

---

## LEADER PERSONALITY ANALYSIS OF WAR DECISIONS (CASE STUDY : VLADIMIR PUTIN IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR)

Wahyu Wulandari

*Political Science Studies, Faculty of Social Science,*

Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia

e-mail: [wahyu.wulandari@uiii.ac.id](mailto:wahyu.wulandari@uiii.ac.id)

Submitted : 10 Juni 2025

Revision : 19 Juni 2025

Accepted: 8 Agustus 2025

### Abstract

*This study explores how Vladimir Putin's personality has influenced his decision-making during the Russia-Ukraine war. While much research has focused on geopolitical, demographic, and socio-political factors, this paper highlights a different perspective: the role of Putin's leadership traits in shaping the conflict. The analysis begins with a historical overview of the Russia-Ukraine tensions, followed by a biographical examination of Putin, identifying key events that have shaped his leadership style. Traits such as assertiveness, self-confidence, and authoritarian tendencies are examined in relation to his strategic choices. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, primarily through content analysis of secondary sources, the study assesses how these traits have influenced his policies and actions. The findings suggest that Putin's centralized and top-down leadership style has played a crucial role in the war, underscoring the broader impact of individual leadership traits on global conflicts.*

**Keywords:** *Leader Personality, Vladimir Putin, Russia-Ukraine War*

---

### A. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important tragedies that has drawn international attention since Russia's decision to attack Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Thousands of people have died as a result of the violence, and infrastructure has been severely damaged,

especially in Ukraine. Although the United Nations and several countries have repeatedly attempted to mediate, the conflict in Ukraine still shows no signs of resolution (Reuters, 2025). There have been several periods of fierce fighting in the ongoing conflict, with heavy losses and destruction on both sides. A humanitarian disaster has also resulted from the conflict, with millions

of Ukrainians fleeing their homes and taking sanctuary in nearby nations. A variety of actions have been taken by the international community in response, including as military assistance to Ukraine, economic penalties on Russia, and diplomatic attempts to mediate a settlement.

US and Ukrainian officials have recently held peace negotiations in Saudi Arabia with the goal of resolving the conflict. However, the situation is still unstable, with more casualties and damage being caused by continuous military operations and drone attacks. The war has significant geopolitical ramifications that impact international relations, economic stability, and global security. With the help of its allies, Ukraine persists in resisting and defending its sovereignty in spite of the difficulties. The resilience and determination of the Ukrainian people have been a source of inspiration for many around the world. As the conflict persists, the hope for a lasting peace remains a priority for the international community (The Independent, 2025).

The armed conflict between the two has actually been going on since 2014. The conflict began when a large-scale public protest against the decision of Ukrainian

President Viktor Ynukovich to reject the economic integration agreement with the European Union (EU) received a fairly strong response from the state security apparatus. Ukrainian President Viktor was considered more pro-Russian so that this protest led to the fall of President Viktor and then divided Ukrainian society into two, those who were pro-EU and pro-Russia (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

The conflict heated up when Russian troops succeeded in controlling the Crimea region of Ukraine in March 2014. Even the Russian defense ministry said that at this time (May 2023) they had controlled a new area east of the city of Bakhmut (Al Jazeera). Some argue that Russia took the opportunity to control Crimea because the strategic location of Crimea could have a good impact on strengthening Russia's influence in the Eastern and Central European regions. So that on March 16, 2014 the Crimean Parliament held a referendum to separate Ukraine and join Russia (Pramono, 2014).

In the case of conflict between Russia and Ukraine, there are several factors causing the war, namely geopolitical factors, demographic factors, and socio-political factors. For instance, Bornu, T.Z (2025) said

that The Russian–Ukrainian war, deeply rooted in historical legacies and geopolitical tensions, has had a profound impact on both nations since its initial escalation in 2014 and its intensification in 2022. The conflict stems from Russia’s strategic ambition to retain influence over Ukraine, its opposition to NATO’s eastward expansion, and the complex cultural and historical ties that connect the two countries. NATO’s eastward expansion has consistently been perceived by Russian officials and much of the public as a potential threat to Russian national security. This perception was further strengthened by NATO’s 2004 enlargement, which brought seven new members into NATO, bringing the alliance’s borders closer to Russia (Gidadhubli, R. G. 2004).

However, in this study, the author wants to try to analyze from different factors, namely through Putin's personality as a leader who has a big hand in the war conflict. Why is this important? because the figure of Putin as a leader is key in making decisions whether to go to war or stop it. As stated by Capobianco et al (1999), that conflict is actually any situation in which people have incompatible interests, goals, principles, or feelings. What Capobianco said is very

closely related to the personality of each individual, where values, beliefs, principles and all of that are attached to a person's character or personality and are able to influence the people around him, especially if he is someone who has power.

