BRISTOL SHORTS RESEARCH

COMPARATIVE FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS REVISITED

A Theoretical Exploration

KLAUS BRUMMER AND CHRIS ALDEN

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Klaus Brummer dedicates this book to
the boys…and to baseball.
Chris Alden dedicates this book to his family.

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List of Abbreviations

AEF	Analogical Explanation Framework
BPM	Bureaucratic Politics Model
CFP	Comparative Foreign Policy
CFPA	Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis
CREON	Comparative Research on the Events of Nations
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
IPE	International Political Economy
IR	International Relations
LTA	Leadership Trait Analysis
OCA	Operational Code Analysis
PHT	Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making

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Klaus Brummer and Chris Alden
Eichstätt and London, February 2026

ONE

Introduction

Every country does foreign policy. Yet not every theory that seeks to explain foreign policy is necessarily applicable to every country. One way out of this predicament would be to come up with country-specific theories, essentially one theory per country. Much more ambitiously, one could aim for a general theory of foreign policy that is applicable to every country. However, the first avenue is not desirable since arriving at generalizations is an integral part of theory building. In turn, the latter avenue has proven to be too challenging to accomplish. Indeed, scholarship which had attempted to devise an integrated theory of the international system that bound together the multiple macro-systemic inter-state engagements with the nuances of domestic decision-making processes into an explicitly quantifiable framework was unsuccessful, as will be spelled out in greater detail in Chapter 2. The result has been a scaling back of academic ambitions and a turn to 'middle-range theory' focusing on the first (i.e., human behaviour) and second (i.e., internal state structures) tier of the levels of analysis or "images" (Waltz 1959; Singer 1961) as a means of making sense of state foreign policy behaviour.

Indeed, middle-range theorizing has become one of the hallmarks of the field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). It suggests that FPA theories are on the one hand "more generalizable than insights derived from case studies, but on the other hand, [have] more severe scope conditions constraining [their] generalizability" (Hudson 2008: 12). Of course, what

follows from this is that one should not expect FPA theories to be applicable to every country. This is particularly true due to the palpable "U.S. bias" that characterizes FPA scholarship, with the U.S. political system often times serving as the (implicit) background against which theories have been developed and subsequently also primarily applied (Brummer and Hudson 2017) – not least thanks "to the relatively easy accessibility of information about American political processes and policy" (Light 1994: 94). This trend is further reinforced by the predominance of the English language in global FPA and IR discussions, something that Aydinli and Aydinli (2024) have called "linguistic imperialism."

Against this background, Hermann (2001: 49) has argued that:

> models of foreign policy decision making have had a distinctly U.S. flavour. As a result, the models have not fared as well when extended to non-U.S. settings, particularly to nondemocratic, transitional, and less developed polities…Indeed, 'the U.S. bias' in the decision-making literature has made it difficult to generalize to other countries and has given researchers blind spots regarding how decisions are made in governments and cultures not like the American.[1]

In turn, Zhang approaches the same question from a different angle. He suggests with a view on the study of Chinese foreign policy that "Considering the benefits that could be gained, it is imperative that scholars of Chinese foreign policy and FPA theorists join hands in ascertaining which FPA models are applicable and which are not to Chinese foreign policy practice, and why and how they are or are not applicable" (Zhang 2016: 458). Of course, given the U.S. centredness of FPA in terms of where its models have originated from and with respect to which country they have been most frequently applied to, as highlighted by Hermann in the previous quote,

Zhang's statement holds just as true for a multitude of other countries as well.

Hence, in the final analysis the question might not just be to how many countries a theory is applicable, thus for which countries it should work and for which it should not, but, even more narrowly, whether a theory's explanatory power extends beyond the U.S. in the first place due to at times significant differences in decision-making environments (Brummer 2021). Systematic differences already exist when comparing the U.S. with other Western democracies, pertaining to the existence of parliamentary systems, a greater role of political parties, and different levels of politicization, among other things. Differences are even more pronounced when it comes to foreign policy making in non-Western settings, relating for example to the level of statehood, state capacity, external penetration, and economic dependence (e.g., Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2014; Whitaker and Clark 2018).[2] Thus, following Zhang (2016: 435), "Theoretical research on FPA needs to extend beyond the United States context and integrate foreign policy practices of countries other than those of the United States."

Goal of this volume

Many years ago, Rosenau stated that "Foreign policy variables were identified and discussed *as if* they operated in identical ways in all societies" (Rosenau 1968: 299; emphasis added). Taking up this statement, this volume's guiding question is whether foreign policy variables do indeed operate identically in different political contexts. Our answer to this question is a resounding "No."

Against this background, this book seeks to specify the analytical scope and ultimately to enhance the explanatory power of FPA theories by increasing their sensitivity to context through the adoption of a comparative lens. As Kaarbo (2003: 157) notes, "If a researcher wants to investigate

many of the traditional factors that explain foreign policy… it is necessary to compare foreign policies across time, space, and issues to understand the general explanatory power of these various influences on governments' behavior." In turn, context-sensitivity refers to the extent to which a theory's core concepts as well as the indicators (or operationalizations or measures) that are associated with those concepts that are valid in one context are also valid in different contexts (Adcock and Collier 2001). The question of sensitivity to context all but inevitably arises in comparative scholarship, for example, when analysing different countries, time periods, or actors. Thus, in our case the question is whether, and how well, the concepts and indicators that are contained in FPA theories travel to settings beyond the U.S.

Specifically, this concerns the validity of both the core concepts as contained in extant FPA theories and of the indicators (operationalizations or measures) that are used to empirically ascertain those concepts in different contexts. The latter also points to the importance of the equivalence of measurements of concepts across settings (Adcock and Collier 2001: 534). Our underlying goal is to improve FPA theories by highlighting potential or actual shortcomings in their context-sensitivity together with suggesting ways in which those shortcomings can be overcome. The latter can come, for example, in the form of delineating scope conditions of theories, the fine-tuning of core concepts, or the adjustment of operationalizations or measurements of those concepts. In so doing, we seek to move beyond what Persaud (2003: 49) has criticized as "too much of an unproblematic acceptance of the models developed for, and out of, the experiences of the Western states" and, in doing so, render FPA as a field of study more inclusive and less ethnocentric more generally.

As already indicated, there are various ways in which comparative work can unfold in the context of foreign policy scholarship (and beyond), for example, with regard to different time periods, actors, or policy domains (e.g., Kaarbo

2003; Brummer 2020). Yet this book focuses primarily on another dimension of comparison, in the form of *differences in political systems*. We suggest that the systematic differences that exist between the political systems of countries have similarly systematic effects on foreign policy processes and outcomes. While the discussion places emphasis on the formal institutional dimension of political systems, it also addresses other dimensions pertaining, for example, to political culture or social interactions, thus accounting for both formal and informal institutions (North 1990).

In some respects, this interplay between institutions, political culture, social interactions is captured by the "classic" regime type formulation favoured by scholars of Comparative Politics (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018; Cianetti, Del Panta, and Owen 2025). Accordingly, research into regime types is various characterized as consisting of a "procedural approach" that focuses on the policy processes, an "actor-centred approach" that gives primacy to elite interactions, or a "sociological approach" that emphasizes the relationship between rulers and ruled (Cianetti, Del Panta, and Owen 2025: 1973). Our position is that it is the distinctive nature of *foreign policy* with its outward facing orientation beyond the formal reach of the state that justifies the emphasis on institutions charged with managing the domestic-international policy frontier within a given political system (Rosenau 1997). This approach helps to anchor our comparative analysis in a context where the signals provided by the international system shape policy responses produced by institutions charged with navigating the uncertainties of interstate relations (Rose 1998).

A common juxtaposition concerns countries from the Global North "versus" the Global South (e.g., Brummer 2021).[3] In addition, and cutting across the North/South divide, there are also differences between democracies and autocracies, as well as between different sub-types of those regime types. It is those systematic differences in the political systems of countries and what they mean for foreign policy

making on which this book's comparative lens mainly focuses and which serve as the primary hook for increasing the context-sensitivity of FPA theories. By taking differences rather than similarities as our point of departure, we seek to pay heed to Dawisha's cautionary remark that "In their zeal to discern similarities, advocates of the comparative method should neither overlook nor underestimate the differences that separate systems" (Dawisha 1980a: 325–326). We similarly take up the broader suggestion by He and Feng (2023: 292) to "bring back the 'comparative' to the field" of FPA.

Plan of the book

From its outset, FPA scholarship has argued against the "black boxing" of the state which is commonly the case in grand theories of International Relations, most notably in the neo-realist tradition (e.g., Waltz 1979) but also in neoliberal institutionalism (e.g., Keohane 1984) or social constructivism (e.g., Wendt 1999). Accordingly, FPA as a field of study has sought to shine a light on what is going on inside the black box of the state. In so doing, it has emphasized on the one hand the role of the persons who make foreign policy – Snyder and colleagues argued that "the state is its decision-makers" (Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin [1954] 2002: 59) – and on the other hand that of domestic institutions for the making of foreign policy, in terms of both processes and outcomes.

Those dimensions also structure the discussions in this volume. After presenting a brief history of Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis (CFPA) in Chapter 2, the following chapters zoom in on the role of "*human decision makers acting singly or in groups*" (Hudson 2005: 1; emphasis in the original). Specifically, they explore: traits and beliefs (Chapter 3); historical analogies (Chapter 4); political loss aversion (Chapter 5); concurrence-seeking in decision groups (Chapter 6); and inter-ministerial conflict (Chapter 7). The

final chapter summarizes the argument and points to avenues for future research (Chapter 8).

Overall, we suggest that a comparative lens can help to increase context-sensitivity, thus explanatory power and applicability, of FPA theories. This is accomplished by fine-tuning either the substance of core concepts contained in those theories or the operationalization/measurements of those concepts. To that end, the following chapters present key assumptions of individual theories, illustrate the contexts in which they have been applied so far, probe into their explanatory scope, and offer suggestions on how a comparative lens can help contributing to increasing the theories' context-sensitivity.

TWO

A Brief Overview of Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis

In the mid-1970s Rosenau opined with respect to the by then fledgling comparative foreign policy analysis scholarship that "coherence and consensus have yet to emerge and, if anything, disarray has become greater as the pace of inquiry has quickened and broadened" (Rosenau 1974: 3). Some 50 years later, this diagnosis is as accurate as ever. Having said that, there is little doubt that foreign policy scholarship conducted from a comparative vantage point has become a key feature of FPA scholarship over time. Hudson (2005: 9) even calls it a distinct "subfield" within FPA.

While early scholarship was placed under the label of "Comparative Foreign Policy" (CFP), we use the term "Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis" (CFPA) here to indicate the variation that nowadays exists in the theory-driven comparative analyses of foreign policy. Indeed, as this chapter will show, contrary to much of the early works, current comparative scholarship is no longer confined to quantitative methods (but much more eclectic in terms of methods) or driven by the goal to come up with more or less law-like generalizations (but much more middle-range in orientation). Hence the decision to place the discussion under a broader label that allows for a greater diversity in comparative scholarship.

Against this background, rather than offering a consensual perspective on comparative FPA, which remains elusive to date, this chapter briefly sketches the evolution of said scholarship

(for general discussions, see for example, Rosenau 1968; Brummer 2020; He and Feng 2023). It starts with the first key works in this tradition that were published in the 1960s and 1970s by scholars such as Rosenau and Holsti as well as those works published in the wake of the CREON project. While comparative FPA scholarship subsequently experienced a hiatus of a few decades, it has received renewed interest since the 2000s following a turn "back to comparison" (Kaarbo 2003). The second part of the chapter thus switches its focus on more recent comparative foreign policy analysis works.

Foundational works

Arguably James Rosenau's chapter entitled "Pre-theories and theories of foreign policy" (Rosenau [1966] 2006; see also Rosenau 1968) was the first milestone of "Comparative Foreign Policy" (CFP). Rosenau's goal was to process information regarding foreign policy behaviour in a comparable fashion so as to enable the subsequent building of verifiable theories of foreign policy at some later stage. To that end, he emphasized "five sets of variables" that were held to underlie the external behaviour of states, in the form of "individual, role, governmental, societal and systemic variables" (Rosenau [1966] 2006: 172). The relative weight of those five variables in influencing states' external behaviour was considered to be specific for different types of societies. The latter were distinguished along three dimensions, pertaining to whether they are large or small, whether they are economically developed or underdeveloped, and whether they exhibit open or closed polities.

Thus, resulting from the various combinations of the three dimensions, the "relative potency" (Rosenau [1966] 2006: 175) of the five variables was ascertained for a total of eight clusters of states. To give but three examples: For large and economically developed states with an open polity (to which Rosenau counted the U.S.), role was considered to be the most important

variable, followed by the societal, governmental, systemic, and individual ones. Conversely, for large, underdeveloped, and closed states (e.g., China), the individual variable was deemed crucial, followed by the role, governmental, systemic, and societal variables. Lastly, for small, underdeveloped, and open states (e.g., Kenya), the order was individual, systemic, role, societal, and governmental. Building on this foundation, additional concepts were added that were supposed to help at arriving at even more nuanced understandings of the drivers of foreign policy and, in so doing, to putting researchers in a position to formulate "if-then propositions" (Rosenau [1966] 2006: 177). Those included, for example, the distinction between penetrated and non-penetrated political systems, with the former being understood as a system "in which *nonmembers of a national society participate directly and authoritatively, through actions taken jointly with the society's members, in either the allocation of its values or the mobilization of support on behalf of its goals*" (Rosenau [1966] 2006: 183; emphasis in the original). Another layer of complexity was added by fine-graining the aforementioned allocation of values along four "issue-areas," namely territorial, status, human resources, and nonhuman resources ones (Rosenau [1966] 2006: 187–197). Ultimately, this led to a rank-ordering of the five variables for a total of 16 different types of states (adding the penetrated/non-penetrated system dimension to the three dimensions mentioned above), for each of which further differentiation was put in place depending on issue areas.

Another major effort of CFP is the CREON project, which stands for "Comparative Research on the Events of Nations" (e.g., East, Salmore, and Hermann 1978; Callahan, Brady, and Hermann 1982). On the one hand, CREON followed Rosenau's general lead in terms of pursuing a cross-national comparative approach and developing explanations of state behaviour covering various explanatory variables and spanning several levels of analysis. On the other hand, CREON aimed at "develop[ing] multivariate theories of foreign policy" in

order to present "a more complete statement of the processes that produce foreign policy behavior" (Callahan 1982: 32). Thus, rather than trying to ascertain the relative importance of individual explanatory factors under specific conditions as Rosenau sought to accomplish, CREON's "multicausal orientation" conceived of foreign policy behaviours as being produced by a combination of variables (Hermann and East 1978: 18–19).

