

- 32 Elizabeth Drew, *On The Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p.86.
- 33 Paul Fick, *The Dysfunctional President: Inside the Mind of Bill Clinton* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1995), pp.11–12.
- 34 Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism, second edition* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002).
- 35 James William Anderson, “The Methodology of Psychological Biography,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 11: 455–75, 1981.
- 36 Sally Patel, “The Perils of Putting National Leaders on the Couch,” *New York Times*, June 29, 2004.
- 37 Anderson, “The Methodology of Psychological Biography,” p.455, pp.456–60.

### Suggested Further Reading

- Alexander George and Juliette George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964).
- Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

### Films

- Woodrow Wilson* (PBS American Experience): See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson>.
- LBJ* (PBS American Experience): See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/experience/films/lbj/>. Particularly excellent documentary about Lyndon Johnson’s life, and contains portions of interviews with Robert Dallek and Doris Kearns Goodwin. Many of the interviewees attest to LBJ’s remarkable personality.

## Chapter 8

# Personality and Beliefs

### Analyzing Personality

Even if one rejects the subjectivity of psychobiography as an approach to studying personality, we cannot leave things at that, not least because there are other ways of approaching the topic. Clearly, personality does not matter in all circumstances, and political psychologists who focus on personality factors nowadays are generally cautious in the kind of claims that they make. A leading advocate of personality-based approaches to politics, Fred Greenstein, provides us with a classic distinction which formalizes in a rather neat fashion some ideas that may have occurred to you already. In assessing whether individual leaders “matter”—in our terms, whether dispositions make a difference in shaping behavior—Greenstein distinguishes between what he calls *actor dispensability* and *action dispensability*.<sup>1</sup> This is a handy way of thinking about the forces that shape politics and history.

Suppose that a given actor—let’s make him George W. Bush in the example—has made a decision, and let’s further suppose that the decision is to invade Iraq. In order to make a difference to historical events, it is clear that the actor in question (Bush) must not be dispensable; in this case, this is another way of saying that if Bush had not been president—say if Al Gore or John Kerry had been in the Oval Office instead—the decision to invade Iraq might not have been taken (if *anyone* would have taken this decision, then the actor is dispensable). But there is a further test that must be passed if the individual is to have a material impact on history: the decision itself must matter as well. This is what Greenstein calls action dispensability. If the action (the invasion of Iraq) had no real impact on the path of history, then the action is dispensable. Most people would probably come to the opposite conclusion, though: the invasion of Iraq does seem to have had an enormous impact on a variety of outcomes, including the welfare of ordinary Iraqis, domestic politics in the United States, regional stability in the Middle East,

U.S.—European relations, and other things. If an individual leader passes both tests—actor and action dispensability—then he or she has had a material impact on events.

Though psychobiography may no longer be in vogue, the tradition of studying personality within political psychology remains a vibrant one. In the previous chapter we noted the problem of access: political leaders, whether past or present, are difficult to put “on the couch.” David Winter argues that we can reliably and objectively measure the personality attributes of leaders “at a distance,” however.<sup>2</sup> We can do this by content analysis of speeches, for instance, or by asking experts who know (or have written) about a given individual to fill out personality questionnaires as if they were the individual in question. Paul Kowert, for instance, used the “Q-sort” technique to reach a general view of the personality traits of a number of American presidents.<sup>3</sup> The experts he used included people who had personally known the presidents involved and those who had written about them from a historical, social scientific, or journalistic perspective.<sup>4</sup> This technique has the obvious benefit of generating more consensual or “intersubjective” portraits of leaders across a large range of individuals, rather than relying on a single author’s psychobiographical interpretations.

Performing content analyses of the public utterances and/or writings of political leaders also allows us to rate a number of different personality attributes, such as a leader’s cognitive style. Some political psychologists examine what they term a leader’s *integrative complexity*, for instance.<sup>5</sup> Suedfeld and Tetlock explain what this term means:

At the simple end of the continuum, decisions are characterized by anchoring around a few salient reference points; the perception of only one side of an argument or problem; the ignoring of subtle differences or similarities among other points of view; the perceiving of other participants, courses of action, and possible courses of action as being totally good or totally bad; and a search for rapid and absolute solutions in order to achieve minimization of uncertainty and ambiguity. At the complex end, we find flexible and open information processing; the use of many dimensions in an integrated, combinatorial fashion; continued search for novelty and for further information; and the ability to consider multiple points of view simultaneously, to integrate them, and then to respond flexibly to them.<sup>6</sup>