Referring to Margaret G. Hermann’s (2015) Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), which identifies seven key personality traits that shape how political leaders behave and make decisions, this study argues that Vladimir Putin’s personality has significantly influenced Russia’s actions in the Ukraine war. Among these traits, Putin demonstrates a high belief in his ability to control events, a strong need for power and influence, and elevated self-confidence—all of which are closely associated with assertive and authoritarian leadership styles. These personality indicators are drawn from Hermann’s framework, not arbitrarily selected, and have been consistently reflected in Putin’s decision-making patterns throughout his political career. By examining Putin’s background, political trajectory, and behavior in past conflicts, this study analyzes how these traits have shaped his leadership style and contributed to key decisions, including the annexation of

Crimea and the escalation of military aggression in 2022. Through this lens, the research highlights how individual personality traits, beyond institutional or strategic considerations, can play a critical role in shaping the course of international conflict.

Given the significance of individual leadership traits in shaping political outcomes, this study seeks to understand the extent to which Vladimir Putin's personality has influenced Russia's decisions during the Ukraine war. In particular, it asks two central questions: Did Putin's personality play a role in the decision-making process surrounding the Russia-Ukraine conflict? And if so, how did his personal characteristics shape the course and outcome of the war?

To address these questions, the study sets out with two main objectives. The first is to assess whether and how Putin's personality contributed to the formulation of Russia's political and military strategies in relation to Ukraine. The second is to explore how specific traits, such as his self-confidence, desire for control, and need for power, have shaped his decision-making style and influenced the trajectory and

consequences of the conflict. By focusing on these aspects, this research aims to highlight the often-overlooked role of individual leaders' personalities in shaping large-scale geopolitical events.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. The Concept of Personality**

In general, personality has many definitions, especially when viewed through psychological studies. In terminology, as said Fatwikiningsih, N (2020) in his book "Psychology Theory of Human Personality", that personality actually comes from the term personality or charm which means a mask in which the players themselves wear masks according to the roles they play. This article uses the trait paradigm approach where trait is one aspect of human personality that is stable or fixed, has a tendency to behave in a certain way and is carried out consciously. The above opinion is also supported by the statement of David Winter (2015) in Cuhadar, Esra et al (2017) saying that personality can be interpreted as a set of embodied contexts, or characteristics formed by the environment and experiences that once developed, then

survive change or if want to change it takes maximum effort beyond the effort to shape it.

From the concepts above, we can see that what a person does consciously in the context of the nature or behavior he is doing will be closely related to the decisions he makes, including political decisions in the context of leadership analysis. One of the arguments of researchers Ali Muhammad and Mutia Hariati H (2019) said that "personality, motivation, belief and character as well as the policies taken by Putin were able to bring Russia through its gloomy period".

The study by Ali Muhammad and Mutia Hariati (2019) argues that Putin's personality, motivation, belief system, and decision-making helped Russia recover from a difficult and uncertain period, particularly following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent years of instability. Their analysis highlights how leadership traits contributed to domestic consolidation and national resilience in the face of internal and external challenges.

While this current study acknowledges the importance of those factors, it builds on that foundation by shifting the focus to a specific international conflict the

Russia-Ukraine war. Rather than analyzing how Putin's traits supported national recovery, this research explores how those same traits, particularly his high self-confidence, strong need for control, and assertiveness contributed to decisions that escalated an international war. In other words, where Ali and Mutia's work emphasizes personality as a stabilizing force, this study examines personality as a driving force behind military aggression and geopolitical confrontation. By situating Putin's leadership traits within the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, this study adds a layer of analysis that emphasizes how personality can both consolidate power domestically and project it externally, even at the cost of global instability.

Based on this perspective, the study hypothesizes that Vladimir Putin's personality traits, particularly his assertiveness, high self-confidence, and strong belief in his ability to control events, have significantly influenced his decisions in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Drawing on Hermann's (2015) Leadership Trait Analysis, these traits are not seen as passive characteristics, but as active forces shaping

key decisions. By exploring how these traits are reflected in Putin's leadership style and political behavior, especially during critical moments such as the annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion, this study aims to demonstrate that individual personality can be a central driver of international conflict, beyond institutional or strategic considerations.

## **2. The Concept of Leadership and War Decision Making**

The concept of leadership is very closely related to decisions or policies made by a leader that produce change. This then also applies in the analysis of Russia's decision under the leadership of Vladimir Putin in attacking Ukraine to date. The domestic political climate of the Russian Federation government also has a significant influence on both the driving and constraining elements in the defense policy development process. The aspect of Vladimir Putin's support in carrying out the defense policy-making process for the government of the Russian Federation comes from the agreement of the parliamentary votes of the upper and lower houses of the Russian Federation government, the support of the

Silovinki group who participate in supervising, and support the defense policy-making process of the Russian Federation government, as well as the full support of the people of the Russian Federation. As Herman (2015) said that leadership style is very closely related to the people around him and this also determines how he regulates the interactions, norms, rules or principles he uses.