To that end, scholars compiled an original event data set covering more than 30 states for the decade between 1959 and 1968 (for details, see Hermann et al. 1973). Specifically, CREON featured three independent variables pertaining to three national attributes in the form of size, development, and accountability from which eight different "nation-types" followed. In turn, CREON also contained nine dependent variables which represented different types of foreign policy behaviours. The latter include the participation of heads of states, bureaucratic involvement, verbal behaviour versus physical deeds, cooperative versus conflictual events, and diplomatic versus economic versus military events (East and Hermann 1974).

A final comparative effort, in the sense of moving beyond approaching the analysis of foreign policy through individual case histories or based on the assumption that certain variables play out in identical ways in all societies (Rosenau 1968: 298–300), was submitted by Holsti (1970). Contrary to the multi-factorial work of Rosenau and CREON, though, Holsti zoomed in on one particular variable (which might be the reason why his work is not commonly associated with foundational CFP works), in the form of national role conceptions. Those are understood as "the policy makers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems" (Holsti 1970: 245–246). Thus, national role conceptions are

different from the "roles" that Rosenau had listed among his five variables since the latter referred to individual actors' official positions in power that they occupied (such as president or foreign minister) and the effects that are generated by said roles on actors' external behaviour.[1]

Holsti highlighted both the fact that states pursue several roles concurrently in general and that policy makers exhibit different perceptions of seemingly identical roles (such as "faithful ally," "regional defender," or "mediator") which in turn can lead to different foreign policy decisions and external actions in varying contexts or over time (Holsti 1970: 235–236). Contrary to the aforementioned works by Rosenau or from the CREON project, Holsti's seminal work on role theory continues to be frequently used in empirical analysis to date. Indeed, building on Holsti's initial work, role theory in FPA has received a noticeable push from the 2010s onward (see, for example, Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011; Cantir and Kaarbo 2016), with many studies taking on a comparative lens (e.g., Karim 2018; Wehner and Thies 2021; Michalski, Brommesson, and Ekengren 2024; Wang 2024).

Recent works

The aforementioned works, most notably those of Rosenau and CREON, did not generate the envisaged results in terms of identifying generalized patterns of state behaviour, which is why the comparative perspective lost some of its appeal. As He and Feng (2023: 291) put it, comparative work "experienced serious theoretical setbacks because it failed to live up to its early promises of developing grand theories in FPA despite major scholarly attempts." Indeed, "The label 'CFP' came close to being pejorative in nature" (Kaarbo 1998: 157).

More recently, however, FPA has experienced a trend toward "back to comparison" (Kaarbo 2003; see also, for example, Breuning 2007; Beasley et al. 2012; Brummer and Hudson 2015; Neack 2018; Jesse 2025). Yet compared to the quantitative

comparative endeavours of earlier decades, scholarship is now characterized by "more eclectic approaches and pluralistic methodologies" (He and Feng 2023: 291). Importantly, more recent works have also exhibited different ambitions compared to the aforementioned earlier efforts. While scholarship continues to be interested in ascertaining potential varying effects of foreign policy variables in different political contexts, among other things, the earlier goal of arriving at "grand unified theory of all foreign policy behavior for all nations for all time" (Hudson 2005: 9) has been dropped. Instead, emphasis is being placed on middle-range theorizing (He and Feng 2023: 293) with a particular focus on actors, be they individuals or groups, which is mirrored in the analytical approaches explored in this volume.

A prominent line of recent comparative work is scholarship that examines foreign policy processes in non-Western contexts, typically with a specific regional focus. Cases in point are monographs or edited volumes focusing on Africa (e.g., Wright 1999; Khadiagala and Lyons 2001; Whitaker and Clark 2018; Bischoff 2020; Clark 2024), the Middle East (e.g., Korany and Dessouki 2008; Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2014) and Latin America (e.g., Fortin, Heine and Ominami 2023). Other works employ a cross-regional perspective by exploring foreign policies of the global south more broadly (e.g., Braveboy-Wagner 2003; 2016; Alden and Mendez 2023). While those works have highlighted specific features of non-Western foreign policy making, they tend to refrain from exploring – systematically or at all – the applicability of extant FPA theories to non-Western settings. In addition, there have been multiple empirical studies that have employed a comparative perspective on certain decisions or events, for example by exploring the relative explanatory power of individual FPA approaches for specific decisions (e.g., Yetiv 2011; Featherstone 2025). The following chapters will present additional examples for comparative analyses of foreign policy processes and outcomes conducted from the theoretical perspective that is discussed in the respective chapters.

Table 2.1: Early and recent comparative foreign policy analysis work

***Early* comparative foreign policy (analysis) work**	***Recent* comparative foreign policy analysis work**
Grand (unified) theorizing	Middle-range theorizing
Emphasis on quantitative methods	Methodologically eclectic

Source: Own depiction

Conclusion

This chapter has briefly sketched the evolution of comparative FPA scholarship. It has shown that said scholarship has come a long way since its inception in the 1960s (Table 2.1). Early scholarship was characterized primarily by the use of quantitative methods through which, in the final analysis, unified theories of foreign policy should have been identified. Yet this goal has proven to be elusive. In turn, and as a consequence, more recent comparative works are not only more eclectic in terms of method but also more limited in terms of explanatory goals. Aligning with what has become a key characteristics of FPA scholarship in general, comparative works have become more middle-range in scope, thus "attempt[ing] to formulate well-specified conditional generalizations of more limited scope" compared to "highly general theories" (George and Bennett 2005: 266).

This volume aligns with the more recent comparative approach to the theory-driven analysis of foreign policy. Specifically, it seeks to explore the applicability of extant FPA theories to political settings beyond the Western and indeed more often than not U.S. context. This is what we mean by proposing to re-engage with the debate on comparative FPA through the lens of middle range theories, which "allow[s] inspection of…frameworks' relative strengths and weaknesses" (Hudson 2005: 17) in contexts other than those to which they have been predominantly applied.

THREE

Traits and Beliefs

There can be no doubt that "Who leads matters" (Walker 2003: 245) in foreign policy. Indeed, a defining feature of FPA scholarship, and also something that sets itself apart from various other sub-fields of International Relations (IR) scholarship, is its long-running explicit focus on the role of individuals, as epitomized in the statement by Snyder and colleagues that was already quoted in Chapter 1 according to whom "the state is its decision-makers" (Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin [1954] 2002: 59). Indeed, it seems hard to dispute that the personalities of Trump, Xi, or Putin have had at least some effect on the international behaviours of those leaders' respective countries. Even the broader IR literature, which had given scant attention to the role of individuals of international politics for decades, has more recently rediscovered the value of tracing international political outcomes back to the individual characteristics, (biographical) experiences, personal dispositions, etc. of individuals in positions of power (e.g., Byman and Pollak 2001; Saunders 2011; Yarhi-Milo 2018; Holmes 2021). The ensuing questions are trickier, though. What is it about leaders that matters? And how can social scientists empirically grasp those factors that matter? FPA scholarship offers multiple answers to those questions as this and the next several chapters show.

This chapter discusses two leader-centred theories together, in the form of Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) and Operational Code Analysis (OCA) (for recent overviews,

see Brummer 2023; Schafer and Walker 2023). The reason for this is that while both theories focus on different substantive issues – LTA zooms in on leadership traits while OCA explores political beliefs – they face similar challenges in terms of their explanatory scope. Generally speaking, both theories profile leaders at-a-distance (Schafer 2000). Social scientists (contrary to psychologists) typically do not have regular and repeated (or any, for that matter) access to the persons they seek to analyse, such as presidents or prime ministers. As a workaround, scholarship has turned to leaders' verbal statements to infer their traits or beliefs respectively. In terms of the method employed to that end, both LTA and OCA have seen a "quantification" as well as "automation" in recent decades. While earlier studies have tried to discern traits or beliefs either qualitatively or through hand-coding, recent scholarship has turned to quantitative content analysis using automated coding schemes that have been specifically developed for LTA and OCA respectively.

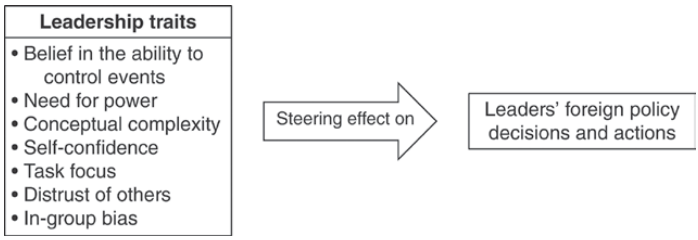
Ever since, multiple empirical studies that have applied LTA and OCA to a broad array of both Western and non-Western leaders, which suggest that the theories have broad explanatory scope in principle (see below for examples). At the same time, the aforementioned trends towards quantification and automation have narrowed the applicability of both approaches in that they now rely (mainly) on the existence of English-language material for the coding processes. In the following, we therefore suggest from a comparative perspective that there is a need to render the coding schemes of LTA and OCA more sensitive to context by developing such schemes for languages other than English. The following paragraphs first introduce the core substantive assumptions of LTA and OCA, then discuss their explanatory scope, and finally suggest avenues for rendering the theories (or rather the methods that are nowadays commonly employed when using those theories) more context-sensitive.

Core assumptions of Leadership Trait Analysis and Operational Code Analysis

Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) had been developed from the late 1970s onward, most notably by Margaret Hermann (e.g., Hermann 1980; 1984; 2005a). The theory focuses on seven personality traits.[1] Those are: belief in the ability to control events; need for power; conceptual complexity (i.e., a person's ability to differentiate things or people as opposed to apperceiving them in stereotypes); self-confidence; task focus; distrust of others; and in-group bias (Figure 3.1).[2] Importantly, the question is not whether leaders exhibit those traits or not. Rather, it is about manifestations of those traits, in the sense of how strongly or weakly developed those traits are for a given leader. While LTA cannot tell us why leaders exhibit specific manifestations of certain traits (thus the sources out of which certain manifestations in traits develop), it suggests that once personality traits are formed, they remain stable (though not static) over time and also do not show meaningful variation across issue areas. It similarly suggests that leaders' traits have clear and predictable effects on their decisions and actions in that "distinct behavioral expectations are associated with specific manifestations of the individual traits" (Brummer 2023: 241).

Operational Code Analysis (OCA) has an even longer track record, dating back to the 1950s when Nathan Leites

Figure 3.1: Schematic overview of Leadership Trait Analysis



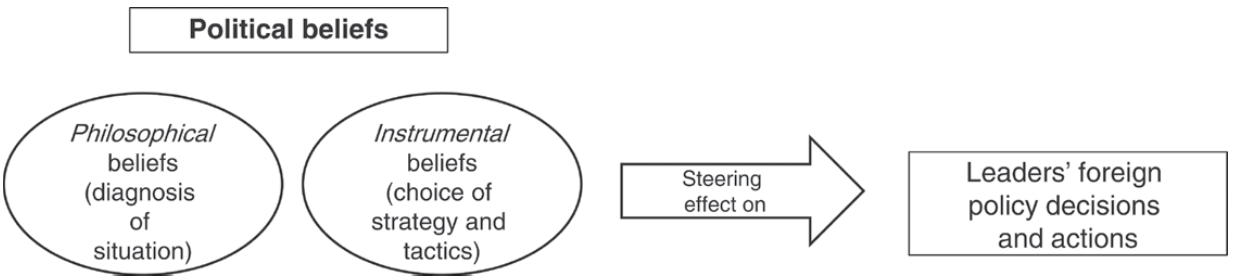
Source: Own depiction

(1951) sought to explore the operational code of the Soviet Politburo. Building on this foundational work, scholars like Alexander George (1969) and Stephen Walker (e.g., Walker, Schafer, and Young 1998; 2005) have further developed the theory. In its current version, OCA focuses exclusively on political beliefs, as opposed to, say, religious ones. More specifically, it distinguishes between two sets of political beliefs (Figure 3.2). Philosophical beliefs examine actors' perception of the political environment in which they are operating, most notably the level of hostility or friendliness they encounter therein. In turn, instrumental beliefs explore actors' preference for specific strategies and instruments, in the sense of whether they place emphasis on conflictual or cooperative approaches to goal-attainment. Taken together, those beliefs offer information on leaders' diagnostic, choice, and shift propensities. Similar to the aforementioned traits, while not considered to determine behaviour, leaders' beliefs are held to have a significant impact on their decisions in that they serve "as causal mechanisms with steering effects" (Walker and Schafer 2006: 5).

As already alluded to, both LTA and OCA have seen trends towards quantification and automation in recent decades. Accordingly, the current state of the art in both strands of research is to identify respectively traits and beliefs using automated coding schemes. The coding schemes for LTA and OCA – the latter is called "Verbs in context system" (Walker, Schafer, and Young 1998) – run on the Profiler Plus platform.[3]

While both coding schemes draw on leaders' verbal utterances, LTA and OCA scholarships have defined different specific requirements on the source material. Most importantly, while LTA works typically rely on spontaneous statements of leaders, OCA studies profile leaders based on prepared speeches. In addition, LTA profiles tend to rely on a larger number of relatively short statements (typically at least 50 statements of at least 100 words each) while OCA profiles are typically based on much fewer but significantly longer

Figure 3.2: Schematic overview of Operational Code Analysis



Source: Own depiction

utterances (ten or so speeches of at least 1,500 words each) (see Brummer et al. 2020: 1045 for details).

Applications of Leadership Trait Analysis and Operational Code Analysis

LTA and OCA seek to identify specific personality characteristics of leaders pertaining to their leadership traits and political beliefs respectively. None of the characteristics appears to be confined to a specific political system or geographical region. Indeed, the traits and beliefs respectively that the two theories explore are so broad, general, and ultimately "human" that they should be applicable to, as well as relevant for, any leader.

