Individual Characteristics of Political Leaders and the Use of Analogy in Foreign Policy Decision Making

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The linkages between individual characteristics of political leaders and their usage of historical analogy during foreign policy decision-making episodes were examined. The individual characteristics studied were conceptual complexity and policy expertise, while usage of analogy was studied in terms of the sophistication and source of historical comparisons. The great majority of the analogies used by low-complexity individuals were nonsophisticated, whereas high-complexity individuals consistently used more sophisticated analogies. Low-complexity individuals drew analogies solely from their own generational and cultural context, while high-complexity leaders drew their analogies from a wider range of sources. More expert leaders drew from their personal experiences to a marginally greater degree than less expert individuals but, interestingly, both types of individual relied on generally available rather than personally experienced events for their analogies. The value added of the approach is to demonstrate that different types of leaders use history differently during political decision making.

KEY WORDS: Political Leaders, Conceptual Complexity, Policy Expertise, Analogical Reasoning, Foreign Policy Decision Making

In June 1950, President Harry S Truman considered the meaning of the North Korean invasion of the South. The attack had come without warning, and the North’s armored divisions had driven the South Korean army into retreat. For Truman, it was still too soon to determine whether the enemy advance could be contained, whether available reinforcements could arrive on the scene quickly enough to make a difference, or what was likely to happen next. George Elsey, who
was Administrative Assistant to the President, expressed his concern, which was shared by many of Truman’s foreign policy advisers, that the events in Korea might give China the opportunity to make a move against Taiwan. But as he looked at the globe, Truman sought out a different lens through which to view the situation and interpret its meaning. It was from a quite different part of the world and was drawn from his own past experience. Turning to Elsey, Truman suggested that, in his view, Iran would be the next place where the Soviets would cause trouble if the United States wasn’t careful:

Korea is the Greece of the Far East. If we are tough enough now, if we stand up to them like we did in Greece three years ago, they won’t take any next steps. But if we just stand by, they’ll move into Iran and they’ll take over the whole Middle East. There’s no telling what they’ll do, if we don’t put up a fight now. (Elsey, 1950)

Truman was drawn to the analogy of Greece, and the danger of appeasement mindset which it exemplified, to make sense of his chaotic environment. Using this analogical lens, the Korean situation for Truman became one based not upon the regional context or North Korean aggression, but rather part of a global struggle against a ruthless, expansionistic opponent who would only be halted by a forceful response.

What led Truman to select and use analogy in this fashion? Are there individual characteristics of leaders which might help us to predict how they will subsequently make use of analogies? In this study, we explore the links between two individual characteristics—conceptual complexity and policy expertise—and the impact they have upon the types of analogy used in foreign policy decision-making contexts. We study the use of analogy by four American presidents and their advisers in six key foreign policy episodes. Although this is an initial “plausibility probe,” with a limited set of leaders and foreign policy cases, we uncover some interesting and significant findings concerning the importance of complexity and policy expertise to the sophistication of analogies policymakers use and the sources from which they draw them.

**Historical Analogies and Decision-Making Style**

The study of the use of historical analogies in foreign policy decision making has become a well-established research program. Studies have identified the role these “lessons of the past” play in six key decision-making tasks: (1) defining the nature of the current situation; (2) assessing the stakes involved; (3) providing possible policy prescriptions; (4) predicting the likelihood of success of policy prescriptions; (5) assessing the moral rightness of policy prescriptions; and (6) providing warnings of danger associated with policy options (Khong, 1992, pp. 19–29). The psychological basis of reasoning through analogy has been estab-
lished, situating the analogical reasoning approach within the wider cognitive decision-making research program (Gentner, 1983; Holyoak, 1985; Jervis, 1976, pp. 217–282; Sylvan & Voss, 1998; Vertzberger, 1990, pp. 246–341). Case studies have established the importance of specific analogies to specific decision-making episodes, increasing our understanding of several major foreign policy events (Hemmer, 2000; Houghton, 2001; Hybel, 1990; Khong, 1992; May, 1973; Neustadt & May, 1986; Record, 2002). However, there are areas of the analogical reasoning research program which require further investigation. In particular, the factors which cause decision makers to use history in different ways and to draw that history from different sources remain underspecified (Hemmer, 2000, pp. 14–15). Although as explained below, certain hypotheses concerning these factors have been forwarded, they are either unsatisfactory or require further empirical investigation. We seek to contribute to closing this gap within the literature by exploring how two individual characteristics (conceptual complexity and policy expertise) influence analogical reasoning.