Vladimir Putin's political opponents who disagree with him are a restraining force in the decision-making process of the government of the Russian Federation on military policy. Vladimir Putin's political opponents use various tactics, such as political tactics, to prevent the confirmation and implementation of the Russian government's military policy, which is in the form of drafting a defense and security budget plan. The Government of the Russian Federation will develop a number of potentials that serve the national interests of the Russian Federation by implementing a Defense Policy in the form of increasing the military budget.

Some of these possibilities include the Military Awakening of the Government of the Russian Federation which has long been in

decline after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the development of military doctrine, the approval of the National Security Concept (NSC) document, the increase in the caliber and quantity of personnel and combat fleets, the creation of various new products in the field of defense equipment, development of nuclear weapons systems, modification of nuclear weapons of the Russian Federation, and modernization of nuclear weapons.

The Russian Federation government acts as a counterweight in the midst of US domination as a superpower, strengthening its diplomatic negotiating position. It also strengthens the position of the government of the republic of the Russian Federation in the International Community. The regional and international effects of the Russian government's defense policies are manifested in an increase in the defense and security budget.

### **C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The goal of the study is to create a personality-based framework for comprehending Vladimir Putin's choices about the escalation of the Ukrainian war. To accomplish this, it combines leadership style

research, biographical study, and an investigation of historical and cultural factors. We use secondary data sources, such as published works, documents, and videos, to learn more about Putin's character, leadership style, and the larger geopolitical environment. The study highlights how individual traits, such as assertiveness, self-confidence, and resolve, along with authoritarian tendencies and strategic thinking, shape Putin's actions and decisions in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

In order to analyze the data, we will be looking at it in a very methodical way. Extracting important themes, patterns, and insights relating to Putin's personality, leadership style, and historical/cultural influences will require doing content analysis of relevant literature, documents, or social media content. The aforementioned theoretical framework will serve as the basis for the analysis' interpretation and subsequent results.

This study will use an analysis of the 3 criteria below, namely:

1. Biographical analysis: biographical analysis was conducted to see how Putin's family background, education, and work have been carried out so far.

2. Analysis of leadership style: an analysis of leadership style was carried out to see how Putin's leadership style was while he was President and what decisions and achievements were made by Putin while in office, including decisions during the Russia-Ukraine war.
3. Historical and environmental analysis: historical and environmental analysis is intended as an analysis in viewing the history of Russia as a country and how the culture built within it can influence and shape the personality of its leaders, especially Vladimir Putin. So that it becomes one of the factors in decision making.

In particular, the paper's study methodology contains some significant gaps that need to be acknowledged. This work has certain potential shortcomings, including possible biases and limits due to the fact that it depends solely on secondary data sources. These limitations may also affect the paper's ability to generalize beyond its single location and person of focus. That the findings of this study may not be extrapolated to other persons or other locations where the same situation may exist. Overall, this study intends to present a

thorough and in-depth examination of Vladimir Putin's character flaws and leadership style, as well as his impact on decisions made during the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

## **D. RESULT & DISCUSSION**

### **1. Biographical Analysis**

Vladimir Putin's leadership cannot be fully understood without tracing the formative experiences that shaped his construction of distinctions between the state, power, and the international world. His childhood in postwar Leningrad, his long career in the KGB intelligence service, and the traumatic experience of witnessing the collapse of the Soviet Union have shaped a very distinctive frame of mind. These three phases of life come together to shape Putin's political identity: a leader who emphasizes militaristic nationalism, places great faith in narrow state control, and has a deep skepticism of the West. These biographical elements not only provide the backdrop but also serve as a primary lens through which to understand the foreign policy and power strategies he implemented during his leadership.

Vladimir Putin was born on October 7, 1952, in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), a city still in the shadow of World War II (Britannica, 2023). His parents, Vladimir Spiridonovich Putin and Maria Ivanovna Putina, were factory workers who survived the Siege of Leningrad (1941–1944), one of the most brutal episodes in modern history, in which over a million civilians died from starvation, disease, and air raids (Gessen, 2012, p. 12). For Putin's family, the war was not just a collective memory, but a personal experience that left deep psychological scars. His father was seriously wounded while serving in the Red Army, while his mother nearly died from starvation during the siege (Myers, 2015, p. 8).

Putin grew up in a household that carried not only the burden of history but also the trauma of loss. His two older brothers died before he was born: Albert died as an infant, while Viktor died of diphtheria and malnutrition during the siege. The memory of the siege of Leningrad has repeatedly surfaced in Putin's public narratives, indicating the significance of the experience in shaping his political and emotional identity. Historian Catherine Merridale (2006) notes that "survivors of the siege internalized a

survivalist mentality that equated vulnerability with death" (p. 214). This mindset seems to explain Putin's tendency to view politics both domestic and international, as a zero-sum arena, where national strength and resilience are the absolute priority in the face of real and imagined threats.