Against this background, it does not come as a surprise that LTA and OCA have been widely applied to both Western and non-Western cases. Employing LTA, scholars have examined, for example, leaders from the U.S. (e.g., Dyson and Preston 2006; Keller and Foster 2012), Germany (Rabini et al. 2020a), the U.K. (e.g., Dyson 2018; 2024; Thiers and Wehner 2023), Turkey (Cuhadar et al. 2017; Kesgin 2020), Iraq (Hermann 2005b), Sub-Saharan Africa (Hermann 1987), Iran (Taysi and Preston 2001), as well as a range of populists from both the Global North and the Global South (e.g., Thiers and Wehner 2022; Fouquet and Brummer 2023). In turn, scholars have used OCA to profile leaders not only from the U.S. (e.g., Walker and Schafer 2000; Schafer and Lambert 2022), the U.K. (Dyson and Raleigh 2012), and Germany (Rabini et al. 2020b) but also from Russia (e.g., Dyson and Parent 2018), North Korea (Malici and Malici 2005), China (e.g., He and Feng 2015), Pakistan (Conley 2019), various countries from the Middle East (e.g., Özdamar and Canbolat 2018), and a range of Pacific Island countries (Kesgin 2023), among many others.

A very interesting study on the analytical scope of OCA was presented by Ozlem Dirilen-Gumus (2017) who explored the potential effect of culture on leaders' beliefs. To that end, she distinguishes between "autonomous cultures" (e.g., Great

Britain) on the one hand and "embedded cultures" (e.g., Singapore) on the other hand. The two types of cultures are defined as follows:

> [E]mbedded cultures emphasise the importance of status quo, modesty and restraint of actions that are functional in preventing tendencies which might disrupt the solidarity of the group or the traditional order ... To the contrary, autonomous cultures conceptualise the individual as a self-reliant unit who finds meaning in his own exclusiveness, who freely seeks to put across his own properties such as traits, feelings and preferences. (Dirilen-Gumus 2017: 36)

She finds that leaders in embedded cultures have a much greater propensity to engage in cooperative strategies and instruments (pertaining to instrumental beliefs).[4] More broadly, the article lends further support to the assumption of OCA's broad analytical scope since it did prove meaningful results in varying (in this case cultural) contexts.

Probing the scope of Leadership Trait Analysis and Operational Code Analysis

Overall, the broad application of LTA and OCA to both Western and non-Western settings suggests that the theories' core concepts are sensitive to context. Yet the challenge that both theories are facing concerns the equivalence of measurements of concepts across settings (Adcock and Collier 2001: 534). This challenge is prominently tied to the aforementioned trends in both lines of research toward quantification and automation.

The development of automated coding schemes requires specific types of source material for analysis, in the form of languages for which coding schemes exist. As it stands, there are full coding schemes for both LTA and OCA only for English

and German. This, in turn, poses challenges for analysing leaders who do not have English or German as their first language. While some leaders may occasionally use those languages, and English in particular, nonetheless, it is quite likely that the number of such statements is not sufficient to conduct an analysis.

Several workarounds are conceivable. One is to use official translations. However, their existence is by no means a given. What is more, official translations may deliberately adapt or even outright distort the messages that are contained in the original statement, as Sabine Mokry (2022) has suggested based on a comparison of Chinese foreign policy statements and their official translations (in this case into English). Alternatively, scholars can translate statements themselves. However, this is not only utterly time-consuming but also places far-reaching demands in terms of language skills. Of course, scholars could also employ artificial intelligence to translate leaders' statements into a "codable" language. However, as good as translation programs have already become, they certainly are not perfect. This, in turn, poses a problem since even minor deviations from the original statement may decide whether a word or expression is contained in the coding schemes, thus will be coded in the analysis or not.

"Coding in tongues": Dictionaries

Arguably the best way forward would be to develop additional coding schemes other than those that are in place for English and German in order to allow for "coding in tongues" (Brummer et al. 2020). Here, however, the issue of measurement equivalence of concepts across settings arises. Crucially, while both LTA and OCA coding schemes entail dictionaries, it is by no means sufficient to merely translate those dictionaries into additional languages. For starters, translating words from one language to another, say from English into Chinese, is anything but straightforward. For some words, there simply are no direct translations available.

In other instances, direct translations might exist in principle but are nonetheless misleading since they are not used in political discourse. A case in point is words that are tainted for historical reasons, as the following example illustrates. In German the word "leader" translates as "Führer". Since the latter term is associated with Adolf Hitler and National Socialism more broadly, it is hardly ever used in German political discourse (Rabini et al. 2020b: 49–53). In such cases, scholars have to identify synonyms or periphrasis that are used in discourse instead.

Historical or cultural factors more broadly can pose additional challenges to the creation of dictionaries. This concerns, for example, the emphasis that societies place on individuals or rather on groups as carriers of rights or obligations. This, in turn, can have implications ranging for the use of pronouns (e.g., I or we) all the way to the varying conceptions of in-groups and out-groups (with, for example, in-group bias being one of the seven traits contained in LTA). Another unexplored dimension of language and signaling, with implications for methods like coding, is the perchance of some leaders like Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe to utilize English to communicate international "messages" that tend to cohere to with the parameters of the issue as understood by international audience while reverting to local languages (in his case Shona) to communicate particularistic messages directed to domestic constituencies.

"Coding in tongues:" Coding rules

Even more importantly, though, the dictionaries are but one of two key elements of the coding scheme. The other is the coding rules "which define the conditions that the words and phrases [included in the dictionaries] have to meet in order to count as indicators for each respective category" (Rabini et al. 2020a: 260). It is here where the idiosyncrasies of individual languages come to the fore. An obvious case in point is syntax

structure. While English typically adheres to the subject-verb-object sentence structure, other languages are much more flexible in this regard. This relates not only to the order in which subject, verb, and object are presented but in certain languages also the very use of a subject in the first place. Other aspects to be taken into consideration are, for example, the use of compound words or the possibility of separable verbs, among other things.

Thus, the challenge is to devise coding schemes that are cognizant of the specificities and idiosyncrasies of individual languages. At the same time, and returning to the issue of measurement equivalence of concepts across settings – which in this case relates to different languages – it is not good enough to come up with high-quality coding schemes for a certain language in and of themselves. In addition, the coding schemes must produce results – that is, index scores for leadership traits or operational code beliefs – that are comparable to other coding schemes, with the original English-language coding schemes arguably serving as the main points of reference.

Thus, the task, and tall order, is to develop novel coding schemes whose findings can be compared to those generated by the original English-language coding schemes. After all, there is only limited value in identifying the traits or beliefs of, say, Brazilian leaders based on original Portuguese-language sources if those scores cannot be compared to the ones of leaders from other countries whose scores were ascertained by a coding scheme based on a different language. To be sure, being able to analyse Brazilian leaders in their own language would be a step forward. However, doing this based on a coding scheme that does not allow comparisons with non-Brazilian (or, more accurately, non-Portuguese-speaking) leaders, the value-added of such a scheme from a cross-country comparative perspective would be very limited.

The implication of this plea for both language-sensitive and comparable coding schemes is that the schemes might look very different from the original English versions not least in terms

of the number of rules that they contain. To illustrate: The German LTA coding scheme contains almost twice as many coding rules than the original English-language coding scheme (see Rabini et al. 2020a: 260–264). The German scheme was refined over time based on numerous rounds of "training" based on sample speeches that were available in both German and English. While it was not possible to get to fully identical results, the average deviation of the results of the German scheme compared to the English one was below three percent. While not perfect, this number suggests that results gleaned from processing German-language through the German LTA coding scheme can be meaningfully compared with those that the English-language coding scheme produces.

Conclusion

Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) and Operational Code Analysis (OCA) are among the tried-and-tested instruments in the toolbox of Foreign Policy Analysis to examine leaders. While LTA gets at essentially stable personality traits, OCA explores much more flexible political beliefs. Both do so by profiling leaders "at-a-distance" using their verbal statements. Both LTA and OCA have been widely applied in empirical analysis, covering a multitude of leaders from both the Global North and the Global South. This, in turn, implies that the systematized concepts featured in both theories are sensitive to context. It similarly highlights the utility of the theories for cross-country comparative work more broadly.

However, and somewhat paradoxically, recent methodological advances have ushered in major challenges in terms of the two theories' applicability in specific settings. The advances relate to the introduction of automated coding schemes to ascertain leaders' traits or beliefs respectively. Those coding schemes, in turn, depend on the existence of a sufficient amount of leaders' statements in English (or German). In many cases, this "language barrier" is difficult, if not outright impossible

to overcome. Workarounds, for example in the form of having texts translated using artificial intelligence, are helpful but certainly not ideal.

What is required instead are coding schemes that would allow the analysis of leaders in their own languages. Yet when developing such coding schemes the question of measurement equivalence of concepts across settings inevitably arises. Thus, it is imperative to ensure that coding schemes produce identical or, more realistically, very similar results irrespective of the input (i.e., the language of the speeches under examination) which they process. Otherwise, comparative work would essentially be confined to leaders who speak the same native language.

FOUR

Historical Analogies

Scholarship has shown that it is quite common for humans to approach current situations through the lens of past situations. This phenomenon is called "analogical reasoning." It is held to be particularly widespread "under conditions of high uncertainty or ambiguity" (Houghton 2009: 126) – thus conditions that are quite common in the realm of foreign policy making which is ripe with "ill-structured problems" (Voss 1998: 11). Unsurprisingly, then, there is a notable literature on the role and effect of history in and on foreign policy (e.g., Jervis 1976: Chapter 6; Neustadt and May 1986; Vertzberger 1990: Chapter 6; Houghton 2001; Flanik 2018).

Importantly, there are different conceptual perspectives in the literature on the role of historical analogies in foreign policy. Those range from perspectives that emphasize the mere instrumental use of analogies to accomplish certain goals to cognitive perspectives that establish an immediate link between the use of historical analogies and specific foreign policy decisions. The following discussion will focus on the latter dimension which perceives of historical analogies as heuristic devices that help decision makers make sense of a current situation or ongoing policy challenge. This perspective has been most prominently outlined by Khong (1992) in his Analogical Explanation Framework (AEF) to which the discussion turns now.

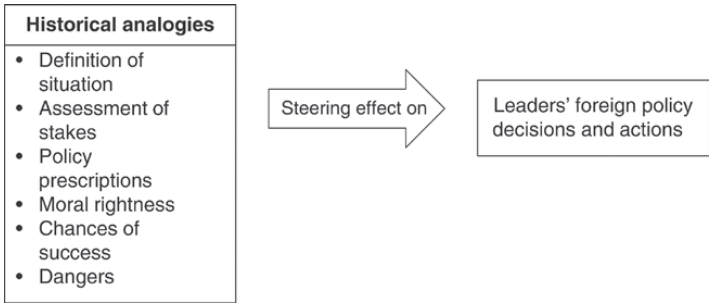
Core assumptions of the Analogical Explanation Framework

The AEF offers a cognitive approach to the analysis of foreign policy. It suggests that the key heuristic (i.e., mental shortcut or simplifying mechanism) that leaders use when trying to make sense of a current situation are events from the past. In other words, leaders seek to draw lessons from the past to make sense of the present. More specifically, when leaders engage in analogical reasoning, they map an "analogical base" – in the form of a past event – onto an "analogical target" – in the form of the situation at hand (Houghton 1996: 524).

Historical analogies originate from two main sources. One are individual/personal experiences pertaining, for example, to leaders' upbringing or past professional careers, and the other are historical/generational experiences, such as a recent war (Khong 1992: 33–35). Scholarship from behavioural economics has shown that all else being equal decision makers select, or activate, the analogy from their repertoire of analogies that is the most cognitively available and/or the most representative. While availability refers to "the ease with which instances or occurrences can be brought to mind," representativeness relates to "the degree to which A resembles B" (Tversky and Kahneman 1982: 4, 11). In line with the latter, Vertzberger (1990: 319) similarly emphasizes that an analogy is the more credible the greater its perceived correspondence with the present situation is.

Often times, leaders draw on past international events to make sense of foreign policy situations that they are now facing. As Jervis (1976: 217) puts it, "Previous international events provide the statesman with a range of imaginable situations and allow him to detect patterns and causal links that can help him understand his world." However, also domestic political events or, as mentioned before, personal experiences may serve as reference points. Either way, historical analogies are far more than only "rhetorical flourishes" or "simply

Figure 4.1: Schematic overview of the Analogical Explanation Framework



Source: Own depiction

comparisons" (Houghton 1998: 281). Rather, they are crucial for leaders' comprehension of reality. Indeed, the analytical view on historical analogies as put forward by the AEF suggests that once chosen, analogies determine leaders' information processing. This is the case because analogies "make possible and control the character of incoming data, the positing of causal relationships among variables, and the prediction of outcomes" (Khong 1992: 220).

More specifically, analogies perform six inter-related "diagnostic tasks" that are held to be crucial for foreign policy decision making (Khong 1992: 20–22) (Figure 4.1).[1] The first task relates to leaders' definition of the nature of the situation that they are currently facing by comparing it with a past event (i.e., an historical analogy) of which they have greater knowledge. The goal is to identify commonalities between the situations in order to guide decision making. This task might be considered the primary one in that it sets the historically-informed frame or reference point through which the current situation is perceived and analysed, and the following tasks then draw various implications from this diagnosis.

The second task pertains to the assessment of what is at stake in the situation at hand, be those stakes personal (e.g., survival in office) or with respect to broader state (national) interests.

The third task concerns the identification of policy solutions. Thus, what policy option or options can be inferred from or are prescribed by the past situation for the one at hand. Khong (1992: 21) explicitly emphasizes the interrelatedness between the first three functions, "with the first normally controlling the content of the second and the third."

The remaining tasks are similarly related in that they "pertain to evaluating the implicit policy prescribed as well as other possible alternatives" (Khong 1992: 21) that leaders have inferred from their reading of the current situation through the lens of a past one (as per the first task). Accordingly, the fourth task is about assessing the moral rightness of possible solutions or avenues of actions as prescribed by the past event. The fifth task explores the likelihood or chances of success associated with the prescribed policy. And the sixth task asks about dangers that are potentially associated with the prescribed policy.

Echoing the preceding discussion on personality traits and beliefs on decision making (see Chapter 3), the assumption on the causal effects of historical analogies on leaders' behaviour is that while they are not conceived as determining action, they should nonetheless have a crucial impact on it. In the words of Khong (1992: 21–22): "[W]hen analogies are used to define the situation and evaluate the options in the ways indicated, they 'introduce choice propensities in an actor's decision-making': they predispose the actor toward certain policy options and turn him away from others."

