1.0), intelligent/educated (2.6) = 29.7.

INTEGRITY LEADERSHIP

A total of 10 traits gave a total of 19 per cent. Fair (3.0), respectable (2.1), double standard (1.5), traitor (1.9), imposter (1.3), untrustworthy (1.0), extravagant (1.2), irresponsible (1.3), trustworthy (3.9), generous/ clean from bribe (1.6) = 18.8.

INTRINSIC LEADERSHIP

There were eight traits collected, giving a total of 21 per cent.

Kind (3.3), visionary (6.7), charismatic (2.1), soft spoken (2.1), arrogance (1.7), coward (0.1) calm/patience (1.9), Islamic personality (2.6) = 20.5.

COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

Three traits gave a total of 16 per cent, but the highest was contributed by being People-Oriented (12.4), Concerned (3.6), and Family-oriented (0.1) = 16.1.

Other items were classified as Others (2.9) and no response (12.0).

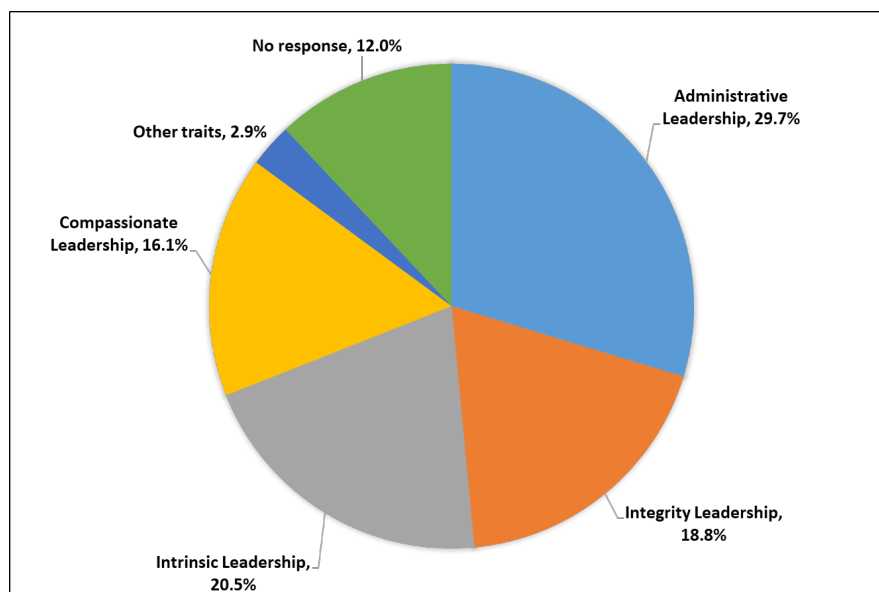


FIGURE 4. Pie chart showing second choice leadership qualities with associated Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin

The second choice on the leadership traits of Muhyiddin Yassin provided four similar dimensions. A total of 29.7 per cent of the features were in Administrative Leadership, 18.8 per cent in Integrity Leadership, 20.5 per cent in Intrinsic Leadership, and Compassionate Leadership recorded at 16 per cent.

The dimensions portrayed Muhyiddin Yassin as someone whose leadership is noticeable in administration. He approached the issue of COVID-19 through several lockdowns using administrative actions. He started his administration by imposing the lockdown on March 18, 2020, hardly 18 days in office. One would expect Intrinsic Leadership to be predominant, but this was not the case, as administrative leadership was visible to Malaysians.

The second leadership trait dimension given by the first choice was integrity leadership. Statements against corruption and abuse of power earned him the dimension trait of integrity leadership.

The leadership traits are divided into administrative, intrinsic, integrity, and compassionate leadership categories to describe qualities associated with Muhyiddin Yassin. These classifications for both choices associated with Muhyiddin indicate that he performed administrative leadership with 34 per cent. He scored low on Compassion. Leaders and management require a holistic commitment to provide services, vision, and taking responsibility to implement growth.

DISCUSSION

Leadership as an object of study has always been interesting, subsuming a long and multidisciplinary research programme over the past three decades. The recent literature draws on old and new models and methods to address critical questions.