Vladimir Putin's childhood not only shaped his personality emotionally, but also instilled in him a deep-seated belief that Russia is under constant siege. This belief has become one of the main narrative foundations of his political rhetoric. Repeated references to World War II known in official Russian discourse as the "Great Patriotic War" serve not only as a form of historical homage but also as an instrument to legitimize policies of militarization and restrictions on domestic opposition. In a 2019 public speech, Putin stated that the events of Leningrad must never be forgotten and condemned the Nazis' deliberate extermination plan as a crime against humanity. He highlighted the resilience and bravery of Leningrad's residents and stressed that their sacrifice served as a lasting example of loyalty to the Motherland, implying the necessity to remember history

to avoid repeating such tragedies (Kremlin.ru, 2019).

This kind of rhetoric is not just historical nostalgia, it plays a strategic role in shaping public opinion and state policy. As Timothy Snyder (2018) notes, “Putin uses the memory of World War II as a diplomatic tool, equating external threats with internal disloyalty” (p. 72). In other words, the collective memory of past suffering is rearticulated to affirm a national identity based on resilience and absolute loyalty to the state. The siege mentality inherited from his parents’ experiences during the siege of Leningrad has become an ideological framework that justifies placing state security above individual freedom, one of the most prominent features of Putin’s governance practices.

Vladimir Putin’s early education took place at School No. 193 in Leningrad, where he demonstrated steady if unexceptional academic performance. School records note his particular interest in German, a skill that would prove to be an important asset in his intelligence career (Hill & Gaddy, 2015, p. 67). In 1970, he was accepted into the Law Faculty of Leningrad State University (LSU), one of the most prestigious institutions in the

Soviet Union at the time. Although not a top-notch student, Putin graduated with honors in 1975 (LSU Archives, 1975), displaying the perseverance that would become his later trademark.

However, Putin’s character formation did not only occur in the classroom. Outside of academic pursuits, he developed a deep interest in martial arts, particularly judo. In 1973, he earned a black belt and later became active in sports organizations, even leading the Leningrad Judo Federation. This experience, according to Galeotti (2022, pp. 34–35), played a critical role in shaping his leadership philosophy, which emphasized discipline, tactical patience, and the ability to exploit an opponent’s weaknesses as strategic strengths.

After completing his law degree, Putin was recruited by the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB), the Soviet Union’s main intelligence agency. The recruitment began even before he graduated, indicating that certain attributes about Putin had caught the attention of state security forces (Mitrokhin, 1999). At the KGB, he underwent intensive training in Leningrad and Moscow, covering a range of operational skills such as

counterintelligence, wiretapping, and investigation (Andrew & Mitrokhin, 1999, p. 211).

His German language skills led him to the First Directorate, the unit that handled foreign intelligence and in 1985, he was posted to Dresden, East Germany. This assignment proved to be a deeply personal experience. There, Putin witnessed firsthand the collapse of the communist regime in East Germany and the euphoria of German reunification—an event he described in his memoirs as a “humiliating collapse” (Putin, 2000, p. 78). According to Soldatov and Borogan’s (2010, pp. 89–92) analysis, this experience strengthened Putin’s belief in the importance of state stability and strength, and the dangers of rapid and uncontrolled political change.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a significant turning point in Putin’s life. He resigned from the KGB with the rank of lieutenant colonel and entered civilian politics through the Saint Petersburg City Government. Under the guidance of Mayor Anatoly Sobchak, a reformist and his former LSU professor, Putin began to build the administrative skills and political networks

that would be essential to his future career (Hill & Gaddy, 2015, pp. 112–115).

In 1996, he moved to Moscow to join the Administration of President Boris Yeltsin. In a short time, he climbed various strategic positions, from Deputy Head of Presidential Property Management, to finally becoming Director of Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (FSB) in 1998. This rapid rise reflected his astuteness in reading the dynamics of post-Soviet politics full of uncertainty (Dawisha, 2014, pp. 156–160).

As head of the FSB, despite only serving for about a year, Putin managed to reform the internal structure of the institution and strengthen his influence among the siloviki, an elite network consisting of former security forces. Sakwa (2015, p. 134) believes that Putin’s closeness to this group was one of the key factors that paved his way to the position of Prime Minister in August 1999, a stepping stone that soon led to the presidency.

When Boris Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned on December 31, 1999, and appointed Vladimir Putin as interim president, many did not fully realize that Russia was entering a new political era.

Since then, Putin has not only maintained power for more than two decades, but has also engineered profound transformations in the country's political structure, foreign orientation, and economic configuration.

One of the main features of Putin's rule has been the vertical consolidation of power. Through constitutional reforms and administrative restructuring, he created a highly centralized system of power, a pattern that, according to Richard Sakwa (2015, p. 189), had not been seen since the Soviet Union. This included strengthening state control over the media, limiting regional autonomy, and placing his confidants in key positions in government and security agencies. This structure was not only about bureaucratic stability, but also about building loyalty and ensuring top-down control of the political process.