However, the directions in which historical analogies steer leaders might be highly problematic (e.g. Khong 2022; Więcławski 2022). For instance, leaders are not necessarily the best historians, which might lead them to select past events for their assessment that may exhibit only surface similarities with the current situation (Vertzberger 1986). This, in turn, significantly increases the likelihood of drawing faulty inferences from the analogy and ultimately ending up with bad policy outcomes. Similarly, how helpful can analogies

be in "novel situations," understood as "a crisis, problem or otherwise noteworthy situation which appears to most of the policy makers dealing with it to be 'without precedent' in significant respects" (Houghton 1996: 525)? In such situations an appropriate analogical base is missing essentially by definition, and leaders may be inclined to make fit (i.e., reinterpret) contradictory or discrepant information to their purposes to avoid cognitive dissonance and be able to adhere to the analogy that they have invoked. Yet such efforts increase the chances of leaders ending up with low-quality decision and eventual policy outcomes.

Applications of the Analogical Explanation Framework

Even though it has first been published more than 30 years ago, the AEF has seen only few applications to empirical cases. Importantly, there is a range of studies that only loosely draw on the AEF without actually systematically applying its core assumptions evolving around the six diagnostic tasks to specific empirical cases. In turn, many of the applications that have used the framework more systematically have been addressing instances of American foreign policy. Khong himself illustrated the explanatory scope of his theory by exploring U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson's decisions to escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam in the mid-1960s (Khong 1992). In turn, David Houghton's work on U.S. decision making in the context of the Iran hostage crisis explored whether analogies are also helpful in making sense of and ultimately responding to "novel situations" (Houghton 1996; 2001). Additional works with a focus on the U.S. include, for instance, articles by Breuning (2003) on U.S. development assistance under Truman, by Hehir (2006) as well as Barthe and David (2007) on U.S. foreign policy towards Kosovo, and by Brunck (2008) on the effect that the lessons from Somalia had on U.S. policy in the context of the Rwandan genocide. Scholars have also drawn on insights from the AEF to analyse decision making

by leaders from a few other, mostly Western countries, such as Germany (Brummer 2012a), the U.K. (Brummer 2012b; Kaarbo and Kenealy 2017; Featherstone 2025: Chapter 6), and Israel (Siniver and Collins 2015).

In turn, to the best of our knowledge systematic applications of the AEF to non-Western leaders are virtually absent. While there is some scholarship that brings together analogies and non-Western cases, the former serve in those cases as prism through which analysts interpret state behaviour. Cases in point are works by Scott (2016) and Kopper and Peragovics (2019) on Chinese foreign policy or by Yin (2020), Lai (2023), and Chan (2025) on the U.S.-China relationship, none of which, however, features an exploration through the lens of the AEF of how Chinese leaders have actively used analogies. In turn, a few other studies that do zoom in on individual non-Western leaders' use of analogies are more interested in the latter's strategic use on part of decision makers rather than exploring their cognitive effect on leaders' decision making in the first place as stands at the core of the AEF. Such studies have examined for example China (e.g., Huang and Bailis 2015; Zhang 2020), North Korea (Aum 2019), Russia (Nielsen 2009), and Iran (Kamali and Jooshani 2019) without, however, making any systematic recourse to the AEF framework with its six diagnostic tasks, or at times to the work by Khong altogether.

Probing the scope of the Analogical Explanation Framework

Systematic applications of the Analogical Explanation Framework to empirical cases have been few and far between. What is more, given the Western bias in the few existing studies, it is very hard to say something specific about its explanatory scope. At the same time, the literature has shown that engaging in analogical reasoning, thus drawing on the past when making sense of the present, is just a common way of how humans make decisions (e.g., Houghton 2009: 126–130). From this

perspective, it seems extremely unlikely that a comparative lens will show that there are leaders from specific types of political regimes or world regions that categorically do not engage in it at least occasionally (bearing in mind that AEF is a middle-range theory, thus does not claim to be capable of exploring each and every foreign policy decision). This, in turn, would suggest universal applicability of the AEF based on a human proclivity to engage in analogical reasoning. Still, applying a comparative lens could potentially add some nuance to this broad-brush assumption. The following paragraphs point to a few such avenues.

Go apply the AEF to non-Western cases

The first suggestion is as mundane as it is pertinent: Go apply the AEF to non-Western cases. As outlined before, for whatever reason this simply has not been done yet as far as we can tell, and even if we should have missed something, the number of such studies published in more broadly accessible journals should be very slim indeed. Thus, the very application of the AEF to non-Western cases would already go a long way in that it would provide insights on where the systematized concepts contained in the framework, most notably the six diagnostic tasks, might be somehow biased to Western categories and thus hard to apply. Given their rather abstract and general nature, it seems rather unlikely that any of the six diagnostic tasks should be inapplicable in principle to non-Western contexts – but also this could be, and needs to be, ascertained empirically.

Comparative overviews of FPA scholarship around the globe (Brummer and Hudson 2015) have shown that FPA scholarship in certain countries or regions is hampered by access to data. For instance, government websites have proven "porous" when it comes to offering depositories of leaders' speeches, and researchers' access to archives is restricted for various reasons including political ones. As a result, the standard that Khong set is clearly not easily replicable, all the more so when more recent

decisions should be analysed for which official governmental records have not been released yet. Indeed, what Khong (1992: 58–62) did was to parse not only public (thus readily accessible) statements of U.S. President Johnson on Vietnam but also private speech acts that Johnson made behind closed doors (e.g., when conversing with this advisors) and that had been already declassified at that time. While Khong eventually selected those analogies that Johnson mentioned the most frequently in his private statements (including the Korean War and the Munich agreement), he at the same time emphasized "that the overlap between the public and the private analogies is impressive" (Khong 1992: 61).

Of course, there is no guarantee that there always is such considerable overlap between leaders' public and private statements, and use of analogies therein. However, from our viewpoint Khong's finding seems like a good enough point of departure. Thus, even in situations where access to leaders' private statements is not possible for whatever reason, scholars could with some confidence draw on their per definition openly available public statements in their efforts to apply the AEF to non-Western cases. This, in turn, would allow first stabs in the testing of the explanatory scope of the AEF beyond Western contexts.

Vladimir Putin's evocation of the historical past, and in particular the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as a source of legitimacy for contemporary Russian claims towards Ukraine, features in his 5,000 word essay published in July 2021 in the build up to the full-scale invasion in February 2022 (Putin 2021). Analogical reasoning runs through some of Putin's arguments – indeed in the context of an historically dubious reinterpretation of the past – so this might serve as a plausible case to test the comparative dimensions of the AEF (Knispel 2022).

Individual versus collective experiences

While containing the promise of conceptual advances, the previous suggestion is primarily practical in nature. Yet a

comparative lens could also advance our understanding of analogical reasoning in conceptual terms more head-on. One aspect in this regard concerns the types of historical analogies that leaders activate as the "analogical base." As stated above, analogies can spring from both individual/personal experiences and broader historical/generational ones. While it seems far-fetched to suggest exclusive links between leaders from certain types of political systems and one or the other source of analogy, there might nonetheless be a greater proclivity towards one or the other source as a function of the political systems from which leaders hail and in which they operate.

To explore this question further, one could draw on the work by Dirilen-Gumus (2017) that was already presented in Chapter 3 when discussing political beliefs based on Operational Code Analysis (OCA). As stated there, Dirilen-Gumus analysed the effects of culture on leaders' beliefs for which she distinguished between "autonomous cultures" which, in a nutshell, place a premium on individuals, and "embedded cultures" where groups play a much greater role as reference points for society. While she found OCA to be generally applicable in both types of cultures, Dirilen-Gumus (2017) nonetheless suggested that there are systematic differences regarding the manifestation of different beliefs, most notably with regard to the propensity for collaboration with as per Dirilen-Gumus is much more pronounced in embedded cultures.

A similar link may be in place for the AEF, this time between types of political systems with varying political cultures on the one hand and types of analogies that leaders should primarily draw from on the other. Thus, one may surmise that leaders from autonomous cultures with their emphasis on individuals are especially predisposed to draw on their own life experiences when engaging in analogical reasoning. In turn, leaders from embedded cultures might be primed to go with collective experiences that are shared broadly in society. This discussion might also offer a bridge to the aforementioned leader-centred

theories, most notably LTA. For instance, Dyson and Preston (2006) have already examined the extent to which leaders' conceptual complexity impacts the sophistication of their choice of analogies. Along similar lines, one could explore, for instance, whether leaders with higher or lower levels of respectively in-group bias or self-confidence are more or less predisposed to activate collective versus individual analogies.

The role of religion

A final avenue would be to systematically explore whether the systematized concepts contained in the AEF contain "Western" biases that make them unlikely to be of value when used in different contexts than those to which they have been commonly, albeit rather rarely, used. Generally speaking, similar to the personality traits as contained in LTA or the political beliefs as featured in OCA, the AEF's key concepts, in the form of the six diagnostic tasks, seem sufficiently generic to be applicable to any context as such. Of course this is not to say that the diagnoses are always identical therefore as well, but rather it is a function of the analogies used whether, say, a situation is assessed as vital (or not) or success chances are deemed poor (or not). The point is that such assessments are not predetermined by types of political systems but rather specific to each situation and leader. Similarly, the information gleaned from applying the AEF should be of value not only for leaders from certain types of systems but for all leaders, be they democratic or autocratic, parliamentary or presidential, etc.

Still, in addition to the aforementioned potential influence of political culture/s, there may be one more factor associated with political systems that actually might systematically impact analogical reasoning by leaders. This factor is religion, a factor that somewhat surprisingly has seen only limited attention in FPA scholarship (Warner and Walker 2011). While the role that religion plays in and for political systems is obvious for instance

in the case of Iran's theocracy, it is by no means confined to such types of systems. Importantly for the argument here, religion could also affect leaders' use of analogies. Indeed, the stronger the role of religion in society is, the more predisposed leaders might be to turn to religious events (real or imagined) as their analogical base. Furthermore, this choice may be amplified in the minds of leaders in societies with strong religious sentiment as they grapple with the need to communicate a given foreign policy decision to a receptive audience.

Importantly, invoking religious analogies may have implications for how leaders evaluate the current situation that they need to find answers to. This is maybe the most obvious when it comes to diagnosing the moral rightness of one's envisaged action (thus the fifth diagnostic task as per the AEF). When framed through the lens of a historical analogy springing from a leader's own religion, evaluations of the moral rightness of her or his envisaged policy prescriptions are arguably a foregone conclusion, in the sense of being answered in the affirmative. This, however, could have negative effects on the quality of the decision, and eventually on the policy outcome. In a sense, those effects might be rather similar to some of the dynamics that the Groupthink Model (see Chapter 7) highlights for decision-making groups, in that leaders infused with the moral rightness of their choice are likely to downplay discrepant information or fail to work out contingency plans, among other things. At the same time, it is worth pointing out that the efforts to mitigate against groupthink include the application of a policy position – the "devil's advocate" – is itself drawn from the historical precedent involving the office of Promoter of the Faith in the Vatican established in 1587 who was charged with critically reviewing a prospective candidate for sainthood (Callard 2019). Thus, future research might want to systematically explore whether leaders from political systems where religion plays a strong role are particularly predisposed to active religious historical analogies (which seems quite likely indeed) as well as whether

the invocation of such analogies increases the likelihood of ending up with low-quality policy outcomes.

Conclusion

Scholarship suggests that it is simply human to draw on past events when trying to make sense of current situations. By implication, this process, which is called analogical reasoning, should potentially also be of relevance when political leaders make decisions. The AEF builds on those assumptions and proposes various functions in the form of "diagnostic tasks" that historical analogies should provide to leaders in their effort to navigate international politics.

Yet there is a glaring gap between the seeming widespread use of analogical reasoning as a decision-making heuristic by humans (thus by extension also quite plausibly by political leaders) on the one hand and theory-driven analyses of the use of historical analogies in foreign policy making. Indeed, while there is extensive FPA scholarship that focuses on the cognition of leaders and the impact it has on their decisions and actions in general (see, for example, Chapter 3), the AEF in particular has only very rarely been employed in this regard. In turn, when it was used, it was applied primarily to Western leaders.

As a result, the extent to which the AEF travels to non-Western settings is rather unclear, not least since it has hardly ever been systematically tested in the first place. Thus, as mundane as it sounds, the first suggestion to help increasing the context-sensitivity of the AEF would simply be to apply it to non-Western cases in order to learn whether there are biases in the systematized concepts contained in the theory that render them less useful or even outright inapplicable to leaders other than the "usual suspects" of, say, U.S. presidents or British prime ministers.

While the systematized concepts contained in the AEF seem sufficiently general to be applicable to leaders from various political systems, be they autocratic or democratic

or parliamentary or presidential, a comparative lens might nonetheless be potentially helpful in that it explores the effect that different political cultures broadly conceived might have on leaders' selection of analogies, which in turn might have implications on the quality of the decision-making process and outcome. Potential hooks in this regard would be the distinction between autonomous (individualistic) and embedded (more group-oriented) cultures as well as the exploration of the role of religion in and for society. While both aspects should impact on which analogies leaders activate when making decisions, the role of religious historical analogies in particular might have also a systematic impact on the decision quality, with absolute truths contained in religion potentially adversely affecting leaders' information search and processing.

FIVE

Political Loss Aversion

The previous two chapters have provided various answers in terms of what it is about leaders that matters, pointing to their personality traits, political beliefs, and use of historical analogies respectively. Yet such psychological and cognitive approaches to the study of leaders can be criticized for being "atomistic," in the sense that they may suggest that leaders essentially operate in a political vacuum in which their personal dispositions and preferences are more or less directly and automatically translated into political action – thus generating explanations of policy making without any politics. For instance, for the Analogical Explanation Framework (AEF) Houghton (1996: 551) argued that the "literature has for the most part greatly underplayed [a factor] thus far: namely, politics itself."

Enter the Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making (PHT). While being another leader-centred theory in the toolbox of FPA, PHT expressly seeks to bring politics back into the analysis of foreign policy decision making. What is more, approaching PHT through a comparative lens also contributes something different compared to what a comparative lens can offer to the previously discussed theories, particularly with regard to Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) and Operational Code Analysis (OCA). Focusing on methodological aspects, the suggestion for the latter was that a comparative approach can render the coding schemes that are associated respectively with LTA and OCA when profiling leaders more context-sensitive. In turn, for PHT a comparative approach can enhance the context

sensitivity of the theory's core substantive assumptions, as will be outlined in the following sections.

