

SKERRIT v. LINTON: *A Compare and Contrast Analysis of Dominican Political Leadership*

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Honesty, integrity and selflessness are the basic attributes of a good political leader. These qualities can be mapped through careful and responsible analysis of political leadership, when the inquiry is premised on the merits and understanding of politics and how formal political organizations are led or managed.

We understand politics to mean the ongoing interaction among people, and leadership would thus be the harmonization of those interactions. Political parties are largely private entities, which mainly look after the interest of their members and affiliates. Parties also seek to hold public office with the balance authority over policy decision making, with the view to representing the best interest of the masses.

If leaders provide direction to parties and parties play the key role in governing the people, party leadership is crucial. So, leadership is not and should not be confused with gamesmanship or gamespersonship (my gender-appropriate word). Party leadership is an honorable and time-tested vocation, which has a constant resonance in all things good and decent. The requirement for democratic leadership is even more demanding; as such leaders must lead in the shadows of the forerunners of true democracy and must be wholly driven by team dynamics.

The key to effective political representation and meaningful participation in a democracy at work is to engage all citizens, and the political leader who best embraces this is the more effective leader. How then do we measure a leader's effectiveness? Simple: we take away the fluff

(variables which compete with the independent variable) and focus on the nitty-gritty – honest and selfless integrity. When the bare qualities required for the effective leadership of healthy democratic political parties are presented, they come without the strategic showmanship or ‘showpersonship’ (my gender-appropriate word) which can sometimes be mistakenly used to characterize or frame leadership. Political leadership - probably more than any other form - is about honesty, integrity and concern for people and love for country (as has already been articulated), putting the latter first at all times. In essence, leadership strategy is not the same as leadership quality.

Now that the road-map to this discussion has been established, let me present the cases for measurement: ROOSEVELT SKERRIT v LENNOX LINTON. One of those leaders, Skerrit, is the current Prime Minister of Dominica and leader of the Dominica Labour Party (DLP) and the other, Linton, is the Leader of the Dominica Opposition and the United Workers Party (UWP). The rationale for the study is that both leaders are elected parliamentarians who hold key national political offices. The other Dominican party leaders should, therefore, not feel slighted by their non-inclusion in this analysis. I should state also that I have assembled field intelligence, which clearly supports this focus on the two leading political actors in Dominica; they do command this attention based on the percentage of the people’s opinion which they earned from the field study.

My analysis of both leaders is guided by this scientific measurement of the leaders’ public profile, as has been alluded to. The following figures which are extracted from that scientific electoral survey of May 2018, therefore, represents respondents’ views on the leadership of Skerrit and Linton as far as honesty, integrity and selflessness is concerned. On the question:

*Which party leader seems more about self than country?* 44.7% of respondents said Skerit with 32.6% indicating that it was Linton. This means that Skerit was adjudged as being more about his own interest than that of the country. Over 20% of respondents did not hold any firm view on party leadership, or they chose not to commit a response. In response to the question: *which party leader strikes you as being most honest?* Linton emerged as the most honest of all the political leaders who were polled with a 38.4% rating; Skerit polled in at 34.2%, while over 25% of respondents failing to provide a response one way or the other. The vast percentages of non-committed respondents provides another point for analysis which we may have some other time, but Linton emerged as being the superior leader even if Skerit has led the nation as Prime Minister.

The fact that Linton is seen as the superior leader is quite telling, especially as there is this tendency by some to associate effective political leadership with the ability to win elections. But this is not necessarily the case. If we were to accept this notion, the political leadership quality index of honesty, integrity and selflessness would be flawed, as these key tenets are not necessarily required to win elections. Winning elections have everything to do with strategies, emotional appeal, getting out the vote and other such tools which can be used in the electoral trade. One may therefore be a flawed political leader and because of the benefit of the services which grants him or her public appeal, end up winning elections. This is a common occurrence in the business of elections. Leadership accounts for statesmanship or ‘statespersonship’ (my gender-appropriate word), while political or electoral savvy is an asset for the election winning equation. An elections winner could easily be a lousy, dishonest and selfish political leader.

Since parties are private entities which look after the needs of their members, it stands to reason that the leader with the qualities which aligns closest to the people's needs - honesty, integrity and selflessness - would best represent the people. But ideals do not necessarily hold in electoral politics or in life in general. Parties aim to win and most times the better party and/or leader do not win. One must not, however, mix-up the two - quality of leadership and winning - although there is an argument to be made for why quality of leadership and winning should or could be merged. The fact is, for one to lead s/he must first win and as such the ability to win is just as important as leadership acumen – but the two are not the same although they do complement each other. The simple litmus test of a good leader is to observe how s/he manages transition from party leader to leader of government. A good leader would embrace all the people, including the opposition members, exercising honest integrity, humility and selflessness, which include transparent accountability in their every undertaking.

Flamboyance, charisma, eloquence, style, wit, tact, amity, showmanship (showpersonship), and knowledge/education and spontaneity are learned traits which leaders may or may not readily possess. Integrity, honor, and selflessness cannot be learnt. Some leaders are naturally disposed with certain gifts, one way or the other, and in the case of Skerit and Linton, we may allocate points for such qualities, but those points do not add up to leadership qualification, and they are not easily measured. Remember also that leadership acumen determines people's representation, because when it is all said and done, the people are generally concerned with the sustenance of their own livelihood and that of their loved ones. The people would naturally entrust the stewardship of their affairs in the hands of an honest and selfless leader of integrity. One may

also need to include the art of consensus seeking, team building, and group dynamics in the mix of an effective party political leader, especially in a democratic system.