On the international stage, Putin has demonstrated a decisive leadership style that is oriented toward restoring Russia's status as a major world power. From the military intervention in Chechnya early in his term, to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and active involvement in the Syrian civil war since 2015, all these moves reflect an assertive and bold foreign policy approach.

According to Tsygankov (2016, pp. 215–220), Putin's foreign policy is not simply a response to external threats, but rather an expression of a long-term project to reposition Russia as a global actor respected or feared by the West.

Economically, Putin's government adopted a model that combined free-market elements with state control over strategic sectors, particularly energy, banking, and the military. The result was the emergence of a system that Dawisha (2014, p. 201) calls "oligarchic capitalism with Russian characteristics" in which business oligarchs loyal to the Kremlin profit greatly, while the state retains control over the direction of the national economy. This model offers short-term stability, but at the same time perpetuates dependence on political patronage and narrows the space for healthy economic competition.

Through consolidation of power, aggressive foreign policy, and engineering of an economic-political model, Putin has not only changed the face of contemporary Russia, but also established himself as a symbol of a new era one characterized by authoritarian stability, strategic nationalism,

and the rise of Russia's geopolitical identity on the world stage.

## **2. Leadership Style Analysis**

Generally, state-level leaders will consult with their colleagues and other specialists before settling on a course of action. Policy execution is also governed by legislation at the state level. Decisions about foreign policy should take into account the state, as well as the leader's goals and personality. As a result, it is crucial that we comprehend the president's character, the worldview of domestic institutions, public opinion, national aspirations, and the foundation of the state.

Putin's leadership style is renowned for being dictatorial, populist, and pragmatic. Sakwa, R. (2015) argues, "Putin's style of leadership combines aspects of authoritarianism & populism, allowing him to consolidate control while maintaining popular support." Putin is a leader who tends to emphasize on authority, suppresses opposition, and controls the media. (Sakwa, 2015). He has a reputation for being a powerful leader who isn't hesitant to resort to violence. He's also a skilled politician who knows how to captivate Russia's electorate. As per Hale's (2015) observation, "Putin's

leadership exhibits the characteristics of patronal politics, where decision power is in the hands of a leader and loyalty is valued as an imbalance of political support."

Putin's leadership style is characterized by a strong emphasis on national security, which was a primary concern for him during his presidency. His administration has raised military spending, repressed dissent, and annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine. The government has shown that it is serious about protecting Russia's interests and keeping its territory intact by prioritizing national security and the use of military action. It has been argued by Charap & Colton (2017) that "Putin's leadership style reflects a strong emphasis on national security, as demonstrated by his annexation of Crimea and crackdown on opposing movements."

Vladimir Putin bases his policies on what is in the best interest of the Russian Federation as a whole. When Vladimir Putin took office, the economy, which had tanked under Boris Yeltsin, began to mend and eventually recover. Economic growth and development under Vladimir Putin are characterized by large profits for the government from a variety of investments in

natural resources, as well as an increase in both foreign exchange and state treasury receipts. After gaining financial control over the Russian Federation government, Vladimir Putin shifted his focus to military and security planning. This defense and security strategy is reflected in the annual increases in the Russian Federation's defense and military budget. Putin has made strengthening the country's defenses a primary priority.

The situation at home and abroad will be impacted by the Russian Federation's decision to raise its military spending. As a result of the government of the Russian Federation increasing its military budget, a variety of defense and security capabilities have grown, both in terms of quantity and quality. The state's military budget is prioritized over other state budgets including those for healthcare, social security, and education. The increased military spending of the Russian Federation has improved the country's standing in international negotiations. The Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin's leadership enjoyed a period of economic, military, political, technological, and armaments-related growth and revitalization. Putin sees figuring out a

security policy as just as crucial to making the Russian Federation Republic a developed country as economic development.

Setting the Defense and Military Budget with precision and care helps protect a country against threats and security disruptions at home and abroad. Governments are more dedicated to advancing their own national interests with the help of foresight and deterrence. The steady political and economic scenario has reportedly allowed Vladimir Putin to ally himself with the United States. The government cares more about furthering its own interests than they do that of the people. The steady political and economic scenario has reportedly allowed Vladimir Putin to ally himself with the United States. The government cares more about furthering its own interests than they do that of the people. The steady political and economic scenario has reportedly allowed Vladimir Putin to ally himself with the United States.

Putin's emphasis on traditional Russian values such as patriotism, Orthodox Christianity, and family structure has not only shaped domestic policy but has also played a role in framing the narrative of the invasion

of Ukraine. As Laruelle (2019) notes, these values have been instrumental in strengthening Russia's national identity, which Putin has used to justify Russia's reclaiming of territories it considers historically Russian, including parts of Ukraine.

Additionally, Putin's pragmatic yet state-dominated approach to economic policy what Treisman (2018) and Connolly (2020) call "managed marketization" has helped sustain Russia's war effort. By maintaining control over strategic sectors such as energy and defense, Putin has ensured the Russian state's ability to fund military operations while maintaining resilience amid international sanctions. These strategic moves suggest that Putin's leadership style, rooted in tradition and pragmatism, is directly related to how Russia waged and sustained its war on Ukraine.