Individual Characteristics and the Sophistication of Analogies

Individual complexity has been linked to how attentive or sensitive individuals are to information from (or nuances within) their surrounding political or policy environments and to the extent to which they require information when making decisions (see Hermann, 1980a, 1987a; Nydegger, 1975; Preston, 2001; Tetlock, 1985; Ziller, Stone, Jackson, & Terbovic, 1977). Moreover, it has also been linked to a political leader’s style of decision making, use of advisers, and the pattern of information processing within their decision groups (Preston, 1996, 2001; Preston & ‘t Hart, 1999). Indeed, the more sensitive leaders are to information from the decision environment, the more receptive they are to the views of colleagues or constituents, the views of outside actors, and the value of alternative viewpoints and information discrepant with their existing ideas (Hermann, 1984; Nydegger, 1975; Ziller et al., 1977). Vertzberger (1990, p. 134), among others, has noted that as the complexity of individual decision makers increases, they become more capable of dealing with ambiguous decision environments and information that demands new or subtle distinctions (see also Bieri, 1966; Scott, 1963; Suedfeld & Rank, 1976; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977). In terms of interactions with advisers and the acceptance of critical feedback, several studies have shown that individuals higher in complexity are more interested in receiving negative feedback from others and are more likely to incorporate it into their own decision making (Nydegger, 1975; Ziller et al., 1977). In contrast, leaders with a lower complexity have been found to be less receptive to feedback from the environment, operate from a previously established and strongly held set of beliefs, selectively perceive and process incoming information in order to support or bolster this prior framework, and can be unreceptive or closed-minded towards alternative viewpoints and discrepant information (Glad, 1983; Hermann, 1984; Vertzberger, 1990). This is
not to say, however, that low complexity necessarily equals poor decision making. As Wallace and Suedfeld note: “There are obviously situations where lowered complexity may be adaptive: when decisions must be made immediately; . . . when one faces an implacable opponent who will not negotiate; when single-minded devotion to a cause is necessary for morale or to overcome unfavorable odds; or when well-structured methods are more effective than innovation” (1988, p. 441). Thus research into complexity does not attempt to make normative claims, but rather describes the information processing tendencies of individuals.


Others have treated complexity as a situationally induced state. This line of research “focuses on complexity as a behavioral characteristic susceptible to modification by such factors as information load, time constraints, risk etc, and on how this changing level of complexity in turn affects behavior and outcomes in a variety of situations” (Wallace & Suedfeld, 1988, p. 442). A measurement scheme was developed which codes for the degree of differentiation and integration of concepts in paragraph length units of material produced by the individual in question. Initially, this “paragraph completion test” relied upon the completion of responses to set stem questions by the subject, but was later refined to allow archival material on political decision making to be addressed. Research on integrative complexity has found that complexity drops prior to surprise attacks (Suedfeld & Bluck, 1988); complexity is higher in crises with successful outcomes (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977), leaders perform better in crises when they maintain high integrative complexity (Wallace & Suedfeld, 1988), and that the variable is useful for understanding specific cases of decision making such as the Munich crisis (Walker & Watson, 1994) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Guttieri, Wallace, & Suedfeld, 1995).

In this study, we treat complexity as a relatively stable personality trait and adopt the Hermann conceptualization and measure. We proceed in this way for two reasons. Firstly, a body of recent empirical work has provided support for
Hermann’s contention that conceptual complexity remains relatively stable for an individual across most situations and across time and that the measure robustly distinguishes between individuals. While initial doubt was cast upon the reliability of the conceptual complexity measure (Rasler, Thompson, & Chester, 1980), Hermann was able to defend her procedures (Hermann, 1980b). Subsequent studies which have analyzed large volumes of material across a long time period for the same individual have found impressive stability. Dille and Young (2000) studied verbal output from across the first terms of Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, finding that Hermann’s technique reliably measured individual differences and that the complexity scores of Carter and Clinton displayed significant consistency. In a study of post-1945 British prime ministers analyzing the universe of their responses to foreign policy questions in the House of Commons, Dyson (2004) found that Hermann’s complexity measure reliably distinguished between prime ministers and that the complexity scores of the individual prime ministers displayed a high level of consistency. We thus agree with Dille and Young that “Hermann’s at a distance measurement technique is a robust one. It captures substantive differences between individuals, which researchers can use to understand foreign policy behavior” (2000, p. 594).

Secondly, given our interest in analogical reasoning, the Hermann conceptualization of conceptual complexity as a relatively stable personality trait provides a separation between our independent variable (complexity as a personality trait) and dependent variable (analogizing as an instance of framing behavior in specific decision-making contexts). The integrative complexity construct would not provide such a clear separation, as it is in itself a decision-making behavior based construct, conceptualized as situationally dependent and measured through the analysis of materials produced during specific decision-making episodes.

With this discussion of complexity in mind, we turn to the literature on analogical reasoning. Here, the issue of the sophistication of analogy use is crucial. Much of the literature argues that decision makers rarely use analogies in a very discriminating fashion. Thus, May (1973) and Neustadt and May (1986) catalogue numerous instances wherein decision makers framed a new situation in light of an old one and were led astray. The implication is that policymakers do not know enough history and use the little which they do know in inappropriate ways. Indeed,

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1 Dividing the material to be analyzed into years and applying an analysis of variance test to the yearly trait scores, Dille and Young found that Carter’s complexity score did not differ significantly through his first term. Clinton exhibited a slight drop from his first to his second year (less than 10% of the total range of variation in a 75 leader data set), and then exhibited stability in the second, third, and fourth years. Carter was significantly higher in complexity than Clinton, and the interval between them was maintained in all eight years analyzed.

2 Dyson divided the responses to parliamentary questions into quarter year segments and calculated a ratio complexity score for each quarter year section. By assigning each prime minister a categorical value, Dyson was able to conduct a one way analysis of variance using “prime minister” as the grouping variable. The results indicated that Hermann’s complexity measure robustly discriminated between individual prime ministers in the data set.
Neustadt and May (1986) is something of an instruction manual to policymakers as to how they might improve their use of history. Khong (1992) also addresses the nonsophisticated use of analogies. He defines nonsophisticated use as “the tendency of policymakers to pick the first analogies that come to mind, by their failure to search for and to seriously consider other parallels, by their neglect of potentially important differences between situations being compared, and finally, by their tendency to use analogies as substitutes for proof” (Khong, 1992, p. 30). Much attention has therefore been paid to the types of comparisons policymakers draw between past and current events. A distinction can be drawn between comparisons made on surface dimensions—i.e., events in two countries from the same region, versus comparisons made on structural dimensions—i.e., the danger of inadvertent war in a crisis situation without obvious similarities to past events (Holyoak & Thagard, 1989, pp. 262–263). Khong argues that policymakers are “impressed by superficial similarities, and that they seldom probe (comparisons) more deeply or widely” (Khong, 1992, p. 35). He suggests that these symptoms of poor analogy use are inherent in the psychological process of analogical reasoning (Khong, 1992, p. 13). Our discussion of complexity and our interest in individual differences leads us to investigate another possibility—that individuals have a differential capacity for sophisticated use of analogy, and that this capacity is linked to their level of conceptual complexity. We hypothesize, therefore, that:

\[ H1: \] High-complexity leaders will utilize sophisticated analogies to a greater degree than low-complexity leaders³.

Individual Characteristics and the Source of Analogies

Within the literature on political leaders, policy expertise has been found to have a significant impact upon decision-making style, the nature of advisory group interactions, and how forcefully leaders assert their own positions on policy issues (cf., Barber, 1972; George, 1980; Hermann, 1986; House, 1990). Individuals have

³ We operationalize the sophistication of analogies in terms of three key features:

- Is the comparison a blanket assertion of perfect similarity (nonsophisticated)—this event is just like this past event—or stated in more contingent terms (sophisticated)?
- Is an attempt made to pinpoint, explain, and expand upon the specific ways in which the current event is similar to the past event (sophisticated), or is no such attempt made (nonsophisticated)?
- Is the comparison based on surface similarities—two countries from the same region; two dictatorships (nonsophisticated)—or deeper structural similarities between events—i.e., a risk of miscalculation and inadvertent war (sophisticated)?

For each analogy, a +1 score was recorded for each indicator linked to sophistication, and a −1 score for each indicator linked to nonsophistication. Summing the indicators leads to a score for the analogy ranging from −3 to +3. A positive score meant the analogy was considered sophisticated, and a negative score meant the analogy was considered nonsophisticated.
been found to be more likely to actively participate in the foreign policymaking process if they are interested in and have had experience with foreign policy (see, e.g., Barber, 1972; Crabb & Mulcahy, 1988; George, 1980). Expertise can provide leaders with a sense of what actions will be effective or ineffective in specific policy situations, as well as which cues from the environment should be attended to and which are irrelevant (Hermann, 1986, p. 178). Leaders with a high degree of policy expertise have been found to be more likely to insist upon personal involvement or control over policymaking than those lower in policy expertise (see Khong, 1992; Levy, 1994; Preston, 2001).

Expertise, and the experience from which it comes, has been treated within the analogies literature as a determinant of the source of comparisons. The argument is made that decision makers will be more likely to draw on events which are, to use the term of cognitive psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “available” (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982). To be highly available for use in decision making, an event will be easily called to mind, either due to its recentness or its similarity to the type of situation currently being faced. Further, events which are particularly vivid to the decision maker, due to their having a personal involvement or due to the high costs or benefits for the individual or their state which followed from the event, are especially likely to be selected (Jervis, 1976, pp. 239–249; Larson, 1985, pp. 38–40). Consequently, it has been argued that differences in the personal and career history of the individual will play a large role in determining which analogy will seem most applicable to the current situation. Lessons drawn from personal policymaking experience will be especially available in decision making (Khong, 1992, pp. 32–35; Neustadt & May, 1986, pp. 157–180). The existing arguments within the literature regarding the source from which decision makers draw analogies are summarized by Christopher Hemmer: “Other things being equal, more recent events, events that occurred during the formative years of a policymaker’s political career, and events that are emotionally involving because they were personally experienced or because they had important consequences for a policymaker or his state are more likely to be used as the basis for lessons of history” (2000, p. 18).

Given our interest in individual characteristics as influences on analogical reasoning, we hypothesize that more expert leaders, with a greater store of potential comparison events upon which to draw, will take analogies from their own experience to a greater degree than less expert leaders, who will be forced to rely upon generally available analogies. In this we follow Jervis, who hypothesized that individuals higher in experience have a “greater range of available alternative analogies” (Jervis, 1976, p. 270). Therefore:

\[ H2: \text{ Expert policymakers will draw analogies from their own experience to a greater degree than less expert policymakers.} \]

In addition to arguments within the analogies literature concerning the importance of individual experience, studies have also suggested that events experienced
by generations of decision makers during the formative, early years of their careers are especially likely to be drawn upon by those decision makers in subsequent years (Holsti & Rosenau, 1980; Lebow, 1985). Ernest May (1973, p. x) added the argument that modern day statesmen are unlikely to regard history from outside of their own time period and cultural referents as being relevant to present day decision making. They are likely only to select analogies from a time and place that “looks the same” as the one in which they are operating.