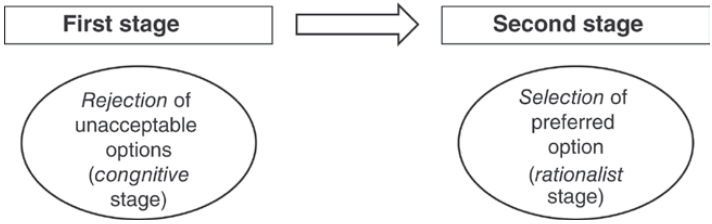
Core assumptions of the Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making

The PHT is a more recent tool for analysing the effect of leaders on both foreign policy processes and decisions (e.g., Mintz 1993; 2004). In a sense, PHT can be considered as a direct response to what was perceived as a major shortcoming of some of the aforementioned leader-centred theories, such as LTA and OCA (see Chapter 3). Indeed, cognitive or psychological FPA approaches, which occupied an increasingly prominent role in FPA scholarship, were perceived as missing out on the "political" of foreign policy decision making (Kaarbo 1998). Thus, while also being leader-centred, PHT nonetheless seeks to place greater emphasis on the political aspect of foreign policy making, as is already indicated in the theory's name (poli = political).

In addition, "poli/poly" also relates to "many," in the sense of leaders using several heuristics (thus: poliheuristic) when making decisions. This is also the segue to another key characteristic of PHT. Rather than juxtaposing cognitive and rationalist perspectives on foreign policy making and ultimately focusing on one or the other, the theory proposes that those competing perspectives can be fruitfully connected (Mintz 2003). The latter is accomplished by conceptualizing foreign policy making as a two-stage process. While the first stage represents the cognitive part, the second relates to the rationalist part. What is more, PHT associates different goals with those respective stages. The first stage is about the rejection of options and the second stage about the eventual selection of an option (Figure 5.1).

More specifically, PHT suggests that during the first stage leaders reject all options that they deem unacceptable. To that end, thus, to initially evaluate options, they employ several heuristics. The processing characteristics that leaders employ include a

Figure 5.1: Schematic overview of the Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making



Source: Own depiction

non-holistic information search, dimension-based processing, and satisficing (Redd, Brulé, and Mintz 2010). Arguably the key heuristic, though, is being referred to as "noncompensatory political loss aversion variable" (Mintz 1993).[1] Indeed, mirroring the above-mentioned focus of PHT on the political, the substantive yardstick for the initial evaluation of options by leaders is domestic politics. In this sense, the key proponent of the theory considered "domestic politics as 'the essence of decision'" (Mintz 2004: 7). In turn, noncompensation means that potential domestic political losses cannot be offset by (potentially) high benefits of an option in other dimensions (legal, economic, military, etc.). As a result, PHT holds that leaders discard all options out of hand which from their viewpoint (potentially) entail unacceptable domestic political costs.

While the acceptability threshold is subjectively defined, hence differs from leader to leader, PHT nonetheless suggests that all leaders do apply the noncompensatory political loss aversion heuristic. This, in turn, begs the questions as what unacceptable domestic political costs might actually entail. PHT offers a rather wide range of possible, and in part also overlapping, answers to this question, in the form of:

- Threat to a leader's survival
- Significant drop in public support for a policy
- Significant drop in popularity

- The prospects of an electoral defeat
- Domestic opposition
- Threat to regime survival
- Intraparty rivalry and competition
- Internal or external challenge to the regime
- Potential collapse of the coalition, government, or regime
- Threat to political power, dignity, honor, or legitimacy of a leader
- Demonstrations, riots, and so forth
- The existence of veto players (e.g., pivotal parties in parliamentary government). (Mintz 2004: 9)

We decided to quote this list in full here because the lack of specificity concerning the operationalization of PHT's key variable is the main hook for bringing in a comparative perspective, as will be outlined in greater detail below.

The second stage of decision making is about leaders' thorough evaluation of all options that survived the initial screening along the domestic politics dimension. Following rationalist assumptions, low scores in one dimension can now be compensated by high scores in other dimensions. The goal is to identify the option with the highest expected utility overall, thus across all substantive dimensions that are of relevance for the decision at hand. Thus, the outcome of the second stage is the selection of "the" option that leaders decide to pursue.

Applications of the Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making

At its core, PHT emphasizes that domestic political considerations, and ultimately political survival in office, are key concerns for leaders when making foreign policy decisions. Since this assumption should hold true for more or less any leader,[2] the explanatory scope of the theory should be similarly broad. Empirical research supports this expectation. Indeed, PHT has been applied to a variety of countries, including

democratic and autocratic as well as Western and non-Western ones (e.g., Sathasivam 2003; Brulé 2005; James and Zhang 2005; Below 2008; Sandal et al. 2011; Brummer 2013a; Vijayalakshmi 2017; Fouquet 2023).

At the same time, applications of the theory to various contexts have brought to the fore a major shortcoming of the theory pertaining to the lack of specificity of what has been labelled as PHT's "most innovative feature" (Oppermann 2014: 24), in the form of the noncompensatory domestic political loss aversion variable/heuristic. As mentioned above, the literature points to a laundry list of possible operationalizations of that variable. The ensuing challenge is that it is essentially left to researchers to decide which of those operationalizations might be the most relevant for the case under examination. A comparative perspective can help addressing this challenge by rendering PHT's most crucial concept more context-sensitive.

Probing the scope of the Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making

Employing a comparative lens should help specifying what PHT's noncompensatory political loss aversion variable relates to. The argument builds on two key assumptions. First, all leaders are driven by a desire to maintain political power, thus survive in office. Second, the institutional mechanisms that keep leaders in office "vary systematically" due to differences in political contexts, most notably in terms of regime type (Kinne 2005: 120). Hence, getting to those institutional mechanisms should allow scholars to arrive at more specific operationalizations of PHT's key variable.

To be clear, the argument is not that it is possible to unequivocally determine the variable's operationalization, in the sense that in specific political contexts it can only mean this or that. Having said that, building on previous works that have explored that very question, we do suggest that it is possible from a conceptual perspective to systematically ascertain what should

be the *primary* reference point for leaders' assessments as to what should be considered unacceptable in terms of domestic political losses depending on context. Whether those primary reference points hold up to empirical scrutiny, or whether they will have to be replaced with some of the other potential factors highlighted in the PHT literature, remains to be determined on a case-by-case basis. So at the very least, the following discussion points to what should be promising points of departures for empirical studies.

Autocracies

Brandon Kinne (2005) examined whether it is possible to get to a more fine-grained understanding of the operationalization of the noncompensatory domestic political loss aversion variable with regard to autocracies. He used Geddes' typology of autocracies as the point of departure. Hence, autocracies were divided into three categories, in the form of personalist, military, and single-party autocracies (Geddes 1999). Due to differences in how these types of autocracies operate, Kinne suggests that it is also possible to come up with different operationalizations of PHT's key variable.

Thus, what leaders deem unacceptable in domestic political terms depends on the type of autocracy that they are heading. Against this background, Kinne (2005: 120–121) establishes the following connections: For leaders in a personalist autocracy, it is imperative that nothing diminishes their prestige or status, most notably with regard to the group of people on whom their survival in office depends.[3] Accordingly, all options should be dismissed that leaders consider as entailing potential challenges to their political status, most notably with regard to their core support group. In turn, leaders in a military autocracy tend to be accountable to the military elite on whose continued support they depend. Therefore, they should discard quickly and without much scrutiny all options "that do not sufficiently appease the ruling military cabal or *junta*" (Kinne 2005: 121; italics in the original). Finally, for leaders in single-party

autocracies the primary challenge to their survival stems from within the ruling party itself on whose continued support they depend. Thus, leaders should reject out of hand all options that represent potential challenges to the interests of the ruling party.

Democracies

More recently, a similar argument has been made for democracies and specific sub-types therein. Taking the classical categorization of democracies as either presidential or parliamentary as their point of departure, Brummer and Oppermann (2021) ultimately focus on coalition governments in parliamentary democracies, thus excluding both single party governments in parliamentary systems and presidential systems. Generally speaking, they hypothesize concerning the operationalization of the domestic political loss aversion variable for governing coalitions in parliamentary systems that "all options are politically unacceptable, and therefore quickly discarded during stage 1 of the decision-making process, that are expected to threaten the parliamentary majority and ultimately the unity and survival of the governing coalition" (Brummer and Oppermann 2021: 110).

Building on the assumption of parties a unitary actors,[4] they lend nuance to their argument by distinguishing between different types of coalition governments, namely minority coalitions, minimum-winning coalitions, and surplus coalitions. Minority coalitions are those that do not carry an absolute majority of seats in parliament. Thus, to govern such coalitions depend not only on all coalition parties but in addition also on the support from the political opposition. In turn, minimum-winning coalitions are those that require all members of the coalition in order to hold an absolute majority of seats in parliament. Hence, such coalitions depend on the support of all coalition parties to govern. Lastly, surplus coalitions include more parties than would be required to have an absolute majority in parliament. Such coalitions thus

need to ensure the support of a sufficient number of coalition parties in order to govern.

In light of those subtypes, it is possible to further specify the above-mentioned hypothesis concerning the noncompensatory domestic political loss aversion variable. For minority coalitions, each option should be rejected out of hand "that are unlikely to find support from all members of the governing coalition *and* to attract support from at least parts of the opposition" (Brummer and Oppermann 2021: 118; emphasis in the original). In turn, for minimum-winning coalitions all options should be dismissed that are perceived unlikely to find the support of all coalition parties. Finally, in surplus coalitions all options are quickly discarded that are deemed unlikely to find the support of a sufficient number of coalition parties.

Future research should explore whether similar arguments can be made for single-party governments in parliamentary systems as well as for presidential democracies. For example, for single-party minority governments the argument could be akin to the one outlined above for minority coalition governments. In turn, for single-party majority governments one could explore whether the main yardstick for assessing the un-/acceptability of options is whether they do not find support among the major factions of the ruling party. Finally, for presidential systems, which tend to be characterized by strong personalization, options that challenge the status or prestige of the president should be conceived as highly problematic (somewhat similar to the logic that has been proposed for personalist autocracies).

Global South

A final contribution regarding the specification of PHT's core variable based on comparative insights comes from Grove (2021). Interestingly, her work cuts across the aforementioned dichotomies of democracy/autocracy and presidentialism/

parliamentarism respectively. Instead, her point of departure relates to systematic differences between countries from the Global North and the Global South, not least in terms of threat environments. In this context, Grove highlights the importance of intermestic politics as well as the role of transnationalism for foreign policy making in the Global South. Intermestic politics denotes the intertwining of domestic policy and foreign policy/international politics. In turn, transnationalism emphasizes linkages and connections by societal (non-state) actors across national borders.

Against this background, Grove proposes a "non-Western state noncompensatory model." She emphasizes that "leaders link or merge internal and external contexts" (Grove 2021: 6) in their calculations as to what constitute unacceptable political costs. Thus, leaders ascertain unacceptability not solely in terms of domestic effects or costs, but also with respect to potential effects or costs in other (more often than not neighbouring) countries, which could similarly impact their survival in office as result of transnational linkages. In such contexts, leaders should quickly dismiss all options that might jeopardize the continued support from key constituencies, be they at home or abroad. Building on Grove's work, future research could aim at further fine-tuning the argument bearing in mind that the "Global South" contains a broad array of countries indeed so that additional sub-/categories in terms of how intermestic politics impacts leaders' decision calculus might be discernible.

Conclusion

The PHT places deliberate emphasis on the effect of political considerations, above all with regard to leaders' desire to survive in office, on foreign policy making processes and decisions. The theory, which conceives foreign policy making as a two-stage process in which cognitive and rationalist elements are combined, has seen wide empirical applications to leaders from both the Global North and the Global South. This scholarship

suggests that there is nothing intrinsic in PHT that would confine its explanatory power to a specific group of countries.

Having said that, we have shown that employing a comparative lens can help augmenting the context-sensitivity of PHT by specifying the operationalization of what arguably is the theory's main innovative feature. The latter refers to the noncompensatory domestic political loss aversion variable (or heuristic), which suggests that leaders quickly and without much scrutiny discard all policy options that from their viewpoint have the potential to entail unacceptable domestic political costs, in the sense of jeopardizing their political survival. The main shortcoming in this regard was that the theory has been rather ambiguous in terms of how to operationalize said variable by pointing to a laundry list of different aspects in this regard. Comparative scholarship has shown that it is possible to arrive at more fine-grained understandings in terms of what noncompensatory domestic political loss aversion could mean depending on varying contexts, most notably with regards to different types or even sub-types of political regimes.

Thus, comparative work has already lent nuance to the operationalization of PHT's key concept, thereby increasing the theory's context-sensitivity more broadly. Having said that, future comparative research should probe even further into this question. As it stands, the discussion has evolved primarily around the question on how to best operationalize the noncompensatory principle in terms of averting domestic political losses. However, from a comparative perspective one could question whether domestic politics is necessarily the key yardstick that leaders employ to identify unacceptable options in the first place (e.g., Stern 2004; Keller and Yang 2008; Brummer 2013a). Indeed, even Mintz who has emphasized the importance of domestic politics acknowledged that other domains – "economic, strategic, diplomatic, legal, social, psychological, and so on" (Mintz 1993: 601) – could replace domestic politics as the key substantive reference point for evaluating the utility of options. Hence, the reference point

could vary from state to state, and possibly even from leader to leader within a single state depending on context.

Ultimately, it might even be the case that leaders' evaluations of policy options are not driven by domestic calculations at all (be they political, economic, legal, etc.) but rather by foreign policy concerns. To establish whether this might be the case, it is imperative to ascertain from where the main challenge for a leader's survival emanates. If this challenge springs primarily from sources internal to the state, then domestic politics should indeed be crucial. If, on the other hand, the main challenge comes from outside a leader's country, then the yardstick could, and arguably should, change. For example, if a leader's survival depends on the continued backing and support from another country, which for example offers an economic lifeline or acts as security guarantor, then the interests of said crucial other state could be the yardstick against which a leader evaluates the acceptability of policy options. In that case, if an option potentially entails consequences that are unacceptable for the other state, then those options should be discarded. Similarly, if a country is under threat of being attacked by another country, then a leader might steer clear of engaging in any actions that may increase the likelihood of military conflict, and discard options accordingly.