### **3. Historical Analysis**

The relationship between Russia and Ukraine has formed and changed over centuries, spanning from the glory days of Kievan Rus' to the collapse of the Soviet Union. From the 9th to 13th centuries, the territories we now know as Ukraine, Russia,

and Belarus were united under the federation of Kievan Rus', with power in Kyiv. This federation was ruled by the Rurik dynasty of Varangian (Viking) descent, often cited as the common root of the three nations (Plokhy, 2006). However, history took them on different paths. When Ivan IV or Ivan "the Terrible" was crowned as the first Tsar of Russia in 1547, Moscow began to emerge as an expansive center of power (Britannica, 2023). On the other hand, the territory of Ukraine at that time was more influenced and under the rule of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was not until the late 18th century, after a series of conflicts and divisions, that most of Ukraine was finally incorporated into the Russian Empire (Subtelny, 2000).

Service (2005) argues that tensions never really subsided. When the Russian Empire collapsed in 1917 due to the Bolshevik Revolution, Ukraine briefly declared its independence. However, in 1922, Ukraine became one of the founding republics of the Soviet Union—along with Russia and other regions—in a socialist federal state. Although formally united, the power dynamics remained unequal, with political dominance favoring Moscow.

According to Kramer (2022), the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 marked a decisive turning point. Russia and Ukraine emerged as independent states, not merely through unilateral declarations of independence, but through a constitutional agreement by the leaders of the Soviet republics to end the union. Ukraine itself strengthened its position through a referendum, in which more than 90% of its people expressed support for independence.

The collapse of the Soviet Union not only marked the end of a superpower, but also exposed the fragility of the foundations of the state, which, as Molchanov (1996) argues, was not a true nation-state but a vast multinational empire. The legacy of this empire has left a complex and unresolved imprint on its successor states, especially Ukraine, where questions of political identity, cultural orientation, and self-definition as a nation still persist. On the other hand Polls from the mid-1990s showed that many Russians in Ukraine still considered the Soviet Union to be their "Fatherland," while most Russians in Russia continued to view

Ukrainians and Russians as one nation (Solchanyk, R. 1998).

The historical and cultural setting in which Vladimir Putin made decisions during the Russo-Ukrainian war is crucial to comprehending his actions. Russia takes great pride in its history as the region's dominant state and its unique culture. Russia's opinions and policies towards Ukraine have been impacted by Russia's shifting political regimes and systems of administration, which are reflected in Russia's complicated history. This historical context helps explain why Ukraine is still a sensitive topic in Russia.

Russia has long demonstrated a historical tendency towards territorial expansion and military strength. Some scholars argue that the country has not been able to fully escape the imperialist patterns of the pre-modern era, the era of the Russian empire that focused heavily on military power and territorial expansion as a symbol of glory (Tolz, 2002). This legacy has left a deep imprint on the way Russian politics is viewed, both in domestic policy and foreign strategy. Throughout its history, Russia has been known to have a tradition of

weak limited government, but with a strong and centralized autocratic pattern of power (Yekelchik, 2013). During the period of power, for example, the space for grassroots political expression in regions such as Ukraine was systematically controlled. Yekelchik notes that the authorities deliberately restricted access to insurgent materials in order to protect local communities from the influence of radical and nationalist ideologies.

This appears to be in contrast to the practices of other European countries that have moved past imperialism and adopted the notion of the nation state. Russia's sentiments and policies toward Ukraine may be influenced by the country's preoccupation with military force and territorial dominance. Because of its historical significance, Russia now views Ukraine as a key location in its geopolitical goals. Because Russia considers Ukraine to be inside its sphere of influence, it is concerned about any attempts by Ukraine to draw closer to the West, such as its pursuit of stronger connections with the European Union.

Migration patterns and demographic shifts throughout time also have had a significant impact on relations between

Russia and Ukraine (Rudnytskiy, 2020). The 1932 famine in Ukraine dramatically altered the demographic make-up of the country just before World War II. An estimated one-third of Ukraine's 25-million-strong population perished in the years leading up to the end of World War II in 1946. However, by the time of the 1959 census, that number had risen considerably to 42 million. Between 1945 and 1955, 3.5 million Soviet citizens migrated from all around the country to work in factories and mines (Ivanov, S 2018). The population of Ukraine is predicted to have dropped drastically before rapidly growing again after the end of the Second World War. The ethnic make-up and population size of Ukraine were also impacted by the migration of Russians from different parts of the Soviet Union to the country. Industrial areas, like Kiev and Crimea, are where many people of Russian descent live. This has the potential to spark ethnic tensions and political competitiveness between Ukraine and Russia.