Again, given our interest in individual differences and analogizing, we formulate an alternative hypothesis. Our discussion of complexity indicated that lower-complexity individuals would be drawn towards surface similarities between a potential analogy and the current situation, whereas high-complexity individuals would be more readily able to perceive structural, nonsurface similarities. In the context of the source of analogies, we suggest that comparisons drawn between events from the decision maker’s generation and culture are more surface driven than comparisons from across temporal and cultural settings, which rely on more structural similarities. Therefore:

\[ H3: \] High-complexity leaders will draw analogies from other generations and cultures to a greater degree than low complexity leaders.\(^4\)

**Analogy and Advisers**

A body of work suggests that individual characteristics of political leaders shape the structure and process of an advisory system (George, 1980; Glad & Link, 1996; Greenstein, 1982; Preston, 1997). George suggests that the “communication network” an executive develops around him will reflect his “cognitive style” (1980, p. 98). Glad and Link argue that “a president’s personality . . . can influence the way he structures his advisory system, the types of relationships he has with key aides and advisers, and even the type and quality of advice and information he receives” (1996, p. 13). Building on these insights, Preston suggests that “a leader’s personality and preferred leadership style often critically affects how the advisory group is structured, the role of group members, the

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\(^4\) We code an analogy as being from a decision maker’s own experience if the decision maker was in an executive (i.e., executive branch, high military command) position concerned with making decisions directly related to the event being used as analogy. In formulating this operational definition we drew upon Jervis’ observation that “participating in the formation of a policy has more impact than witnessing it” (Jervis, 1976, p. 240). We code an analogy as from the generation and culture of the decision maker if the event to which a comparison is being made took place during the individual’s lifetime, and if the comparison event entered the consciousness of the nation of the decision maker. This is not the same as the comparison event directly involving the decision maker’s nation. For example, the Munich conference did not directly involve the United States, but “the diplomacy of this period had important enough consequences for the United States, which was not an active participant, to make the Munich analogy at least as salient for this country as for Britain and France” (Jervis, 1976, p. 267).
nature of debate and information processing within the group” (1997, p. 197; see also Burke & Greenstein, 1989; Greenstein, 1982; Hermann & Preston, 1994). With this in mind we investigate the hypothesis that the decision-making style of the leader, and in particular the manner in which they use analogy, will be mirrored by advisers to the leader. This may be the case for two basic reasons. First of all, it may be that advisers will attempt to match the information processing preferences of their chief. As George argues, these pressures towards conformity within decision-making groups exist for several reasons. Advisers are conscious they are appointed in order to fulfill the needs of the leader. Additionally, they may fear incurring the leader’s displeasure. Finally, they interact repeatedly over a long period of time, and so can grow fond of one another and begin to conduct foreign policy as, in the commentary of Bill Moyers upon the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, a “gentleman’s club” (George, 1980, pp. 82–95; see also Janis, 1972). Secondly, it may be that the leader will select advisers whose decision-making style is similar to their own. Glad (1983) argues that certain leaders will seek to appoint advisers who are “like minded,” Winter and Stewart (1977) suggest that presidents high in need for affiliation tend to surround themselves with advisers who are selected on the basis of perceived similarity, while George (1980) and Glad and Link (1996) independently document Richard Nixon’s fear of disagreement and consequent selection of very similar figures into his advisory circle. In light of this research, we specify hypothesis four:

\[ H4: \] Advisers will match the analogical style of the leader whom they advise in terms of the sophistication and source of analogies they use.

Two important caveats to this line of reasoning should be noted here. Firstly, the literature on leader-adviser relations is not in consensus on these points. Link and Glad (1994) have argued that in some cases leaders purposively select advisers who are different from them in terms of information processing style, in order to compensate for skills and perspectives which they themselves lack. Additionally, some leaders find great value in diversity among their advisers: George (1980, p. 157) suggests that this was the case with individuals such as Franklin Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. The second caveat we would enter here has to do with the basic premise of the study: As we are arguing that individual characteristics of leaders matter for analogizing, why are we not arguing the same with advisers? There are two responses. First, developing complexity and experience scores for the tens of advisers who were involved in our cases is beyond the scope of the present pilot test. Second, the data we generate concerning advisers is worthwhile in order to consider a form of the null hypothesis concerning individual characteristics and analogizing: Perhaps they matter for leaders, but are less relevant for advisers in subordinate power positions and consequently more stringent role requirements.
Method and Data

Measuring Leaders’ Characteristics

The individual characteristics of the leaders in this study were measured using assessment-at-a-distance techniques. The conceptual complexity measure was adopted from Hermann’s (1983/1999) Leadership Trait Assessment profiling technique. This method utilizes content analysis of spontaneous interview responses by political leaders across differing time periods, audiences, and substantive topic areas. The measure of conceptual complexity involves coding for evidence across interview responses of the leader’s ability to differentiate the environment and the degree of differentiation shown in describing or discussing other people, places, policies, ideas, or things (see Hermann, 1999). The specific trait score is the ratio of words within a sample of text tagged as indicative of high complexity (i.e., “approximately,” “possibility,” “trend”) versus those tagged as indicative of low complexity (i.e., “absolutely,” “certainly,” “irreversible”). To provide the source material for analysis, a set of spontaneous interview responses were collected for each president, from sources such as White House press conferences, interviews, and television talk shows. The focus on spontaneous responses reduces the risk of a profile reflecting the influence of a speechwriter and a prepared text rather than the conceptual complexity of the individual.

The policy expertise measure is adopted from Preston (2001). This measure codes for the relevant jobs, education, or other experiences that convey to the individual substantive foreign affairs knowledge or experience (see appendix for coding form). Data for this measure was collected from standard public domain and biographical sources.