When one compares George W. Bush with JFK, for example, “Kennedy scored higher in integrative complexity, and had a coherent verbal manner of expression, laced with irony and wit. Bush’s language, in contrast, is awkward

and saturated with the earnest rhetoric of conventional morality,” David Winter notes.<sup>7</sup>

Much of David Winter’s work uses content analysis to rate political leaders according to their *motives*, with a particular emphasis on a recurring set of personality dimensions: the extent to which they seek power, affiliate themselves with others, try to achieve great things, and seek to control events. Winter and Stewart, for instance, find that the need for power and the need for affiliation are particularly important motivations for U.S. presidents.<sup>8</sup> As Winter notes, personality is a complex matter, and he defines it to include not only motives (how much power a leader seeks, for instance) but character *traits* as well (for instance, how introverted or extroverted a leader is). While the latter are relatively fixed, the former can vary over time, making the measurement of personality additionally tricky. Less conventionally, Winter also defines personality to include both *cognitions or beliefs* (what a leader thinks about abortion, for instance) as well as the *social or political context* in which a leader is operating (“the situation,” in our terms).

Along with Winter, Margaret Hermann is perhaps the scholar who has done most to place personality at the forefront of political psychology. Although there are many of her studies we could discuss here, one of the best known is her 1980 study of forty-five political leaders.<sup>9</sup> Based on earlier research, Hermann notes that “aggressive leaders are high in need for power, low in conceptual complexity, distrustful of others, nationalistic, and likely to believe that they have some control over the events in which they are involved.” On the other hand, the same research suggests that “conciliatory leaders are high in need for affiliation, high in conceptual complexity, trusting of others, low in nationalism, and likely to exhibit little belief in their own ability to control the events in which they are involved.”<sup>10</sup> Hermann later built upon this earlier work to develop *leadership trait analysis*, in which personality is treated as a combination of seven traits: belief in one’s ability to control events, conceptual complexity, need for power, distrust of others, ingroup bias, self-confidence, and task orientation. Like Winter’s framework, this approach utilizes at-a-distance content analysis of public speeches.<sup>11</sup>

Stephen Dyson has also recently applied this approach to the personality of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.<sup>12</sup> Examining Blair’s responses to parliamentary questions on the Iraq War, Dyson investigates the role played by Blair’s personality in shaping British decision-making on that issue. Utilizing Hermann’s framework, “Blair has a high belief in his ability to control events, a low conceptual complexity, and a high need for power,” Dyson argues.

In the Iraq decisions, the evidence indicates broad support for the expectations as to Blair’s preferences and behavior derived from his personality



profile. He demonstrated a proactive policy orientation, internal locus of control in terms of shaping events, a binary information processing and framing style, and a preference to work through tightly held processes in policy making.<sup>13</sup>

According to Margaret Herrmann and Thomas Preston, a survey of the literature shows that five factors in particular have shaped the study of leadership style, namely “involvement in the policy-making process, willingness to tolerate conflict, a president’s motivation or reason for leading, preferred strategies for managing information, and preferred strategies for resolving conflict.” They relate these factors to the kind of advisory system preferred by various American presidents. Preston subsequently broadened some of these insights into a more general framework for categorizing leadership style along two dimensions: the need for power and involvement in the decision-making process on the one hand, and cognitive complexity or sensitivity to context on the other. Along the first dimension, for instance, some leaders exhibit both a high need for control and also a high degree of interest and experience in the policy process. Preston terms these “directors.” Others have a low need for control and a low interest (“delegators”). It is also possible to combine a high need for power with low interest (“magistrates”) or a low need for power with high interest (“administrators”).<sup>15</sup>

Preston also classifies presidents according to their degree of cognitive complexity—where complexity is treated as a relatively fixed personality characteristic—and interest in foreign policy. Here he divides leaders into “navigators,” “observers,” “sentinels,” and “mavericks.” Navigators, for instance, have a high degree of interest in foreign policy with a high need for information and a high degree of cognitive complexity. Sentinels have a high degree of interest but a low need for information and a low degree of complexity, and so on. Putting these two categorizations together then allows us to fit presidents (and potentially any kind of leader) into a richer, more detailed, and more reliable kind of “master scheme” than that devised by, say, James David Barber. Preston characterizes Bill Clinton, for instance, as a “delegator–observer”; in other words, he is a delegator along the first dimension—meaning, as the name suggests, that he relied on subordinates and experts a great deal—and an observer along the second (although his cognitive complexity was high, he had limited interest in foreign policy). George W. Bush, on the other hand, best fits Preston’s “delegator–maverick” category; although similar to Clinton along the first dimension, he exhibited a low need for information and a low degree of cognitive complexity.<sup>16</sup>