Thus, the extent to which domestic politics rather than foreign policy considerations is indeed the essence of decision might actually be a function of a combination of state capacity and threat environment. The more powerful a state is, thus the less likely it is that a leader is unseated by outside forces, the more emphasis should be placed on domestic political challenges. Conversely, if the main threat to survival in office comes from another country (e.g., by losing its backing or by being attacked by it), then the foreign policy interests of that country should be key for a leader's assessments of the unacceptability of certain policy options. Of course, those assumptions would only help ascertaining whether domestic or foreign policy factors should drive leaders' evaluations

of options using the noncompensatory principle. Another important way forward would be to explore whether it is possible to ascertain for the domestic sphere whether leaders actually have political concerns on top of their mind or whether other domestic issues, such as economic, social, or legal ones, are paramount for leaders' evaluations of policy options.

SIX

Concurrence-Seeking in Decision Groups

Foreign policy is often made in group contexts, with the latter varying for example in terms of formality and size (e.g., Garrison 2010). Regarding formality, cabinets belong to formal groups whereas "kitchen cabinets" are examples for informal groups. In turn, while both cabinets and kitchen cabinets would qualify as small groups, parliaments or bureaucracies could be conceived as much larger groups that are also involved in foreign policy making. In this chapter, the focus is on decision making in small groups.

The literature on small-group decision making suggests that there are different types of group-interaction patterns (Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997). The continuum ranges from conformity (cooperative) patterns on the one end to conflictual patterns on the other end, with "hybrids" (i.e., mixtures of conformity and conflict) in-between (Stern and Sundelius 1997: 124–133). Bureaucratic politics is associated with conflictual group interactions (see Chapter 7). Conversely, groupthink, which will be discussed in this chapter, is an example for confirmative interaction patterns. While the Groupthink Model unequivocally zooms in on small groups, it is agnostic whether the group is a formal or informal one.

Core assumptions of the Groupthink Model

The Groupthink Model examines the adverse effects of concurrence-seeking in decision-making groups (e.g., Janis

1982; Esser 1998). As emphasized by the main proponent of the Model, Irving Janis, the main challenge arises "when the [group] members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (Janis 1982: 9). Hence, group members' desire to maintain agreement pushes a group's actual task, typically in the form of finding the best possible solution for a certain substantive issue, to the background. In addition, it impairs the quality of the group's decision-making procedures, thereby significantly increasing the likelihood of poor foreign policy decisions and ensuing outcomes, or even outright fiascos.

More specifically, the Groupthink Model identifies three sets of antecedent conditions that could give rise to groupthink as an empirical phenomenon, which is intimately tied to concurrence-seeking all the way to "mindless conformity" (Janis 1982: 3) by group members. The first, and arguably most crucial, condition concerns the cohesiveness of a group. The assumption is that the more cohesive a group is, the more likely said group is to succumb to a groupthink tendency in the form of concurrence seeking. A range of factors can render a group highly cohesive, such as joint professional or educational backgrounds, shared party membership and ensuing congruence in political ideology, and possibly also more general characteristics pertaining to age, ethnicity, social status, etc.

The second condition held to contribute to the rise of concurrence-seeking relates to certain structural features that are associated with a group. These include aspects such as a group's insulation from other decision-making bodies and a lack of clear procedures for making decisions, among other things. The third and final condition concerns the environment in which a group is operating. Factors such as high-pressure situations or a group's low level of self-esteem resulting, for example, from previous failures or moral dilemmas, are considered to contribute to concurrence-seeking in this regard.

While the Groupthink Model fails to exactly specify which, or how many, of the aforementioned factors must be in place,

it is assumed that the more of the antecedent conditions are met by a group, the higher the likelihood for the emergence of concurrence-seeking in said group should be. In turn, the consequences that concurrence-seeking should have on a group's decision-making process are clearly spelled out. It should initially trigger a range of "symptoms of groupthink" (Janis 1982: 174–175), including overestimation, closed-mindedness, and pressures towards conformity on part of group members. This, then, should adversely affect the quality of the group's decision making. This may show, for instance, by a group's failure to thoroughly examine all of the available options, to come up with contingency plans, or to appreciate risks associated with the preferred course of action. Ultimately, a decision-making process by a group that has become "victim of groupthink" is held to have a "low probability of successful outcome" (Janis 1982: 244) (Figure 6.1).

Applications of the Groupthink Model

The prominence awarded to the Groupthink Model in overviews of the field of FPA clearly exceeds its usage in empirical analysis. On the one hand, arguably most textbooks on FPA discuss the model either in stand-alone chapters or as part of explanations for group-decision making (e.g., Hudson 2007; Houghton 2013; Brummer and Oppermann 2024). On the other hand, the model has only rarely been used in empirical analysis, all the more so when taking into account that it has been introduced in the early 1970s (Janis 1972).

In terms of cases under examination, it is fair to say that the Groupthink Model was developed against the background of the U.S. political system. Cases like the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Korean War, Pearl Harbor, and the escalation of the Vietnam War were used by Janis to illustrate his ground-breaking formulation of the model (Janis 1982). Other scholars have followed suit by extending applications to more recent cases of U.S. foreign policy, such as the Iranian hostage crisis

Figure 6.1: Schematic overview of the Groupthink Model

Source: Own depiction

(Smith 1984), the Gulf war (Yetiv 2003; 2004), or the war in Iraq (e.g., Kuntz 2007; Mitchell and Massoud 2009; Badie 2010; Yetiv 2011; Eder 2019). Having said that, there are a few studies that apply the model to cases other than the U.S., as will be discussed in greater detail below. Examples include the Soviet Union and Russia respectively (Bodenstein 2001; Forsberg and Pursiainen 2017), the U.K. (Verbeek 1994), and Colombia (Monroy and Sanchez 2017).

Overall, though, empirical work using the Groupthink Model is few and far between. One can think of several reasons for this. One concerns the lack of specificity of the model as such, for example in terms of how many, or which combinations, of antecedent conditions need to be in place to trigger groupthink tendency in the first place. In addition, data requirements associated with the model are quite steep since group deliberations on the levels of, say, cabinets are typically held behind closed doors. This challenge is particularly pronounced when it comes to analysing more recent cases for which official records have not been released yet. A further reason is the model's connection to fiascos, thus an inherent bias for examining only a very specific, and not very common, type of foreign policy decision.

Having said that, it is undisputed that many foreign policy decisions are made in small groups, thus the unit of analysis that the Groupthink Model zooms in on. This is true irrespective, for example, of regime type. Hence, it certainly is worthwhile exploring dynamics that unfold in decision-making groups, thus probe for different types of group-interaction patterns as outlined at the beginning of this chapter including groupthink. Embarking from a comparative perspective, the following discussion points to several avenues for both explicitly specifying and also broadening the scope of the Groupthink Model.

Probing the scope of the Groupthink Model

Employing a comparative lens can help in probing the scope of the Groupthink Model along various dimensions. One

concerns the question whether it is primarily applicable to different types of democratic regimes. Another explores the extent to which it might travel to non-democracies. And a third probes into the seeming solid connection between the emergence of groupthink and poor foreign policy outcomes.

Before presenting arguments along those lines, a caveat is in order. Generally speaking, groupthink can affect any small group of decision makers, irrespective of whether the group is formal or informal or where it is located in the hierarchy of a government (i.e., cabinet level to desk-officer gatherings). Having said that, empirical work using the Groupthink Model has typically focused on the highest echelons of government, in the form of formal cabinets or informal gatherings of top-tier decision makers. This is also the focus of the following discussion.

Specific types of democracies

Crucial for probing the scope of the Groupthink Model are the antecedent conditions highlighted in the model pertaining to group cohesiveness as well as structural and contextual aspects. After all, it is the existence of those factors that triggers concurrence-seeking in groups and, following from this, various defects in the ensuing decision-making process. Hence, the question is whether those factors are more or less likely to emerge as a function of specific types of political systems. As stated before, the majority of the empirical works that employ the Groupthink Model do so with regard to U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, the empirical focus on the U.S. has been so pronounced that Hart (1994: x) wondered whether groupthink is "an exclusively American phenomenon."

In employing a comparative lens that focuses on different types of democracies, we suggest that while a focus primarily on the U.S. system is too narrow, democratic political systems like that of the U.S. certainly do contain structural features that render the emergence of the antecedent conditions

of groupthink, thus of concurrence-seeking and all the negative symptoms that come along with it, more likely. More specifically, while following the classical distinction among democracies between presidential and parliamentary ones is already helpful, drawing on Lijphart's typology is even more promising in terms of clustering democracies with regards to their likely propensity to experience groupthink (Brummer 2015).

Lijphart clusters democracies into two categories: majoritarian and consensus ones. Countries like the U.S., the U.K., and Canada would belong to the former category, which in turn highlights that Lijphart's typology cuts across the presidential/parliamentary dichotomy by including both presidential systems and Westminster-style parliamentary systems. In turn, countries like Israel, Germany, and the Netherlands are examples for consensus democracies (Lijphart 2012: 3, 305–306).

We suggest that distinct characteristics of the two types of democratic systems render the emergence of certain antecedent conditions of groupthink particularly likely or unlikely for that matter. Those factors concern differences in electoral systems and ensuing differences in the set-up of governments. In the case of majoritarian systems, majoritarian electoral systems tend to lead to single-party majority governments. Conversely, consensus democracies tend to be led by multiparty coalitions which result from proportional representation.

As a result, what could be considered the most important antecedent condition for the emergence of groupthink – Janis (1982: 245) refers to it as "a necessary…condition" – namely the existence of a highly homogenous decision-making group, is decidedly more likely to emerge in majoritarian systems than in consensus ones. Since consensus democracies are characterized by governing coalitions, the cabinets in those types of democracies tend to be populated by representatives from two or more parties who vary in terms of political ideology, and possibly also along various sociodemographic or biographical characteristics. Hence, the governing coalition

arrangement that is typical for consensus democracies inevitably increases heterogeneity and, in so doing, invariably decreases cohesiveness among the key governmental decision makers. In comparison, members of cabinets in majoritarian systems who all hail from the same party or, should they not belong to the governing party, have been hand-picked by the head of the executive, should be much more homogenous in terms of ideology and possibly also in terms of other characteristics.

Thus, cabinets in majoritarian systems should be considerably more cohesive than their counterparts in consensus systems, which in turn should render the emergence of groupthink (much) more likely in majoritarian systems. A view on the scant empirical literature using the Groupthink Model supports this assumption in that most countries in which groupthink has been detected are indeed majoritarian democracies. Most notably, this holds true for the U.S. on which the majority of empirical work focuses (e.g., Janis 1982; Yetiv 2004; Badie 2010; Eder 2019). In addition, it comprises scholarship that has applied the model to the U.K. (Verbeek 1994; Grube and Killick 2023), thus a country that would not have been put in the same category with the U.S. had the clustering unfolded along the presidential/parliamentary dichotomy.

Conversely, and in light of our argument unsurprisingly so, there are hardly any empirical studies that have identified groupthink for consensus democracies. At first glance, a study by Tuomas Forsberg and Christer Pursiainen (2006) on Finland seems like the exception to the rule. Examining 17 instances of crisis decision making for the country, they identify two foreign-policy cases where elements of groupthink have emerged. Those were the decision to apply for membership to the European Community (EC) in the early 1990s and the country's response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. In Lijphart's typology, Finland falls squarely into the group of consensus democracies. However, when it comes to foreign policy making the country clearly exhibits majoritarian tendencies that result from the president's strong

role in said policy area equal, if not superior to those of the government headed by the country's prime minister. Indeed, prior to the constitutional reforms which entered into force in 2000, foreign policy belonged to the "undisputed…domains" (Auffermann 2009: 259) of the president, and also after the reforms the president has continued to have strong influence on the country's foreign policy. Hence, when it comes to foreign policy making Finland is less typical for a consensus democracy, thus also less of an exception to the proposed argument, than it might appear at first glance.

Departing from a broader understanding of groupthink than is commonly found in the literature, Eoin Carolan (2017) examines two other countries that should be considered consensus democracies as per Lijphart's typology, in the form of Ireland and Iceland. Carolan asks whether certain societal characteristics, namely social cohesion and social homogeneity, are likely to induce groupthink. Indicating his alternative take on groupthink that shifts focus from individual small groups to the level of the nation-state, he suggests that while there is indeed evidence linking societal characteristics and groupthink, the phenomenon might be better described as "Volkthink" which "is defined as the association of certain policies with a cohesive but depersonalised social identity such that these policies function as a form of identity preservation or promotion" (Carolan 2017: 394). Overall, then, while Carolan's work does not challenge the argument that consensus democracies should be less likely to experience groupthink, it offers an interesting perspective on broadening the perspective on groupthink concerning potential triggers (related to specific groups versus societal) and where the phenomenon plays out (groups versus society/nation-state).

Stella Ting-Toomey's work on negotiating across cultures provides another angle on issues like groupthink and consensus-seeking conduct that features in foreign policy decision making (Ting-Toomey 1999). This is complemented by Geert Hofstede's observations on large and small distance cultures

which shape the style of interaction as much as the content of inputs into the foreign policy process (Hofstede 1991). In both of these instances, culture is shown to exercise influence over group decision-making dynamics in their assessment of foreign policy issues.

Non-democracies

The preceding discussion has explored the emergence of groupthink as a function of differences in types of democracies. This, in turn, mirrors the empirical literature on groupthink which is almost exclusively about decision-groups acting in said regimes. Indeed, one of the very few applications of the model to a non-democratic country that we are aware of is an article by Forsberg and Pursiainen (2017) in which the authors examine the Russian decision to annex the Crimean peninsula in 2014. Why is it that the Groupthink Model has hardly ever been applied to non-democratic countries?