Relations between Russia and Ukraine are influenced by a number of variables, including economic issues. After Russia invaded Crimea, Ukraine's economy became extremely vulnerable. Because of

this precarious position, even the Russian Democrats were slow to recognize Ukraine as a sovereign state (Larrabee, 1996). The policy of financial independence in Ukraine was limited by the country's dependence on Western aid and support, which was inadequate. Due to limited resources and economic needs, Ukraine agreed with Russia's rejection of NATO expansion in the mid-1990s (Larrabee, 1996).

Meanwhile, on the other hand, according to Blockmans (2017), Russia also sought to gain hegemony in the Black Sea region after its annexation of Crimea in 2014. This strategic move was not only territorial, but also marked a turning point in Russia's ambitions to strengthen its military dominance and assert control over key energy and trade routes. By militarizing Crimea, Russia increased its naval presence and gained a foothold that allowed it to more strongly influence regional dynamics. As a result, neighboring countries now face higher security risks and strategic vulnerabilities, as most lack the effective military and political capacity to counter Russia's expanding power.

Many Ukrainians are dissatisfied with their government's partnership with Russia,

and this discontent is driving them to push for closer ties to the European Union. Prior to joining NATO in 2004, the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Slovenia took the decision to do so. Russia's borders may be in jeopardy as a result of NATO's presence in the countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. Although Russian officials tried to convince themselves that NATO expansion after the Cold War was no longer required, the country's economic woes are a mirror of Ukraine's instability and are a major factor in the political dynamics between Russia and Ukraine.

Russia's military & political engagement in the Georgian and Ukrainian crises in 2008 and 2014 are instances of the Russian expansionist foreign policy. This might be seen as a prophylactic move against the developing international relations problem and Russia's mounting threat. The yearning for economic, political, and social improvement in Ukraine has now mobilized the people to demonstrate and fight opposing authoritarian authority and corruption. The original purpose of the Ukrainian demonstrations was to put stress on the government in order to develop ties to the European Union, although the protests

have now broadened to address a number of other economic, social, and political concerns. Protests and the Euromaidan uprising in Ukraine demonstrated a desire to bring about reform & an end to corrupt regimes in 2013. Russia conquered the Crimean Peninsula & other parts of Ukraine as a consequence of this conflict.

When taken as entirety, this historical viewpoint illustrates the complicated dynamics of Russia-Ukraine ties. Amid the long and often tumultuous history between Russia and Ukraine, Vladimir Putin emerges as a leader who consciously draws on and uses the past to shape Russia's current and future foreign policy, especially toward Ukraine. Rather than allowing history to remain a backdrop, Putin appears to be actively reinterpreting it, using imperial legacies and Soviet-era memories as tools to justify Russia's territorial ambitions, challenge Western influence, and reassert Russia's position as a global power.

As Mankoff (2014) and Snyder (2018) note, this strategic use of historical narratives is not merely symbolic, it helps Putin legitimize his leadership domestically while also defending his controversial actions internationally, such as the

annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. To truly understand Putin's motivations and decisions, then, we need to look at how he positions Ukraine not simply as a neighbor but as a key part of Russia's historical identity and geopolitical ambitions.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

To sum up, this study looked at how Vladimir Putin's personality affected the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. By examining his background, leadership style, and historical significance, the author hopes to understand how his personal qualities influenced his decisions and actions during times of conflict. Putin's decision-making was influenced by his upbringing, schooling, and time spent in the KGB. His views on politics and power, particularly national security, were influenced by his experiences in the military and intelligence community as well as his family's involvement in the World War. This supports both his leadership style and his belief that Russia ought to have more global influence.

In addition, Putin's leadership style has been characterised as pragmatic, populist, and dictatorial. He places a strong emphasis

on defence and has demonstrated that he is willing to use force to protect Russia's interests and boundaries. His emphasis on national security has led to Ukraine's annexation of Crimea, higher military spending, and the repression of opponents. Putin's decisions during the conflict were informed by his pragmatic economic policies and his support for traditional values like patriotism and family.

Putin's decisions have been influenced by both his personality traits and the political context of the Russia–Ukraine war. External factors like the geopolitical context and Russia's history as a reasonably powerful nation have played a role in shaping his behavior, but these traits assertiveness, self-confidence, determination, and strong authoritarian tendencies have been more important. The investigation is based on secondary data, and it is well-known that online debates suffer from issues including the spread of misinformation and bias. To properly understand how Putin's personality affects his combat decisions, more research and primary data collection is required.

The author concludes that Vladimir Putin's personality has influenced his

decisions in the Russia-Ukraine war. His upbringing, leadership style, and the historical and cultural influences on his attitude to conflict all contribute to shaping who he is now.