Four individuals were selected for the study: Harry S Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson. We selected four U.S. presidents in order to control for nationality—crucial given the hypotheses concerning the source of analogies. We selected a sequence of presidents for a similar reason—to control for the time period as a source of analogies. Finally, the long delay between a presidency and the opening of archival materials on the administration—materials crucial to our coding of analogies—precluded the selection of more recent presidents. Table 1 displays the conceptual complexity and policy expertise scores of the four presidents:

The scores exhibit a similarity between Truman and Johnson, who are both substantially lower in complexity and expertise than Eisenhower and Kennedy. In

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<th>Truman</th>
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<td>Conceptual Complexity</td>
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comparison to a 122 leader-reference set (see Taysi & Preston, 2001), which labels scores as “high” or “low” in complexity which fall outside of one standard deviation from the mean, Eisenhower and Kennedy profile as high in complexity, while Truman and Johnson profile as medium. However, empirical research on the Truman and Johnson decision-making styles has indicated that, in the areas of information processing and framing of situations, Truman and Johnson are properly considered low complexity leaders (Preston, 2001). This aside, for our purposes the central point is that Truman and Johnson score significantly lower in complexity than Eisenhower and Kennedy.

No reference group concerning the policy expertise characteristic yet exists, although a grouping of Truman and Johnson as low expertise and Eisenhower and Kennedy as high expertise is supported by the differential in the scores and is in line with other accounts of these presidents. The major problem with the selection of these four presidents is the covariation of complexity and expertise in the sample, making the isolation of the separate effect of these explanatory variables difficult. Ideally, we would have added a low-complexity, high-expertise leader and a high-complexity, low-expertise leader. However, no modern American president for whom archival materials are yet available fits this description. Solving this problem by introducing a non-U.S. leader raises problems given that some of our hypotheses are sensitive to nationality of the leader. Further, selecting a more recent U.S. president and using solely secondary source material would also be undesirable given standard doubts about these materials. Finally, we do acknowledge that the covariation is problematic in terms of inductively assessing the separate impact of these two individual characteristics. However, as our theoretical discussion indicated that we expect complexity and expertise to separately affect different aspects of analogy use, we are confident in proceeding with our four presidents.

Linking Individual Characteristics to Use of Analogy in the Archival Record

From the presidencies of Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson we selected the following foreign policy decision cases for analysis: (1) Truman’s decisions to intervene in Korea in June 1950 and (2) cross the Thirty-Eighth parallel in September 1950; (3) Eisenhower’s decision not to intervene at Dien Bien Phu in April 1954; (4) Kennedy’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962; (5) Johnson’s decisions to intervene in Vietnam in July 1965 and (6) institute a partial-bombing halt and winding down of the war in March 1968. In order to arrive at the selection of these cases, a master list of major foreign policy crises in which these presidents were involved was compiled. Archival material on these cases was gathered from the relevant presidential library. The cases finally selected for inclusion in the study were those for which the most complete archival record was available—a crucial factor given the level of detail demanded by our coding procedures. Therefore, the cases were not selected with the hypotheses of
the study in mind (indeed, the material was collected before the specific hypotheses had been formulated). Because part of our case selection rule was volume of material available, we did not include hypotheses in the study concerning frequency of analogy use, as this would logically be correlated with the amount of material available. Only major crises were selected in order to partly control for the potential impact of stress upon use of analogy—which would be important given that use of analogy has been linked to aspects of the situation facing decision makers (Houghton, 1996). Each of the episodes included were high-stress situations in terms of involving high stakes, time pressure, or both.

Documents covering all aspects of presidential interaction with advisers and decision making in the cases were collected, including minutes of National Security Council or Cabinet meetings, memoranda between advisers and the president, diaries and memoirs chronicling interactions, telephone conversations, reports, etc. A coding workbook based upon the operational definitions introduced earlier was developed to be completed whenever an instance of analogy usage by the president or his advisers was encountered. The workbook contained a series of dichotomous questions: whether an analogy was sophisticated, from a decision maker’s own experience, and from a decision maker’s own generation and culture. Each instance of analogy usage was coded 1 or 0 for each of these questions. This allows the calculation of chi-square values to determine whether the null hypothesis of no variation linked to complexity and expertise could be rejected. In addition, qualitative data on each analogy usage was preserved. This allows for the elaboration and illustration of the linkages demonstrated through the quantitative analysis. When possible, interviews with presidential advisers were also conducted. These interviews, conducted by the second author, provided context and elaboration but were not used in the generation either of the trait scores or the coding of analogies.

Results

In the tables below, we present our findings. Table 2 shows the volume, sophistication, and source of the analogies used in the entire sample of material analyzed, while Tables 3 and 4 show the impact of conceptual complexity and policy expertise.

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5 Each analogy was evaluated by two individuals: the first author and an outside individual who was unaware of the complexity and the expertise scores of the presidents and the hypotheses of the study. Because the coding procedures generated categorical data, Spearman’s rho was used to calculate the correlation between the coders’ judgments. The correlation was .907, significant at $p < .01$. This is above the accepted intercoder reliability standard of .8 (see Holsti, 1969, p. 142). In instances of discrepancy between the coders, these were discussed and reconciled with reference to the coding rules. These discrepancies mostly rested upon biographical details of an individual using an analogy, which was important to determine whether the analogy was from the individual’s personal experience. As an additional check against possible bias, the complexity and expertise scores were generated separately by the second author, who did not take part in the analogies coding.
The Sophistication of Analogy Use

Hypothesis one, concerning the impact of individual characteristics on the sophistication of analogy use, posited that high-complexity leaders would use a higher proportion of sophisticated analogies than low-complexity leaders. This
hypothesis was supported by our results. High-complexity leaders demonstrated sophistication in 91% (10/11) of the instances of usage, while by contrast, low-complexity leaders used nonsophisticated analogies in 88% (14/16) of the instances where analogies were used. A chi-square test indicates a difference between use of analogy by the two groups of leaders which is statistically significant. The qualitative record can be examined to illustrate this finding.