Arguably a key reason for the dearth of scholarship exploring non-democratic regimes are the aforementioned steep data requirements associated with the Groupthink Model. Even for democracies it is extremely challenging to trace dynamics that unfold in typically highly-confidential group-settings unfolding behind closed doors, particularly with regard to more recent or current decision-making processes for which there is no access yet to the official meeting records. Said challenge is augmented for non-democratic regimes which by definition lack transparency and public accountability, which means, among other things, that access to any kinds of official documents is essentially out of the question including for "older" decisions. Mind you, though, that also in democracies access to governmental documents/archives is by no means a given, as for example Ganguly and Pardesi (2015: 64) have pointed out as one of the key challenges for doing FPA scholarship on and in India.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges concerning data, we would contend from a conceptual perspective that

autocracies should be particularly conducive to the emergence of the antecedent conditions for groupthink. This should be true for all types of autocracies as identified by Barbara Geddes. Geddes initially distinguished between personalist, military, and single-party autocracies and later added monarchies as a fourth category (Geddes 1999; Geddes, Wright, and Frantz 2014). When it comes to personalist autocracies, they could be rather similar to presidential democracies in the sense that a predominant leader hand-picks the members of his or her core group typically based on a combination of loyalty and shared worldviews, both of which should be conducive to groupthink. For party-based autocracies, the core decision-making group hails, by definition, from one and the same party. Similarities among group members most obviously in terms of ideology but more often than not also in terms of social or educational backgrounds result from that. A similar argument can be made for military juntas not only based on shared "military" mind-sets but potentially also, for example, in terms of similar career trajectories. If anything, the connections that bind together decision-group members in monarchies are even tighter due to the family ties.

In short, in all types of autocracies, the core decision-making group should be rather homogenous. In addition, structural aspects that are conducive for the emergence of groupthink should also be in place more often than not given the non-democratic nature of the regimes, such as the insulation of the group from any oversight bodies or the lack of impartial group leadership. Overall, then, the emergence of groupthink should be similarly, if not even more, likely in autocracies than is the case for majoritarian democracies.

Therefore, it seems to be pertinent to start systematically probing into the question as to whether decision-making groups in autocracies are or were victims of groupthink when making decisions. Returning to the aforementioned limiting factor in terms of access to data, a potential workaround could be to start examining this question by exploring

decision making in states that transitioned from autocracies to democracies. In those contexts, it may now be possible to access archives that would have been, or were, inaccessible during the existence of the autocratic regime. Cases in point are the former military dictatorship in South Korea or the party-based autocracy of the German Democratic Republic, where a broad array of material is now available through the Federal Archives of (reunited) Germany. Similarly, there are archives in countries which become accessible that can shed light on foreign policy positions of other countries through analysis for their files. For instance, research into the archives of the South African apartheid regime's defence industry revealed how the People's Republic of China held secret meetings aimed at purchasing weapons, despite their public diplomacy against apartheid (van Vuuren 2017).

At first glance, examining foreign policy decision of regimes or even countries that no longer exist might appear more pertinent for historians than for FPA scholars. While such work would have necessarily nothing to say for current or future decisions of a past regime or country, it nonetheless promises to offer valuable insights into the workings of decision-making groups in autocratic countries. This, then, would be the generalizable insight – ideally concerning both the level of concepts and of their operationalization – that follows from such work and that could subsequently be applied to current autocratic regimes.

Non-fiasco decisions

While cushioned in probabilistic terms, there tends to be a straightforward connection between the occurrence of groupthink and (very) low-quality foreign policy outcomes, namely fiascos. Janis himself referred to a "low probability of successful outcomes" (Janis 1982: 244) as the most likely, albeit not deterministic, result of group decision-making processes that are characterized by groupthink. However, the cases that

he used in his writings as well as the very sub-title of the book ("Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes") suggests that there should indeed be a very high probability of groupthink leading to fiascos (Janis 1982). Having said that, Janis himself mentions a few factors to support the idea that the relationship is not deterministic, thus that even groups that succumb to groupthink might end up realizing their policy goals. The somewhat unflattering reasons for this are "that chance and the stupidity of the enemy can sometimes give a silk-purse ending to a command decision worth less than a sow's ear" (Janis 1982: 11).

Yet when there is no automatic link between groupthink and fiascos, the question is whether there are additional reasons other than chance and the other side's stupidity that could lead to high/er quality decisions despite – and possibly maybe even because of – the emergence of groupthink. To answer this question two aspects need to be addressed. First, what are high/low quality foreign policy decisions/outcomes to begin with? And second, which dynamics associated with groupthink might actually be conducive for high/er-quality outcomes?

When it comes to ascertaining the quality of foreign policy decisions, work by Schafer and Crichlow (2002; 2010) offers valuable suggestions. They posit that the quality of decisions can be ascertained based on their effect on the national interest and international conflict respectively. In terms of national interest, the question concerns the extent to which a decision contributes to the attainment of the decision-group's substantive foreign policy goals. Regarding the other dimension, the question is whether a decision heightens or dampens the level of international conflict (Schafer and Crichlow 2010: 54–56).

The other question pertained to the elements of groupthink that might actually be conducive to high-quality foreign policy decisions. As mentioned before, the scant empirical literature on groupthink typically ties its emergence to faulty decision-making processes and poor outcomes. A notable

exception in this regard is an article by Monroy and Sanchez (2017). The article sticks out not only because it applies the Groupthink Model to a non-Western case, namely the decision by the Colombian government to pursue "Plan Colombia," which was developed jointly with the U.S. in the context of the fight against drug cartels and the armed conflict more broadly. In addition, it suggests that while the Colombian decision-making group around President Andrés Pastrana did exhibit symptoms of groupthink, it nonetheless made a decision that should be considered successful, or high quality, in that it "succeeded in restructuring the U.S. perception of Colombia, from a torn, failed country to a close partner and friend" (Monroy and Sanchez 2017: 246). In terms of groupthink, the authors point, for example, to high levels of group cohesiveness resulting, among other things, from relations of friendship among group members, from which various symptoms of groupthink followed. In the end, however, those did not lead to a fiasco, as is commonly expected in the groupthink literature. Instead, concurrence-seeking tendencies are held to have positively contributed to the quality of the decision since factors such as gatekeeping or distrust towards others allowed the group to move forward with their substantive goals.

This finding mirrors the one by Yetiv (2003) who examined the decision by the U.S. government under George H.W. Bush during the first Gulf War. Importantly, he suggests that while the decision-group exhibited symptoms of groupthink, the latter did not adversely affect the quality of the government's decision in the end. One of the reasons for this was the presence of a "group leader [that] was skilled and experienced in the subject matter" (Yetiv 2003: 440), in the form of President Bush. In addition, Yetiv suggests that overestimation that characterized group dynamics regarding the evaluation of the threat that the U.S. was facing actually had a positive effect, not least since it led to the building of a large and highly capable military coalition to fend off said threat (Yetiv 2003: 441).

Thus, both studies suggest that the typical association between the emergence of symptoms of groupthink and low-quality policy outcomes is by no means as thorough as it seems in general. More specifically, it suggests that factors other than luck or even higher levels of inability on the other side contribute to high/er quality decisions. Rather, the very symptoms of groupthink themselves can have positive effects on group decision-making processes and outcomes. Against this background, future scholarship should further systematize the conditions under which concurrence-seeking in groups leads to high- or low-quality foreign policy decisions and outcomes respectively.

Conclusion

This chapter's unit of analysis are small decision-making groups, comprising around one or two dozen members. Decision making in groups, such as cabinets, is quite common in foreign policy making. What is more, there are various reasons to suggest that decision making in groups is preferable to decisions that are taken by a single individual. For example, groups should bring together more expertise and a greater variety of views and also entail some kind of control mechanisms that place limits on the whims of any individual person (i.e., group member).

Having said that, the FPA literature suggests that decision-making groups may exhibit dynamics that adversely affect the decision-making processes that unfold in them and, ultimately, also the quality of the decision that is taken by the group. While the quality of decision making in some groups is impeded by too much adversity (see Chapter 7), other groups suffer from the opposite extreme of too much conformity among group members. Indeed, the Groupthink Model, which highlights the negative effects that concurrence-seeking in decision groups can have, suggests that groups that succumb to groupthink have a high likelihood of ending up with (foreign policy) fiascos.

Yet the previous discussion has shown that the Groupthink Model faces several challenges with respect to its explanatory scope. On the one hand, this concerns the question as to whether its scope is limited to a particular political system, namely that of the U.S. to which it has been applied the most frequently by far. On the other hand, the question is whether concurrence-seeking and everything that follows from it with regards to the ensuing decision-making process invariably leads to low-quality outcomes.

Approaching those questions from a comparative angle, this chapter suggests that while there are indeed structural reasons as to why certain political systems should be particularly likely to trigger concurrence-seeking tendencies in groups, the U.S. political system is by no means the only one that falls into that category. Rather, majoritarian democracies in general should be conducive to the emergence of groupthink, as should be various types of autocracies. For the latter, though, the key challenge for empirical work rests with access to sources. In addition, scholarship suggests that groupthink tends to produce greater variation in outcomes than is commonly assumed, since the very dynamics that can lead to low-quality decisions could in fact also lead to the opposite outcomes. Thus, future comparative work should seek for further systematize the conditions under which concurrence-seeking might also lead to high-quality outcomes, rather than fiascos with which it is commonly associated.

SEVEN

Inter-Ministerial Conflict

Government bureaucracies, hence, ministries and agencies, play an important role in foreign policy. Its influence has been conceptualized along two main dimensions. One relates to intra-ministerial aspects pertaining to standardized patterns of behaviour like routines or "standard operating procedures" that structure how bureaucracies approach foreign policy issues which they have to attend to. The other concerns inter-ministerial aspects by focusing on interactions between actors hailing from different ministries or agencies who are driven by their respective organization's interests and the implications that this has for policy-making processes and outcomes. The latter is also the focus of this chapter.[1]

Core assumptions of the Bureaucratic Politics Model

The Bureaucratic Politics Model (BPM) examines inter-ministerial dynamics that unfold in small groups that are made up of representatives from different ministries and governmental agencies (e.g., Allison 1969; Allison and Zelikow 1999).[2] As already mentioned above in the chapter on the Groupthink Model (see Chapter 6), group interaction patterns range on a continuum from highly confirmative (cooperative) to highly conflictual (Stern and Sundelius 1997). Groupthink is an example for the former. In turn, bureaucratic politics stands for a highly conflictual group interaction pattern. Thus, the BPM explores the extent to which such conflictual dynamics affect foreign policy processes and outcomes.

The core assumptions of the BPM can be summarized in three propositions: the "stand-sit proposition," the "bargaining proposition," and the "resultant proposition" (Brummer 2013a). The stand-sit proposition concerns actors' policy preferences. It suggests that actors' position in government (their "sit") is the primary determinant of their policy preferences/stances (their "stand"). This link is captured in the widely-cited adage "Where you stand depends on where you sit" (Allison 1969: 711). However, this straightforward and seemingly all but deterministic link between bureaucratic position and policy preferences was blurred by Allison himself when he added that "the stance of a particular player can be predicted with high reliability from information concerning his seat" (Allison 1969: 711). So while organizational interests are held to have a strong influence on an actor's policy preferences, the cited qualification opens up the possibility that (not further specified) other factors can also have at least some impact in this regard.

In turn, the bargaining proposition describes the more often than not contentious interaction between members of a decision-making group. Rather than being confined to an individual ministry or agency, foreign policy issues often times affect multiple institutions. This means, and in fact requires, that representatives from various ministries and agencies are at the table when decisions are made. In the ensuing bargaining process which tends to be conducted using established "action channels," each representative is driven by his or her organization's interests (as per the stand-sit proposition), which leads to contentious interactions during which ministry representatives vie for turf, competencies, budget, or personnel, among other things. This is when "the pulling and hauling that is politics" (Allison 1969: 707) ensues. In turn, due to dispersed competencies across ministries, each of which is responsible for addressing "their" specific aspect of an issue, no ministry (representative) can simply impose its (his or her) views on the other actors.

This is also the segue to the final proposition, in the form of the "resultant proposition." It suggests that due to diverging interests of ministry representatives as per the stand-sit proposition on the one hand and the inability to impose one's position on the others during the negotiation process as per the bargaining proposition, the eventual outcome of inter-ministerial decision-making processes is a "resultant." The latter refers to unintended compromise solutions. It suggests that the decision on which the group eventually settles is one that does not perfectly mirror the interests of any single ministry involved in the decision-making process. Rather, it is "distinct from what anyone intended" (Allison 1969: 707). In other words, each ministry has to make concessions from its original position. As a result, decisions tend to reflect lowest-common denominator agreements rather than the identification of the best possible option for the policy challenge at hand, as would be expected by rationalist models of decision making (Figure 7.1).

Applications of the Bureaucratic Politics Model

The key question for the purpose of this volume is whether we should expect to see the dynamics outlined in the BPM to apply to all countries or whether we should consider the explanatory scope of the model to be confined to a specific set of countries. Allison himself provided an initial answer to this question. On the one hand, he conceded that the model's "primary base is the U.S. government" (Allison and Halperin 1972: 43). Against this background, it does not appear particularly surprising that most of the empirical studies that have highlighted the effect of bureaucratic politics on foreign policy decision-making processes and outcomes to date have focused on the U.S. Works in this vein have examined decisions by the administrations of Carter (Smith 1985; Zhang 2006), George H.W. Bush (Yetiv 2004; Zhang 2006), George W. Bush (Yetiv 2011), Barack Obama (Marsh 2014; Marsh and Jones 2017), and Donald Trump (McHugh 2023), among others.

Figure 7.1: Schematic overview of the Bureaucratic Politics Model

Source: Own depiction

Still, while Allison highlighted the grounding of his model in the U.S. political system, he was optimistic that its explanatory scope is not confined to that particular country. In this sense, he expressed the "hope…that the framework is sufficiently general to apply to the behavior of most modern governments in industrialized nations" (Allison and Halperin 1972: 43). Thus, from Allison's viewpoint the model should extend beyond the U.S. and the Soviet Union, hence the two original countries that he had focused on, to include at least other industrialized – or "developed" – countries. Building on this assumption, empirical studies have applied the model to countries such as Germany (e.g., Brummer 2013a; 2013b; Wood 2016), Canada (Nossal 1979), and Japan (Sebata 2010), as well as to foreign policy making within the European Union (Bach et al. 2016; Sanus, Akgül-Açikmese, and Karaoguz 2024).

Critics of the model have engaged with Allison's claim concerning the explanatory scope of the Bureaucratic Politics Model. For instance, they doubted that the model holds explanatory power for less stable or less modernized countries since those countries tend to lack stable bureaucratic structures and, by implication, also clear-cut organizational interests that underpin bureaucratic politics dynamics (see the overview in Smith 1980: 31). While the argument sounds plausible indeed, it does not contradict but in fact reinforces Allison's original claim in that his model should hold explanatory power only for industrialized (or developed) states.

