

Objective: (1) to motivate dispositional theories of foreign policy, (2) to compare and contrast methods of studying a leader’s cognitive style, and (3) analyze results from these methods.

1 Key Ideas

Question: What conditions are required for leaders to “matter” in IR?

Answer: To “matter” in IR, leaders must vary in their attributes (i.e., differ from one another) *and* have agency (i.e., the ability to influence policy).

Question: What are the primary challenges scholars face in studying leaders?

Answer: (1) access: contemporary leaders are often out of reach for scholars and may even close themselves off, while historical leaders are stuck in the past; (2) inference: be wary of leader’s rationalizing their actions versus providing real reasons for their behavior; (3) ethics: unethical to make clinical diagnoses at a distance; (4) generalizability: can we learn more generally about leader decision-making based off of traits and personalities, or do leader idiosyncracies dominate?

Question: What are the four primary methods to studying leader cognition at a distance?

Answer:

Method	Description	Example
Operational codes	What leaders believe about the nature of history and politics: (a) diagnostic propensities and (b) choice propensities	JFK: optimistic about political universe; low confidence in control over events; cooperation is best overall strategy (Renshon 2009)
Leadership styles	How leaders make their decisions: (1) constraint respecters v. challengers; (2) open v. closed to information; (3) internal v. external motivation	Murtala Muhammed (internally motivated) v. Anwar Sadat (externally motivated)
Integrative complexity	How leaders think: (a) evaluative differentiation (i.e., the ability to acknowledge multiple viewpoints on an issue) and (b) conceptual integration (i.e., the ability to make connections between these differentiated dimensions)	Biden’s Ukraine policy as an example of high integrative complexity: US sends <i>modified</i> rocket launchers to support Ukraine but also to limit the possibility of broader escalation
Personality	“relatively stable psychological tendencies that are characteristic of individuals, predisposing them to consistent patterns of thought and behavior”; the Big 5 are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism	High openness associated with support for left-wing parties v. high conscientiousness associated with support for right-wing parties (Caprara and Vecchione 2013, 31)

Question: What is the central debate about where ideology originates?

Answer: Some scholars argue that ideology stems from elite cues (see Converse 1964). But if elite cues are the primary drivers of ideological preferences, then why are there cross-national similarities in ideological structure? Scholars like Jost (2017) argue that ideology instead is a form of motivated social cognition—beliefs vary according to our needs.

2 Tutorial: Leadership trait analysis

Leader: Joe Biden (2021)

Method: LTA applied to speeches

1. Remarks by President Biden on America's Place in the World (Feb. 4, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/04/remarks-by-president-biden-on-americas-place-in-the-world/>
2. Remarks by President Biden to Department of Defense Personnel (Feb. 10, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/02/10/remarks-by-president-biden-to-department-of-defense-personnel/>
3. Remarks by President Biden in Address to a Joint Session of Congress (April 29, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/04/29/remarks-by-president-biden-in-address-to-a-joint-session-of-congress/>
4. Remarks by President Biden on Afghanistan (Aug. 16, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/08/16/remarks-by-president-biden-on-afghanistan/>
5. Remarks by President Biden Before the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (Sept. 21, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/09/21/remarks-by-president-biden-before-the-76th-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly/>

Results: The table below shows the results of the LTA procedure conducted via ProfilerPlus. The table report scores of component dimensions.

Text	DIS	TASK	BCCE	IGB	SC	CC	PWR
1	.2258	.6636	.4608	.2254	.2703	.4952	.3894
2	.1707	.5132	.3966	.3208	.3243	.4872	.375
3	.2179	.5806	.4734	.1355	.3882	.5711	.3242
4	.0833	.6962	.4365	.0748	.3175	.5802	.3413
5	.1932	.6627	.3631	.1867	.4167	.4852	.3497
Average	.1782	.6233	.4261	.1886	.3434	.5238	.3559

Decoding LTA (Hermann 1999):

- DIS = distrust of others; TASK = task focus; BCCE = belief that can control events; IGB = ingroup bias; SC = self-confidence; CC = conceptual complexity; PWR = need for power
- Reaction to constraints (associated with BCCE and PWR): low PWR ($< .38$) and low BCCE ($< .33$) = constraint respecters; low PWR but high BCCE ($> .57$) = constraint challenger but skilled at direct influence; high PWR ($> .62$) and low BCCE = constraint challenger but skilled at indirect influence; high PWR and high BCCE = constraint challenger with skill in direct and indirect influence
- Openness to information (associated with CC and SC): open if (a) $CC > SC$ or (b) high CC ($> .58$) and SC ($> .80$); closed if (a) $SC > CC$ or (b) low CC ($< .32$) and SC ($< .34$)
- Motivation for seeking office (associated with TASK): high ($> .76$) = problem; low ($< .48$) = relationship; medium = both/depends on context

Citation: Nick Levine and Michael D Young (2014) "Leadership Trait Analysis and Threat Assessment with Profiler Plus". Proceedings of ILC 2014 on 8th International Lisp Conference, Montreal, QC, Canada — August 14 - 17, 2014. Association for Computing Machinery.