To be clear and for the purpose of this article, honesty is understood as the truthful application of facts; integrity refers to the manner in which the leaders display such honesty, and selflessness is the sense of being more concerned about the needs of others before that of the leader. If the people have information, they will do what is in their best interest – every time. The loudest message is sometimes found in the drawn-out voices, and with the noise in Dominica being so voluminous at present; I expect that this message will come through, albeit when the dust would have settled. Hopefully the settling won't take too long. At the end of it all, it is the people who must demand that their “leaders” present themselves in their true form, as being caring and honest about the well-being of the masses. If this is done, there will be little need to even attempt to prize out partisan support from the citizenry.

I offer the following general closing comments. Show me a leader who applies facts, truthfully, and who displays a degree of honesty and selflessness, and I will show you a good leader. Show me a leader who uses electoral fluff, noise, extravagance, ridicule and unfair name-calling, and I will show you a “leader” who uses all these elements to shield their leadership ineptness. A classic moment occurred during a 2008 US Presidential Campaign town hall meeting when Sen. John McCain rose in defense of his opponent, Barack Obama. He actually chastised a supporter for making inaccurate assertions about his political rival – then Sen. Obama who went on to serve as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of America. This, I dare say, is the sort of character that true leaders are made of; the ability to do the right thing even if doing so may put you on the back foot in the

electoral process. Oh how good and proper it would be to see our Dominican leaders stand up in selfless defense of integrity and honesty as McCain.

Winning should not be the main leadership motivator; a call to duty should be. I also believe that everything should be done in moderation, and if leaders must mount convincing electoral campaigns, they must do so within discretionary limits. With that said, I understand that there may be the need to incorporate external attributes to augment leaders' appeal, but such augmentation must be responsibly applied. This is the only way that the true idea of political leadership, one of the key functions of the party structure in a democracy, can be preserved. Good, honest, and selfless leaders of integrity always represent the people well, and it is the people's responsibility to keep those leaders in check. But in order to do that, the people must be convinced – at all times – that those leaders are indeed remaining true to form.

There is this quiet and personal feeling of conviction that someone gets which says that a leader honestly cares about them. This feeling is and has to be personal, but when added up, that feeling should resonate through the people of conscience. To know this, such opinions must be responsibly measured. Based on the results of my field survey, Dominicans think that Lennox Linton leads Roosevelt Skerit in the key categories of political leadership and those qualities (as elaborated on earlier) are *honesty*, *integrity*, and *selflessness*. You may wish to incorporate other qualities into the discussion, but I had not measured those and cannot responsibly comment one way or the other. Let me state, however, that the other variables which could impact leadership outcomes are flamboyance, charisma, eloquence, style, wit, tact, amity, showmanship (showpersonship), knowledge/education and life experiences.

Though these traits did not go through the measurement maxim (as I indicated), they could be factored into the casual analysis of the respective leaders – Skerit and Linton in this case. We already know, based on my survey findings, that Linton is seen as the superior leader when it comes to honor, integrity and selflessness, so one may wish to apply the listed qualities to either Linton or Skerit and come up with their own opinion. The fact is, political leadership is a practical approach to human relations and it would be disingenuous of me not to recognize the tremendous strides that Linton has made in molding a political party in the face of opposition adversity which plagues Dominican and Caribbean politics.

Linton has managed to keep his party together, with one noticeable exception (the defection of Joseph Isaac). He has done so with a renewed sense of purpose through progressive team building, and in the face of tremendous legal and other setbacks. Skerit, on the other hand, is seemingly on a one-man conquest; he is the brand of his party and his political ambitions do not necessarily speak to his strengths as a consensus team-builder/leader. By mere observation only, one could conclude that both Linton and Skerit adopt different leadership styles and, while it is left to be seen what the eventual outcome will be in terms of their leadership legacy, it is always healthy to discuss such observable traits of those who serve in public office. This is what democracy demands.

We already know that Linton's leadership approach, as expressed by the Dominican constituents, is more honest, selfless and integrity driven. When team-work/team building and the maintenance of the democratic structural principles party leadership is added to this, it would be

rather disingenuous for any credible social observer not to appreciate that Linton is exemplary in that regard. Skerrit's strengths are in his public persona and charming charisma. Skerrit is obviously successful at creating his own political niche, but is this personality branding sustainable when it comes to his party? Can the DLP continue to be led under Skerrit's leadership model after his time? It may be said that each leader brings their own attitude, characteristic, vision, and style to the task, but I am not speaking of style, characteristics or attitude. I am instead dealing with the basic quality and substance of true democratic leadership.

With that said, please allow me to pose the following additional questions: Is Skerrit's leadership model, and/or that of Linton, in sync with standard models in democratic standards? Have Skerrit and Linton displayed the sort of integrity, team-work/team building, and have they put matters in place for maintaining the structural integrity of their political party? If both leaders do espouse those qualities, which leader appears to possess those qualities in greater abundance? Which political party stands the chance of doing better should either leader suddenly disappear – DLP or UWP? I leave it up to you to dwell on these questions and to make a determination one way or the other.

Finally, I ask that Roosevelt Skerrit and Lennox Linton engage each other. Gentlemen: please address the people away from the partisan noises and let the people know who you really are and what you are truthfully about. Inform the people of your plans to improve their circumstances and enhance their lives. Show the people a better way to relate with each other amidst their political differences. If you are the leader the people desire, that should be left to them to decide but the partisan tribalism which presently chocks needs to stop and it begins with you leaders.