## Analyzing Belief Systems

Some students have difficulty initially conceptualizing the difference between personality and *beliefs*, and some scholars (Winter provides a prominent example) actually treat beliefs as one aspect of personality. For the sake of analytical clarity, we will treat them separately in this chapter, however. One useful way of thinking about this distinction in a way that hopefully makes it crystal clear is to contrast a pair of individuals with a similar belief system but differing personalities, or a pair with essentially the same personality traits but differing beliefs. In the first category, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his predecessor provide a useful contrast. Both Blair and Brown were leading members of what became in Britain the “New Labour” movement within the British Labour Party. After suffering defeat after defeat at the polls in successive U.K. elections, “New Labour” members began to feel that the party should move to the center and even the right on many political issues. Both Blair and Brown were political moderates within the party who strongly favored this strategy. In 1994 Blair became leader of the Labour Party, continuing a policy of moving to the center that had been initiated by his predecessor, and in 1997 the party finally won the general election after eighteen years in opposition. “New Labour” won two more elections under Tony Blair until he stepped down in 2007 and was replaced by Brown as both Labour Party leader and U.K. prime minister.

What is especially interesting about this example is that while Blair and Brown shared a very similar ideological belief system, they appeared to exhibit strikingly different personalities. At the time of writing we do not have a systematic comparison of Brown’s personality with that of Blair along various trait dimensions, but there is already a consensus of sorts regarding some of the differences. While Blair was outgoing and more “political” in the way that his friend Bill Clinton was, Brown seemed more quiet and reserved. While Brown projected an image of cautiousness and seemed rather “donnish,” Blair was more inclined to take political risks, most notably when he went against his own political party and a substantial majority of British public opinion by backing George W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq. While Blair and Bush had enjoyed an apparently warm personal relationship, Brown made it clear from the start that he would not have the same sort of relationship with the American president.

Dissatisfaction with the somewhat vague and imprecise nature of personality itself—and the difficulties involved in tracing the processes by which particular personality attributes produce particular decisions—has led a growing number of political psychologists to turn to the content of people’s beliefs or cognitions, which seem more directly related to leader decisions. Although as we have seen in the situationist part of this book there are some

true views, and he almost certainly did not construct these views after the fact. More importantly, however, there are *empirical* objections nowadays that we could level at Holsti's analysis. At the time Holsti wrote, it was widely assumed that Dwight D. Eisenhower was a "do nothing" president who spent most of his time on the golf course, delegating domestic policy to his White House Chief of Staff Sherman Adams and foreign policy to Dulles. In recent years, however, revisionist research has largely debunked this unflattering image of the Eisenhower presidency. Thanks to Fred Greenstein's pioneering work in *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, for instance, we now know that Eisenhower and not Dulles was the real architect of the administration's foreign policies. Eisenhower, he argues convincingly, deliberately gave the appearance of not playing a policy role because he wished to preserve the popularity which comes from the symbolic side of the presidency, knowing that it was his national "father figure" status that underlay his broad popularity—and that getting your hands dirty with the political side of the presidency inevitably erodes that popularity—Eisenhower deliberately cultivated the perception that he was not involved in policy-making, letting Dulles and Adams take the political heat for unpopular decisions; behind the scenes, however, he quietly orchestrated the activities of his administration using what Greenstein calls "hidden-hand" techniques.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, there are parallels between Holsti's analysis and the observations that are often made about George H. W. Bush's relations with the Soviet Union as the Cold War came to an end. Against all expectations, Ronald Reagan had developed warm personal relations with Mikhail Gorbachev as the Cold War drew to a close, but several members of the succeeding Bush administration were suspicious of Soviet intentions, maintaining an "inherent bad faith" model similar to that of Dulles. As secretary of defense, Dick Cheney was especially skeptical about Gorbachev's intentions, as was the president himself.

### Operational Code Analysis

One especially prominent approach that political psychologists have used to study political beliefs is called *operational code analysis*.<sup>20</sup> Nathan Leites created the basis for this approach in the early 1950s when he investigated the political beliefs of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin. In a classic 1969 article, Alexander George reformulated Leites' observations into two sets of questions or fundamental categories: *philosophical* beliefs and *instrumental* beliefs. The operational code, George argued, provides a "set of general beliefs about fundamental issues of history as central questions as these bear, in turn, on the problem of action."<sup>21</sup>

### Philosophical Beliefs

- What is the "essential" nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?
- What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic, or must one be pessimistic on this score?
- Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?
- How much control or mastery can one have over historical development?
- What is one's role in moving and shaping history in the desired direction?
- What is the role of "chance" in human affairs?