Different societies with their own history, institutions, cultures, and political systems give rise to different political leaderships, Malaysia not being an exception. Given the relatively short period of studying leadership in the Malaysian political system, this study sought to ask voters their perception of the characteristics of their prime minister. This would make the approach more innovative, allowing respondents to articulate the characteristics inherent in their national leader. Rather than focus on the intrinsic character traits of the candidates, scholars have focused on citizen

perceptions of candidate traits. These contemporary studies have inherited the theoretical framework of viewing trait perceptions as an influence on the vote, determined by a range of prior attitudes, beliefs, and stable demographic characteristics of the voter.

The study asked an open-ended question to obtain answers from respondents on what they perceived as the leadership and personality traits of Muhyiddin Yassin as Prime Minister of Malaysia. Although he was an experienced political figure, few were aware of Muhyiddin's characteristics as the country's leader. An earlier study on Adenan Satem (Syed Arabi Idid & Manimaran, 2023: forthcoming) provided us with valuable experience in studying leadership. In the earlier study, we asked respondents for their agreement on the 13 constructed attributes of the Sarawak Chief Minister. We duly categorised them into four categories based on the similarity of the items chosen. This was helpful with the present study as it guided the placement of the items. Our advantage in this study was that the items that were grouped fell nearly into the same categories as those in the earlier study, subject to some minor adjustments as the attributes given by the respondents were richer and more varied.

This qualitative study solicited answers from Malaysians on what they perceived to be the traits of their Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin. The paper obtained responses through two open-ended questions asking respondents to identify their personalities and leadership traits. The study received 30 traits of leadership and 34 on his personality. No significant differences in traits were reported on the first or second choice for leadership and personality.

The findings showed that voters were aware of the attributes or traits of their leader, and as often the case, these are related to their performance. This study was done when Muhyiddin Yassin had just taken office as prime minister and launched the lockdown to contain COVID-19. The declaration of emergency for several weeks affected the livelihood of Malaysians as thousands were left jobless, but the leader came out predominantly with an administrative trait. He was seen announcing policy statements, but the senior minister in charge of security and the director-general of health were executing the actions.

This study established both negative and positive traits in the leadership and personality of Muhyiddin Yassin, revealing more detailed

information when analysed by race (Malay, Chinese, and Indian/others). Overall, Malaysians were satisfied with the performance of Muhyiddin Yassin, but it had to do more with his administrative leadership than his other leadership qualities.

Muhyiddin's leadership and personality attributes were positive and negative, but more positive than negative traits were associated with him; findings revealed that Muhyiddin was valued for his leadership and personality attributes like Kindness, bravery, people-oriented and family. Muhyiddin was accepted as someone good, trustworthy, and bold to take action.

Some respondents had negative responses regarding Muhyiddin's personality and leadership attributes, such as being weak in making decisions, prone to double standards, and good at talking rather than doing work.

The findings identified the traits of Muhyiddin with administrative decisions on handling the COVID-19 crisis right after he was sworn into office, whose consequences had affected millions of Malaysians. It was a challenging and unfortunate time since Muhyiddin's PN government had been hit with political resistance and an unending health crisis severely impacting the country's socioeconomic progress. Notable are the negative personality qualities observed in the study, untrustworthy and not being efficient.

This study was able to group the various leadership traits the voters gave into Administrative, Intrinsic, Compassionate and Integrity Leadership qualities. The voters perceived Muhyiddin Yassin's leadership as Administrative, followed by the Leadership of Integrity, Intrinsic and Compassionate. Compassionate Leadership was expected to predominate during the crisis, but the voters perceived him as more of an administrator than the other leadership dimensions.

Traits studies have been done to predict the behavioural characteristics of leaders, but performance can also provide a summary of the traits that followers have of their leaders. This study, in short, provides findings that Malaysian voters can provide features of their leaders during an emergency based on their performance. These did not entirely define the prime ministers' character qualities but came from the perception and way the COVID-19 crisis had been managed. The new suggestions on the leadership traits of Muhyiddin Yassin would be valuable in the coming studies on leadership in Malaysia. In the meantime, this study is significant

as it provided numerous items of leadership traits as perceived by ordinary Malaysians of their leader at a particular period of time.

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