-----

## REFERENCES

- Al Jazeera, 2023. *Russia-Ukraine war: List of key events, day 431*. Al Jazeera News. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/1/russia-ukraine-war-list-of-key-events-day-431>
- Ali, M. and Hariati, M.H., 2019. *Kebangkitan Kembali Great Power Politik Luar Negeri Rusia Era Presiden Vladimir Putin*. Yogyakarta: MIHI UMY.
- BBC, 2023. *Vladimir Putin: From Russia's KGB to a long presidency defined by war in Ukraine*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-15047823>
- Blockmans, S. (2018). *Crimea and the quest for energy and military hegemony in the Black Sea region: governance gap in a contested geostrategic zone*. In *Aftermath of the Ukrainian Crisis* (pp. 71-82). Routledge.
- Bornu, T. Z. (2025). *The Russian-Ukrainian war; it's causes, background and effect*. *The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology*, 7(05), 189-200.
- Britannica. (2023). *Ivan the Terrible*. Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- Capobianco, S., Davis, M. & Kraus, L., 1999. *Managing Conflict Dynamics: A Practical Approach*. St. Petersburg, Fla: Eckerd College Leadership Development Institute.
- Charap, S. & Colton, T.J., 2018. *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*. Routledge.
- Cuhadar, E. et al., 2017. *Personality or Role? Comparisons of Turkish Leaders Across Different Institutional Positions*. *Political Psychology*, 38(1), pp.39-54.
- Connolly, R. (2020). *The Russian economy: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Council on Foreign Relations, 2023. *The Conflict in Ukraine*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker>
- Dawisha, K. (2014). *Putin's kleptocracy: who owns Russia?*. Simon and Schuster.
- Fatwikiningsih, N., 2020. *Teori Psikologi Kepribadian Manusia*. Penerbit Andi.
- Gessen, M. (2012). *The man without a face: The unlikely rise of Vladimir Putin*. Penguin.
- Gidadhubli, R., 2018. *Expansion of NATO: Russia's Dilemma*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, pp.1885-1887.
- Hale, H.E., 2014. *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hermann, M.G., 2005. *Assessing Leadership Style: Trait Analysis*. In: J.M. Post, ed. *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders: With Profiles of Saddam Hussein and Bill Clinton*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp.178-212.
- Hill, F., & Gaddy, C. G. (2015). *Mr. Putin REV: Operative in the Kremlin*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Ivanov, S. (2018). *Population change of Kharkiv region (1989–2016)*. In *Conceptul de dezvoltare a statului de drept în Moldova și Ucraina în contextul proceselor de eurointegrare* (pp. 27-29).
- Kramer, M. (2022). *The dissolution of the Soviet Union: A case study of discontinuous change*. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 24(1), 188-218.
- Kremlin.ru. (2019, January 18). *President's Speech at the Museum of Defense and Siege of Leningrad [President's Speech at the Museum of Defense and Siege of Leningrad]*. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/tran>

- [scripts/speeches/59738](#)
- Kyrydon, A., & Troyan, S. (2022). The Russian-Ukrainian war (2014-2022): Basic preconditions and causes. *Balkan social science review*, 20, 157-179.
- Larrabee, S., 1996. Ukraine's Place in European and Regional Security. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 20, pp.249-270.
- Laruelle, M., 2019. *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields*. Taylor & Francis.
- Mankoff, J. (2009). *Russian foreign policy: The return of great power politics*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Merridale, C. (2006). *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945*. Macmillan.
- Molchanov, M., 1996. Borders of identity: Ukraine's political and cultural significance for Russia. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*.
- Myers, S. L. (2015). *The new tsar: the rise and reign of Vladimir Putin*. Simon and Schuster.
- Plokhly, S. (2006). *The origins of the Slavic nations: Premodern identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pramono, H., 2014. Pemimpin Separatis Ukraina Timur Ingin Bergabung dengan Rusia. *Surya.co.id (Tribunnews.com)*, 13 Mei.
- Robert Service. (2005). *A history of modern Russia: from Nicholas II to Vladimir Putin*. Harvard University Press.
- Reuters. (2025, June 30). *Pace of Ukraine talks hinges on efforts of Kyiv, Washington, Kremlin says*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pace-ukraine-talks-hinges-efforts-kyiv-washington-kremlin-says-2025-06-30/>
- Rudnytskiy, O. P. (2020). The Historical Evolution of the Population of Ukraine in the Light of the Theory of Demographic Transition. *Demography and Social Economy*, 3(41), 3-16.
- Sakwa, R., 2014. *Putin Redux: Power and Contradiction in Contemporary Russia*. Routledge.
- Snyder, T. (2018). *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. Crown.
- Solchanyk, R., 1998. Russians in Ukraine: Problems and Prospects. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, pp.539-553.
- Subtelny, O. (2009). *Ukraine: A history*. University of Toronto Press.
- Tolz, V., 2002. "Cultural Bosses" as Patrons and Clients: The Functioning of the Soviet Creative Unions in the Postwar Period. *Contemporary European History*.
- Treisman, D. (Ed.). (2018). *The new autocracy: information, politics, and policy in Putin's Russia*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Tsygankov, A.P., 2019. *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Yekelchyk, S., 2013. *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*. Slavonic & East European Review