The two higher-complexity presidents (John F. Kennedy and Dwight D. Eisenhower) consistently demonstrated a sophisticated style of analogizing. Consider Kennedy’s search through the history of past actions to find a precedent for Soviet placement of nuclear missiles in Cuba in October 1962: “We never really had a case where it’s been this, uh . . . after all they backed down in, uh, Chinese Communists in ’58. They didn’t go into Laos. Agreed to a ceasefire there” (J. Kennedy, 1962). Later in the same meeting, Kennedy continued: “I don’t know enough about the Soviet Union, but if anybody can tell me any other time since the Berlin blockade where the Russians have given us so clear provocation, I don’t know when its been, because they’ve been awfully cautious really” (J. Kennedy, 1962). These examples have the hallmarks of sophisticated use of analogy. The differences between the current Soviet move (extremely aggressive) and their behavior in the past (“awfully cautious”) are pointed out. The analogies are also forwarded in conditional terms: “I don’t know enough about”; “if anybody can tell me.”

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, another example of Kennedy’s use of sophisticated analogy occurred on the morning of 23 October 1962, when a letter was received from Soviet leader Khrushchev accusing the United States of creating “a serious threat to peace” and emphasizing that the USSR did not recognize the U.S. right to establish a blockade around Cuba (Chang & Kornbluh, 1992, p. 156). Later at the Ex Comm, the decision-making group created to formulate U.S. policy during the crisis, Kennedy directed the Navy to begin enforcing a naval quarantine at dawn on the 24th. Discussion centered around the exact rules to be given the Navy regarding the interception of merchant vessels in the quarantine zone (Bundy, 1962). Although the Navy indicated that it was possible to disable ships without sinking them by “shooting at the rudders,” Kennedy expressed concern that the Russians might resist the boarding of a vessel, perhaps resulting in fierce fighting and casualties. A response was composed to Khrushchev, encouraging him to observe the quarantine line and emphasizing that the United States did not want to fire on any Soviet ships. As Kennedy told several advisers after the meeting, “the great danger and risk in all of this is a miscalculation—a mistake in judgment,” and referred them to the miscalculations among nations prior to the outbreak of World War I that led to an unwanted war, described in Barbara Tuchman’s book, *The Guns of August*, as an example (R. Kennedy, 1969, pp. 60–63). This use of analogy is complex insofar as Kennedy perceived the structural similarities (risk of miscalculation) between situations (World War I, the Cuban Missile Crisis) with little surface comparability.
The other high complexity leader in the study, Dwight Eisenhower, also exhibited consistently sophisticated use of analogy. During the Dien Bien Phu episode Eisenhower constructed a compound analogy of British “imperial folly” as he decided whether or not to involve America in the battle. During the April 29th National Security Council meeting:

The president again repeated his conviction that if the United States were to permit its ground forces to be drawn into conflict in a great variety of places throughout the world, the end result would be gravely to weaken the defensive position of the United States. Before doing that, it almost appeared that we would have to choose between actually launching an attack on Soviet Russia or allowing ourselves to be exhausted piecemeal, as had been the fate of the British. (Eisenhower, 1954a)

This already sophisticated analogy was unpacked further by Eisenhower in a letter sent at the same time to his friend, “Swede” Hazlett:

The French have failed entirely to produce any enthusiasm on the part of the Vietnamese for participation in the war. Incidentally, did you ever stop to think that if the British had, in our War of the Revolution, treated as equals the Americans who favored them . . . the job of Washington would have been much more difficult, if not impossible . . . Yet no really effective service was rendered by these people because the British persisted in treating them as colonials and inferiors. (Eisenhower, 1954b)

The analogy of “imperial folly” here comprised two parts—one of imperial overstretch caused by being drawn into peripheral conflicts, and which cautioned against U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and one of imperial arrogance, which cautioned that equitable treatment of the indigenous population was necessary in order to win a military victory. This second part of the analogy chastised the French for failing to learn the lessons of the British empire. This use of analogy was especially sophisticated—the analogy invoked is not an obvious one and the similarities are not confined to surface appearances. Further, the implications of the analogy are unpacked into their component parts.

In contrast were the low-complexity presidents (Harry S Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson), who frequently resorted to less sophisticated analogies to make sense of their decision-making environment. The findings of our study are consistent with the observations of former associates of both of these presidents. As Richard Neustadt recalled, “I think Truman used analogies all the time and didn’t look at them very hard. And some of them were lousy!” (Interview, November 16, 1996).

During the Korean case, Truman told a meeting of congressional leaders that he could not let the invasion pass unnoticed because it was obviously inspired by the Soviets, who would swallow one piece of Asia after another, then the Near
East, and then perhaps Europe (Preston, 1997, 2001). It is interesting to note that even after his presidency, Truman’s analysis of the North Korean invasion of the South was still dominated by the Munich analogy: “Communism was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen, and twenty years earlier” (Truman, 1956, pp. 332–333). This statement has many indicators of simplistic analogy use: a blanket comparison (“just as” being the crucial operator), with no attempt to unpack the analogy and explore the similarities and differences between the past and the current situation.