### Instrumental Beliefs

- What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?
- How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?
- How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted?
- What is the best "timing" of action to advance one's interests?
- What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one's interests?

The first set of beliefs has to do with one's general philosophy about the nature of political life, while the second deals with more "practical" questions such as how one goes about implementing one's chosen political objectives. As you can probably see from a brief perusal of the questions, a leader's philosophical beliefs have to do with the answers which animated the classic political thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. While Hobbes had an exceptionally dark view of human nature, Locke held a rather more optimistic view. While Locke saw the world as a harmonious place, Hobbes famously held the opinion that if man were freed from the order-providing shackles of government, life would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." Contrasting with these fundamental "what is the political world like?" questions, on the other hand, are questions having to do with "how should we achieve our goals?" These are our instrumental beliefs.

As Scott Crichtlow suggests, the operational code approach is fundamentally dispositionist in the sense that it stresses the ways in which leaders *differ* in their reactions to the *same* political environment. If situation were everything, we would not need to bother studying a leader's beliefs, because these would not add anything much to the explanation (they would be *epiphenomenal*, to



use the social scientific phrase). But as Crichlow notes, “operational code analysis provides a means of testing a leader’s fundamental predispositions toward political action,” and hence of understanding the sources of the differing behaviors of leaders when placed in similar situations.<sup>22</sup> George stresses that there are some circumstances where situation or environment would in effect “force a leader’s hand,” but in general he maintains that dispositional beliefs could be expected to shape behavior in many circumstances.<sup>23</sup>

Let’s consider Lyndon Johnson and how he handled the problem of Vietnam as one example of some philosophical and instrumental beliefs. Addressing just a few of the questions above, one can reliably say that:

- Johnson had little foreign policy experience, so regarding Vietnam he relied on some simple but fundamental beliefs.
- For LBJ the essential nature of political life was conflictual, a war of good versus evil (Hobbesian view).
- Johnson believed that he could control events in Vietnam.
- Domestically and internationally, he steered a “middle course” that was enough to assuage hawks at home but not enough to provoke China into intervening in the war.
- His graduated bombing strategy allowed him to monitor (and to some extent control) risks.
- Instrumentally, he believed in bargaining backed up by threats (this had served him well in the U.S. Senate, but tragically the technique did not work well with his Communist adversary, Ho Chi Minh).<sup>24</sup>

Having laid out the basic form of operational code analysis, George did not conduct many actual operational code analyses himself, but left it to his followers to apply the theory empirically. One of the most prolific of these has been Stephen Walker, who has probably conducted more of these analyses than anyone else during their academic career. One of the best known of his articles is an operational code analysis of former National Security Adviser and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Examining Kissinger’s work as a political scientist prior to joining the Nixon administration in 1969, Walker demonstrates a strong correlation—with only a couple of deviations—between Kissinger’s writings as an academic and his actual behavior in office, albeit on one important issue (policy-making with regard to Vietnam between 1969 and 1973). Walker concludes:

In spite of the exigencies of bureaucratic politics and alliance diplomacy, plus the personal intervention of President Nixon at key points, Kissinger dominated the conduct of the American foreign policy that terminated

U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. He acted according to the instrumental principles of his operational code.<sup>25</sup>

Operational code analyses have now been published for a huge variety of leaders since the 1970s, and a new generation of scholars has adopted sophisticated computational techniques designed to tease out the ways in which a particular individual would answer the questions posed by the code. Recent work, moreover, has taken operational code analysis in new and interesting directions. Scott Crichlow, for instance, has used this approach to examine the ways in which leadership beliefs change over time.<sup>26</sup> Charting the operational codes of Israeli leaders Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, he shows how the basic philosophical views of both leaders became less conflictual between the 1970s and 1990s. Both men shared a similar view of their political environment in the 1970s, and these views changed in a similar direction over time. Crichlow finds that:

both leaders diagnosed their political universe in the 1990s differently than they had in the 1970s. In the earlier decade they saw a conflictual environment in which they had little chance of achieving their basic political goals. In the 1990s they saw a more unpredictable political universe, balanced between cooperative and conflictual forces.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, the analysis shows that in both periods Rabin “was clearly predisposed to acting in a cooperative manner.”<sup>28</sup> Crichlow also adds to George’s original conception of the operational code by producing a typology of typical codes, ranging from out-and-out idealists to pragmatists to realists, with various categories in between.<sup>29</sup>

