**[Popularity and effectiveness](https://www.dawn.com/news/1759958/popularity-and-effectiveness)**

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RECENTLY, in an academic session with students abroad, I was discussing human effectiveness and leadership. Subliminal disturbance about the events back home led me to dwell on correlating the popularity of leaders and their effectiveness. Having considered many examples from history, the group concluded that popularity cannot necessarily be equated with effective leadership.

There have been many popular leaders who were very ineffective and turned out to be even destructive. On the other hand, there have also been many effective leaders who were relatively less known and unsung but who made a major, positive impact on history in terms of shaping the future of their societies.

Two sequential examples of leaders from mid-20th-century Germany are very instructive in this regard: Adolf Hitler and Konrad Adenauer. One was extremely charismatic and popular but a destroyer; the other was a wise statesman with a vision and a nation builder, but people hardly know of him.

Hitler took up the agenda of restoring Germany’s lost pride after its defeat in World War I and through his mercurial personality and emotional oratory mobilised Germans and turned them into Nazis. He tried to take power through a failed coup attempt in 1923, was arrested. He made fiery speeches in court where some judges developed sympathy for him. He was released much before the completion of his jail term, and mobilised against the Jews and for pan-Germanism. He won the elections in 1932 and became chancellor, and eventually manoeuvred to become head of state as well as of government and established a one-party dictatorship.

There have been many popular leaders who proved to be not just ineffective but also destructive.

Goebbels, his propaganda minister used all communication mediums at his disposal to instigate the people against the Jews, which eventually resulted in the terrifying Holocaust. Six million Jews were systematically exterminated. Hitler’s aggressive foreign policy and declaration of wars against Poland, the Soviet Union and the US led to World War II in which Germany was eventually defeated at the hands of the Allies.

In 1945, in view of his imminent defeat and capture by the Soviet Red Army, Hitler committed suicide along with his wife whom he had married barely two days earlier in a bunker. Goebbels took over as chancellor; a day after he and his wife first murdered their six children, and then also committed suicide. The Allies occupied Germany and divided it into four parts managed by Britain, France, the US and the Soviet Union.

Konrad Adenauer was the lord mayor of Cologne in 1933 when Hitler was riding the popular wave to power. From the beginning, he was courageous enough to openly oppose Hitler and his party. As mayor of Cologne, he ordered the removal of swastika flags from bridges and public buildings and refused to greet Hitler when he arrived in Cologne on an election campaign. A week after Hitler took over as chancellor, Adenauer was removed as mayor. For the next 10 years or so, he survived arrests and Nazi hunts. After the ‘unconditional surrender’ of Germany and occupation by the Allies, he took upon himself the responsibility of restoring the dignity of his crushed country and bringing Germany back into the comity of nations as a responsible state. This was a Herculean job. Along with others, he founded the Christian Democratic Union in 1945 and became its first chairman, organising the party across the country. As a Catholic, he strongly believed in Christian morality and developed his leadership on moral principles. As a very hardworking leader, he was determined to take Germany out of the abyss. Eventually, he was elected as the first post-World War II chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. Imagine his challenges: bringing internal coherence and confidence to his people who had been defeated in two world wars; rebuilding the image of Germany after the barbaric genocide of Jews; dealing with four super powerful occupying forces; dealing with the Soviet communist forces that had already divided Berlin. The economy was in tatters and the world didn’t want Germany to regain its strength after twice experiencing its expansionist ambitions.

For the next 15 years as chancellor, Adenauer put his head down and bit by bit rebuilt his country — its economy, its people and its image. Through his unrelenting work ethic, clear vision and political skill, he inspired confidence internally and in the outside world. He realised that a united Europe was essential in the long run for Germany, so he laid the foundations of what today is the European Union (EU). To deal with the communism threat knocking at his door during the Cold War years, he played a key role in strengthening what we know today as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato). He never accepted the division of Berlin, despite the erection of the wall, and laid the foundations of reunification. The wall eventually came down in 1989.

Today, Germany is Europe’s largest and the world’s fourth largest economy. German technology is the gold standard. It is a welfare state which takes care of its people in every sense of the word. Germany’s political system and its institutions are strong and it has a central role in the EU.

A hard test of effective leaders lies in how their vision is dealt with by future leaders. In Konrad Adenauer’s case, this is how Angela Merkel, another Christian Democrat leader, remembered him on his 50th death anniversary, “…who, with foresight and skill, gave our country a perspective and stability after the failure of the Weimar Republic and horrors of National Socialism. We bow to Konrad Adenauer with gratitude. We also take his merit as an obligation for our tasks in a confusing, difficult world. In view of what Konrad Adenauer and his contemporaries have achieved, we should have the courage to continue this work”.

Popular leaders can be a boon or a curse, they can cut both ways but effective leaders are the ones who make a real positive difference in the long run. They may be less charismatic and noisy but they gain lasting fame through their clear vision, hard work, integrity, principled leadership and impact.

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