Similarly, Lyndon Johnson’s conceptual complexity score predicts that he would exhibit a largely undifferentiated image of the world and process most of his information about foreign affairs through relatively simple lenses. Johnson’s natural “tendency” in foreign affairs was “to think about the external world in the simplistic terms of appeasement versus military resolve” (Hoopes, 1969, p. 7). As a result, Johnson tended to view Vietnam in straightforward terms, often reducing the entire conflict to simple equations such as “freedom versus communism” or “appeasement versus aggression” (Kearns, 1976, p. 257). Further, it has often been noted that Johnson tended to see “each country and all the people he met through an American prism” when either traveling abroad or contemplating foreign policy decisions (Kearns, 1976, p. 194). This often led, as Neustadt noted in an interview, to the use of ill-fitting analogies:

[Johnson] did analogize from his own experience in Texas or in the Senate . . . I heard him discuss how the Germans in West Germany will act drawing from the Texas Germans . . . It’s not a very good comparison, but he was making his own . . . I also heard him talk about Ho Chi Minh in terms that indicated he really did think of Ho as sort of a senator. You know, cuff him. You don’t cuff him to death—you just make life difficult for him. Sticks and then carrots, and then the guy will reason—okay—so he’ll make a deal. (Interview, November 16, 1996)

Johnson frequently utilized simple analogies—especially ones involving Munich—to understand events abroad, and this heavily influenced his early decision making on Vietnam. For example, during the decision making surrounding the 1965 escalation, the simple Korean War analogy forwarded by Secretary of State Dean Rusk (which, itself derived from the Munich experience, emphasized standing up to aggression in order to prevent further expansionistic behavior by a ruthless opponent), was very important in shaping Johnson’s views (see Khong, 1992). Paul Warnke observed: “I think that the principle analogy Johnson had was Munich. That there weren’t going to be any more Munics . . . He’d often talk in terms of, that he had to stop this threat at the very beginning. If we’d stopped Hitler before Czechoslovakia, it would have made a big difference” (Interview, July 6, 1995).

Indeed, in explaining his reluctance to withdraw from Vietnam, Johnson noted “everything I knew about history told me that if I got out of Vietnam and let Ho Chi
Minh run through the streets of Saigon, I’d be doing exactly what Chamberlain did in World War II” (Kearns, 1976, p. 252). Building upon the Munich analogy, Johnson observed that: “If the aggression succeeded in South Vietnam, then the aggressors would simply keep going until all of Southeast Asia fell into their hands . . . Moscow and Peking would be moving to expand their control and soon we’d be fighting in Berlin or elsewhere. And so would begin World War III” (Khong, 1992, p. 182). Note the unequivocal application of the analogy, “everything I knew about history . . . I’d be doing exactly what Chamberlain did.” As our results indicate, low-complexity leaders are prone to this type of less sophisticated analogy usage.

**The Source of Analogies**

Hypothesis 2, which suggested that more expert leaders would draw analogies predominantly from their own experience whereas less expert leaders would draw analogies from those that were generally available, was not supported by our results. Contrary to our expectations, both types of leader drew the majority of their analogies from generally available knowledge rather than to different degrees from their own policymaking experiences. That being said, there was a slight difference in the effect produced by expertise, with high-expertise leaders using their own prior experiences as analogies to a marginally greater degree than those of low expertise. Indeed, across both presidents and advisers, just 26% of analogies used were drawn from the experience of the individual. These results, if confirmed by further investigations, might call into question the strength of the assertion within the analogical reasoning literature suggesting that events which are personally experienced by policymakers will be particularly available to them. Had this been the case, we would have expected a far larger number of analogies used to be drawn from the policymaker’s experience.

Hypothesis 3, which suggested that high-complexity leaders would utilize historical parallels drawn from generations and cultures different from the policymaker’s own to a greater degree than low-complexity individuals, was supported by our results. Truman, as a low-complexity individual, was less disposed to see the events of other eras and cultures as relevant to his current situation. The Munich analogy was the defining event of his era, however, and he stated its appeal in those terms: “In my generation, this was not the first time the strong had attacked the weak. I recalled some earlier instances: Manchuria, Ethiopia, Austria” (Truman, 1956, pp. 332–333). Truman here is following the tendency exhibited by low-complexity leaders of using history drawn predominantly from their own generation and culture, which he and Johnson did in their analogy use 100% of the time. In contrast, Eisenhower and Kennedy drew history from other times and cultures for 36% of the analogies they used. This difference in the sources of analogy drawn upon by the high versus the low-complexity decision makers is reflected in a statistically significant chi-square value.
Advisers and Analogies