In a comparative analysis of the operational codes of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, Mark Schafer and Stephen Walker examine whether beliefs in the democratic peace—the popular thesis that democracies do not fight one another, but may be especially prone to go to war with non-democracies—vary across political leaders within democracies. The theory is usually proposed on a purely *cultural* level, suggesting that all politicians within a democracy simply internalize the democratic peace and thus that we can expect few if any meaningful differences among individuals *within* a democratic state.<sup>30</sup> But is this the case? Schafer and Walker find that in some ways there are. For instance, they discover that while both Blair and Clinton hold highly positive views of democracies and negative views of non-democracies, they vary in the extent to which they believe that they can control the latter; Clinton scores high on control while Blair does not.<sup>31</sup> On the instrumental side, Clinton’s tactics towards non-democracies are also more cooperative than Blair’s. Blair

- the concept see for instance "President Clinton's Policy Dilemmas: A Cognitive Analysis," *Political Psychology*, 15: 337–49, 1994.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.172. Cognitive complexity has also been linked to the sophistication and kind of historical analogies used by leaders. See Stephen Dyson and Thomas Preston, "Individual Characteristics of Political Leaders and the Use of Analogies in Foreign Policy Decision Making," *Political Psychology*, 27: 265–88, 2006.
  - 7 Winter, "Things I've Learned About Personality From Studying Political Leaders At A Distance," p.570.
  - 8 David Winter and Abigail Stewart, "Content Analysis as a Method of Studying Political Leaders," in Margaret Herrmann (ed.), *A Psychological Examination of Political Leaders* (New York: Free Press, 1977).
  - 9 Margaret Herrmann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly*, 24: 7–46, 1980
  - 10 *Ibid.*, p.8.
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  - 13 *Ibid.*, p.303.
  - 14 Margaret Herrmann and Thomas Preston, "Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy: The Effect of Leadership Style on Executive Arrangements," *Political Psychology*, 15: 75–96, 1994, p.81.
  - 15 Thomas Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle: Leadership Style and the Advisory Process in Foreign Affairs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp.16–17.
  - 16 *Ibid.*, pp.22–23.
  - 17 Yaacov Vertzberger, *The World in Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition, and Perception in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p.114.
  - 18 This article, originally published in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* in 1967, was republished as Ole Holsti, "The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study," in James Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, second edition (New York: Free Press, 1969).
  - 19 Fred Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower As Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).
  - 20 For an excellent edited volume on this topic featuring many of the scholars who utilize this technique, see Mark Schafer and Stephen Walker (eds.), *Beliefs and Leadership in World Politics: Methods and Applications of Operational Code Analysis* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).
  - 21 Alexander George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision Making," *International Studies Quarterly*, 13: 190–222, 1969, p.191. See also, for instance, Alexander George, "The Causal Nexus Between Cognitive Beliefs and Decision Making Behavior: The 'Operational Code' Belief System," in Lawrence Falkowski (ed.), *Psychological Models in International Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979).
  - 22 Scott Crichtlow, "Idealism or Pragmatism? An Operational Code Analysis of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres," *Political Psychology*, 19: 683–706, 1998, p.684.
  - 1 George, "The Causal Nexus Between Cognitive Beliefs and Decision Making Behavior," p.104. On this point see also Stephen Walker, "The Evolution of Operational Code Analysis," *Political Psychology*, 11: 403–18, 1990, pp.408–9.
  - 2 Vertzberger, *The World In Their Minds*, pp.114–15. See also Stephen Walker and Mark Schafer, "The Political Universe of Lyndon B. Johnson and His Advisors: Diagnostic and Strategic Propensities in Their Operational Codes," *Political Psychology*, 21: 529–43, 2000.
  - 3 Stephen Walker, "The Interface Between Beliefs and Behavior: Henry Kissinger's Operational Code and the Vietnam War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 21: 129–68, 1977, p.147.
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  - 5 *Ibid.*, p.695.
  - 6 *Ibid.*, p.698.
  - 7 *Ibid.*, p.701.
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  - 9 *Ibid.*, p.573.
  - 10 *Ibid.*, p.575.
  - 11 Stephen Dyson, "Drawing Policy Implications from the 'Operational Code' of a 'New' Political Actor: Russian President Vladimir Putin," *Policy Sciences*, 34: 329–46, 2001.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, p.329.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, p.344.
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  - 17 *Ibid.*, p.416.

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- Alexander George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision Making," *International Studies Quarterly*, 13: 190–222, 1969.
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### Film

- Blair: The Inside Story (BBC, 2007). Three-part documentary available on YouTube.