Hypothesis 4 made the prediction that advisers to the president would use analogies in the same general manner as the president. Were this hypothesis to hold, an adviser to a low-complexity president would use predominantly nonsophisticated analogies drawn from their own generation and culture, whereas an adviser to a high-complexity president would use more sophisticated analogies, drawn from a broader range of history. We did not find this expected variation in advisers’ use of analogies. There are several possible explanations for this. First, this could be seen to lend support to those within the literature on leaders and advisers who argue that leaders purposefully pick advisers who differ from them (i.e., Link & Glad, 1994), or who value diversity in decision-making groups as a good in and of itself (George, 1980). Second, it may well be that analogizing is such an individual, as opposed to social, task, that the manner in which the president himself likes to operate has no bearing on how the advisers use history. In a large number of adviser usages of analogy, the president was either not present or the analogy was used in a nonsocial (i.e., private memorandum) context. It may be that advisers, when analogizing for the benefit of the president, do use history in the same way as the president, but when analogizing for the benefit of themselves or their fellow advisers, do not use history in the same way as the president. Analogizing by advisers would therefore be unaffected by what the president is like, in contrast to other more social decision-making tasks (holding meetings, presenting policy recommendations), where a variation in the characteristics of the leader has been found to correlate with the manner in which the advisory system operates (see Preston, 2001). Third, and most consistently with the theoretical basis of the article, the variation in the individual complexity and expertise of advisers themselves may be affecting their use of analogy. This is a potentially fruitful line of research for future studies to explore, as we indicate in the concluding section.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of individual characteristics of leaders upon their patterns of analogical reasoning within policymaking groups. Using archival materials gathered from across four U.S. presidents and six foreign policy decision cases, we pursued an investigation of a number of hypotheses. We attempted to make two contributions to the study of analogical reasoning. First, we sought to introduce theoretically grounded expectations of the impact of individual differences upon the use of analogies. Second, we sought to investigate these linkages in a more rigorous and comparative fashion than previous studies of analogizing, which have been valuable but also somewhat idiographic. In interpreting the results of the study it is of course appropriate to note that it represents a pilot test of the hypothesis that the individual characteristics of political leaders impact the sophistication and the source of analogies they use. While a more extensive
comparative quantitative study than has been attempted previously, testing the hypotheses over four presidencies still represents a small sample from which to draw general conclusions. Additionally, the covariation of complexity and expertise within the sample is not ideal, and although we have argued that “fixing” the problem is not a trivial matter, the issue does somewhat constrain the strength of inferences which it is possible to draw. Even with this in mind, we uncovered some intriguing findings.

We found that high-complexity leaders overwhelmingly employed more sophisticated analogies than did their low-complexity counterparts, who consistently employed quite simple analogies in their policymaking. We found that the more expert presidents employed analogies drawn from their own experiences slightly more than did the less expert presidents. Interestingly, we found that both types of leaders tended, for the most part, to draw analogies from generally available knowledge rather than from their own personal policymaking experiences. We found that low-complexity leaders consistently employed analogies drawn from their own generation and culture, while high-complexity leaders looked further afield for their analogies, drawing many from other generations and cultures as well. We also found that there does not appear to be a strong link between the styles of analogical reasoning used by advisers and their presidents.

These results have important implications for the study of analogies and leaders. First, the strong apparent effect of conceptual complexity as a stable personality trait upon the sophistication of analogy use is further support for the validity of that construct and Hermann’s measure. Case-based framing behavior in foreign policy decision-making episodes emerges as a further aspect of political decision making impacted by a leader’s conceptual complexity. The role attributed to experience as a source of analogies within the literature is called into question by our results, however. Most of the analogies used by individuals did not come from events in their personal past, but were drawn from those that were generally available. This suggests perhaps that the availability of an analogy is impacted less by the event being personally experienced than was previously thought, and further investigation of this matter is necessary. The results as a whole indicate that studies of analogizing in foreign policy decision making should take greater account of individual characteristics as determinants of the mode of analogical reasoning decision makers will likely employ.

The findings also suggest that several avenues of future research are appropriate. Most pressingly, the results here require further validation in future studies of other individuals and decision-making episodes. In particular, it would be helpful to include high-complexity/low-expertise individuals and vice versa. As we have suggested, this will probably require selecting a set of leaders from outside of the U.S. presidency. However, the testing of these linkages in different national contexts and executive systems would be a valuable contribution in and of itself. Additionally, a fascinating future study would develop complexity and expertise scores for advisers to political leaders and test the hypotheses developed
here regarding the manner in which these individuals utilize analogies. Our results suggest that advisers do not mirror the analogical style of their chief, and so it becomes important to investigate whether individual characteristics determine their use of analogy. Finally, a future study should consider the impact of individual characteristics upon the probability of perseverance with an inappropriate analogy. Khong (1992) among others has noted that once an analogy is selected by a policymaker, the subsequent reframing of the situation in alternative terms is very difficult for the policymaker to achieve, even when the course of action suggested by the analogy is failing. We would suggest that this is not a phenomenon that is likely to occur with equal probability across individuals, but rather that different types of individuals will be more susceptible to perseverance than others. Empirical investigation of this hypothesis would be a valuable contribution.

Future research aside, the value added of the current work is to show that what the leader is like in terms of their individual characteristics has a significant impact upon the analogies they use, and consequently how individuals frame events and evaluate policy options during the decision-making process. The sophistication and source of analogies are not, it seems, necessarily determined by processes inherent to analogical reasoning that apply universally, but rather are affected by the individual characteristics of the decision maker.

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**APPENDIX: Foreign Policy Expertise Scoring Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator of Expertise</th>
<th>Scoring Rule</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior-level political / military job(s) previously held involved primarily in foreign affairs or policy-making.</td>
<td>Each job (held by the individual for a minimum of 1 yr.) is counted separately (5 pts. Each yr. Less than 1 yr = 2 pts).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous junior-level political / military job(s) focused primarily upon foreign affairs and providing in-depth substantive knowledge of foreign policy topics.</td>
<td>Each job (held by the individual for a minimum of 1 yr.) is counted separately (1 pt. each/yr.).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous job(s), while not primarily focused upon foreign affairs, involved the individual substantively in the formulation, implementation or conduct of foreign policy during specific episodes.</td>
<td>Each significant or major individual job experience is counted separately (1 pt. each).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant foreign affairs-related education.</td>
<td>Ph.D. in foreign/international affairs (5 pts.) M.A. in foreign/international affairs (1 pt.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant foreign travel experience</td>
<td>Each experience (minimum length of 1 yr.) is counted separately (1 pt. each/yr.). Those of at least 6 months duration (0.5 pts. each).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Score =</td>
<td></td>
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