Other scholars called into question the extent to which the BPM is actually applicable to Allison's original cases, in the form of the U.S. and the Soviet Union respectively. Regarding the latter, it was suggested that the model was of limited value for the Soviet Union due to major differences that exist between the U.S. and the Soviet system despite the similarities that they share as "advanced industrial societies" in terms of their "complex organizational structures" (Dawisha 1980a: 301) which, at minimum, "demand the extension of the model" (Dawisha 1980b: 343). Those differences concerned,

for example, the greater role of shared ideology, overlapping memberships in several branches of the party/state hierarchy from which no clear-cut stand/sit assumption can be gleaned, or differences in bureaucratic structures and decision making processes more generally, which were held to be more flexible and irregular than in the case of the U.S. (Dawisha 1980a). Concerning the U.S., critics argued that even while there might be conflict on the bureaucratic level among advisors to the president, it is the president who serves as the ultimate decision maker. The president is not only in charge of setting up the advisory system that surrounds him but has also the power to impose his or her views on his advisors if need be. Therefore, critics held that the model "obscures the power of the President" (Krasner 1972: 160).

Overall, then, there was and continues to be only limited agreement concerning the explanatory scope of the Bureaucratic Politics Model. What scholars seem to agree on is that "The classic model of bureaucratic politics in foreign policy is primarily underpinned by the U.S. practice" (Ye 2023: 639; see also Lai and Kang 2014: 296; Zhang 2016: 435). Yet whether this means that the model is applicable to essentially one country only (i.e., the U.S.), or rather to all industrialized countries, let alone all countries, remains open for debate. For example, Freedman (1976: 436) argued that "even analysts examining other industrial countries [than the United States] will find this model extremely culture-bound." Having said that, Yu (2018: 226) comes to a rather different conclusion by arguing "that the BPM [Bureaucratic Politics Model] is by no means limited to a certain category of political system. It is possessed with great explanatory value when it is used to examine foreign policies regardless of the type of regime."

Probing the scope of the Bureaucratic Politics Model

The preceding discussion shows that the context-sensitivity and, following from it, the explanatory scope of the BPM

remain both underexplored and underspecified. We suggest that approaching bureaucratic politics from a comparative angle can help remedying this shortcoming. This can be done along two avenues. The first concerns whether specific types of political systems within countries render more or less likely the *emergence of bureaucratic politics as such*. The second explores whether the *specific drivers and dynamics of bureaucratic politics*, which were originally developed against the background of the U.S. political system, are identical in all countries that experience the phenomenon.

Bureaucratic politics in different types of political systems

As stated above, Allison confined the explanatory scope of the BPM to "industrialized," thus economically developed, states. Yet a comparative lens can lend nuance to this assumption concerning the model's explanatory scope. Such a lens suggests two things. First, that also less economically developed countries may exhibit bureaucratic politics. And second, that it is possible to ascertain which types of democratic systems should render the emergence of bureaucratic politics particularly likely.

In an important, albeit largely overlooked study written already several decades ago, Vertzberger (1984) suggested that the BPM should also be applicable to developing countries, or at least to a certain sub-group therein. For him, the level of economic development of a country was not the decisive factor for bureaucratic politics to emerge. Rather, he argued based on an empirical study of Indian foreign policy in the run-up to its border dispute with China in the late 1950s and early 1960s that also economically less developed countries can experience such dynamics. According to Vertzberger, the key reason for this is that also less economically developed countries can have "coherent bureaucracies" with clearly defined organizational interests, structures, and processes which render them "similar to, though not exactly the same, as in

the Western developed countries" (Vertzberger 1984: 70). By implication, they too can experience bureaucratic politics just like industrialized countries.

Hence, Vertzberger's comparative work suggests that it is not the level of industrialization, or economic development more generally, that should be considered a prerequisite for the emergence of bureaucratic politics. Rather, shifting emphasis from economic structures to state structures, it is the existence of stable bureaucratic institutions that pave the way for inter-ministerial competition. Such institutions exist not only in developed countries but in a somewhat similar fashion also in developing countries. As a result, the BPM should not be confined to industrialized, or developed, states but also "applicable in explaining foreign policy behavior in a certain class of Third World countries" (Vertzberger 1984: 89). This insight echoes even earlier work by Migdal (1972: 515–517) who had also advocated that the "level of institutionalization," most notably the coherence and autonomy of bureaucracies, among third world states is decisive for the explanatory power of the Bureaucratic Politics Model, which should be the better the higher the level of a state's institutionalization is.[3]

In turn, Brummer (2017) explored whether particular types of democratic systems render the emergence of bureaucratic politics more or less likely. So rather than conceiving inter-ministerial conflict as a function of a state's level of economic development (i.e., the "industrialization" to which Allison referred) or the level of institutionalization (as highlighted by Vertzberger and Migdal), the question is whether specific democratic sub-/types are particularly conducive for said phenomenon. Drawing on Lijphart's typology of democracies, which distinguishes between majoritarian and consensus types (Lijphart 2012), Brummer argues that bureaucratic politics should be relatively more likely to emerge in the latter type for two reasons. First, consensus democracies tend to be governed by coalitions, which suggests that party political conflict could further exacerbate conflict between representatives of different

ministries and agencies who not only seek to advance their organizations' interests but also those of their respective parties. Second, in consensus democracies the role of the head of government (prime ministers, chancellors, etc.) tends to be weaker than that of their counterparts in majoritarian systems. This suggests that no predominant actor exists that could impose his or her views on other actors, which in turn should render the emergence of unintended compromises as the eventual outcome of inter-ministerial bargaining more likely.[4]

Varying drivers and dynamics of bureaucratic politics

In addition to ascertaining which types of countries should render more or less likely the emergence of bureaucratic politics as such, comparative insights can also help exploring whether the specific drivers and dynamics of bureaucratic politics are identical in all countries that experience the phenomenon. Indeed, while Vertzberger emphasized in particular the applicability of the model also to specific types of developing states, he added that the model's dynamics "will be accentuated by some of the particular qualities of such societies" (Vertzberger 1984: 89). It is those accentuations or modifications in terms of how bureaucratic politics dynamics emerge or play out to which the discussion turns now. Nuances in this regard has been highlighted by scholarship on bureaucratic politics in democracies and autocracies alike.

Sebata (2010) has explored the applicability of the BPM for Japan. Importantly, he provides a cultural reason as to why the interests of an organization might have a particularly strong effect on its members: "In Japanese society, people tend to adhere to the opinions of the group to which they belong" (Sebata 2010: 8). What is more, Sebata highlighted two additional aspects that a focus on the U.S. typically glosses over. One concerns the strong influence that the LDP exerts on bureaucracies resulting from its almost uninterrupted sting in power since the mid-1950s. This close connection between

a party and bureaucracies will be further emphasized for the Chinese case below. The other relates to the importance of external pressure, which is something that "the bureaucratic politics model tends to neglect" which is why it might be considered "culturally biased and more suitable in the case of superpowers" (Sebata 2010: 13). Having said, Sebata himself qualifies the latter argument by showing that the model can also be successfully applied to a non-superpower like Japan.

In turn, Karim and colleagues (2023) have discussed bureaucratic politics for the case of Indonesia, specifically with regard to its foreign policy towards China concerning the South China Sea. Their work lends nuance to the discussion on how inter-ministerial conflict, which the authors clearly detected for the case under examination, could be dampened. Specifically, they emphasize the role of a so-called "curator" in this regard, understood as someone who "is tasked with coordinating ambiguous or problematic policies according to the president's directives" (Karim et al. 2023: 136). Karim et al. argue that it was primarily due to the work of a curator, who more often than not made use of informal channels of action and networks, that Indonesia was able to pursue a relatively coherent policy despite internal policy differences. More broadly, the work suggests that the use of curators – and maybe even more so of informal mechanisms to resolve or at least dampen bureaucratic conflict – should be particularly likely in countries that feature "complex bureaucratic systems" (Karim et al. 2023: 135). This, in turn, lends nuance to the aforementioned discussion on the level of institutionalization in that it might not only be the strength of bureaucratic structures that render inter-ministerial conflict more or less likely but, relatedly, the complexity of those structures.

Turning to bureaucratic politics in autocracies, there has been an increasing interest in bureaucratic politics dynamics in the case of Chinese foreign policy making, for example, in terms of its effects on the Belt and Road Initiative or on

Chinese behaviour in the South China Sea and towards Africa (e.g., Long 2016; Jones 2017; Yu 2018; Duggan 2020; Van Staden, Alden and Wu 2020; Ye 2023).[5] Most of those studies place greater emphasis on the empirical phenomena under examination than on theoretical discussions pertaining to the explanatory scope of the Bureaucratic Politics Model. Some also use the concept of bureaucratic politics rather loosely by including a variety of actors next to national ministries or state agencies including (state-owned) enterprises, sub-state actors like provincial governments, and individuals (academics, etc.).[6] Yet this scholarship is nonetheless highly informative in teasing out what might be particular or special about inter-ministerial conflict in the Chinese case. Most importantly, echoing Sebata's work on Japan (Sebata 2010), scholarship on the Chinese case has also highlighted the close intertwining between a predominant party and the bureaucracy.

Generally speaking, the scholarship on Chinese foreign policy making suggests that there is ample scope for bureaucratic politics, especially since the reform era (Lampton 2001). Thus, rather than representing a unitary actor, the country has experienced an increasing fragmentation of the foreign policy decision-making process in recent decades as result of both domestic political changes and the country's deeper integration into world affairs (Zhang 2016; Duggan 2020; Jones and Hameiri 2021; Loh 2024; Taylor and Garlick 2025). Nowadays, a variety of ministries and agencies are involved in foreign policy making, vie for influence, and bargain over the eventual decisions (e.g., Lai and Kang 2014). As a result, "Pluralistic and inconsistent voices on Chinese foreign policy have thus become the 'new normal' in this sphere" (Zhang 2016: 437).

Yet this is not to say that bureaucratic politics in China is identical to the one that Allison has originally formulated for the case of the U.S. Rather, there are "Chinese characteristics of bureaucratic politics in foreign policy-making" (Zhang 2016: 437).[7] The most crucial aspect, and difference, in this regard concerns the role of the Chinese Communist Party

(CCP) in the making for Chinese foreign policy. As Zhang (2016: 441) opines:

> different from Western bureaucratic politics, which occurs among various administrative government departments, the politics in China is mainly wrought out within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the sole ruling party… The Chinese Government is a functional department of the CCP; Chinese politics is not government politics, but the CCP's internal politics.

This view is seconded by Yu (2018: 226) who suggests that:

> there is a key difference between Western bureaucratic politics and the Chinese political system. The former occurs amongst various administrative government department whereas the latter intertwines between the Party and the Government…As a result, final decision of foreign policy making and other decision-making power concentrates in the hands of the CCP.

As the result of the CCP's influence, we thus see a strong politicization of the Chinese bureaucracy. However, this is not to say that CCP is monolithic. As per Ye (2023: 640), the system is characterized by a "centralized structure with several power centers at the top to represent different interests." In that system, the key fault lines concern the CCP itself and the factions[8] within the party that represent the aforementioned "power-centres" and which, while originally based on ideology, are nowadays held together mainly by personal relationships and shared (economic) interests (Zhang 2016: 451). Those factions control different ministries or agencies. It is their interests that "overshadow the particular interests of the various organizations which are represented by faction members" (Vertzberger 1984: 75). As a result, those individuals clash not due to incompatible organizational interests as such but

because they represent different party factions that are pitted against each other and that vie for greater power or influence within the party. Hence, we do see inter-ministerial conflict, but not in the "original" sense in that such conflict would be driven first and foremost by competing organizational interests but rather by personal animosities or ideological factionalism within the CCP (Zhang 2016: 448).[9]

In other words, "in-party politics" is key (Zhang 2016: 448), with ministries being among the vehicles through which the former is played out: "Bureaucratic politics is mainly in-party politics rather than department-centred government politics" (Zhang 2016: 456). In this in-party (or intra-party) politics that is acted out as if it were bureaucratic politics, another key feature of the Chinese case might come to the fore, namely the country's "ranking systems." Following Long, the ranking system pertaining to party cadres might determine which party to the conflict, hence, which faction, eventually ends up as the winner: "To put it simply, when the prevailing actors in the model have divergent preferences, their relative positions in the ranking system determine the outcomes" (Long 2016: 153). Thus, the CCP's influence on ministries and state agencies not only leads to "high politicization" but also infuses "hierarchical division" (Jeon and Yoon 2006: 861) that might prove crucial in how inter-ministerial conflict is eventually resolved.

The more recent scholarship on bureaucratic politics in China which emphasizes the impact of in(tra)-party politics on inter-ministerial conflict echoes certain insights from earlier scholarship that examined bureaucratic politics for the case of another party-led autocracy in the form of the Soviet Union (e.g., Valenta 1975; 1991; Dawisha 1980a). Like works on Chinese foreign policy making, this scholarship has argued against the assumption of states being unitary actors, suggesting instead that also in the Soviet case foreign policy making was influenced by "bureaucratic interests and pressures" (Valenta 1975: 148). Another similarity is the literature's emphasis of the role and importance of the main party. Yet contrary to

the Chinese case, where party factionalism is considered as a driver for inter-ministerial conflict, the influence of the CPSU on Soviet foreign policy making was held to "suppress… the expression of organizational interests and in controlling the implementation of decisions" (Dawisha 1980a: 318). Against this background, Dawisha (1980a: 325) emphasized "The pervasive role of the Party [CPSU] in preventing bureaucratic conflict."

Of course, the very impact of a predominant party on inter-ministerial interactions, by either promoting (China) or dampening (Soviet Union) bureaucratic politics, is something that the Bureaucratic Politics Model with its U.S. focus has not readily acknowledged. What is more, Valenta's work on bureaucratic politics in the Soviet case points to a possible scope condition for bureaucratic politics to emerge, in the sense that it should be more likely on issues where "domestic interests play as important a role as national security interests" (Valenta 1975: 173). Conversely, it should be less likely to arise when internal policy is not meaningfully affected.

Conclusion

This chapter has probed the explanatory scope of the Bureaucratic Politics Model, which emphasizes the influence of organizational interests on actors' policy preferences as well as the often times conflictual interaction patterns that characterize inter-ministerial interactions as result of diverging preferences. While there is broad agreement in the literature that the model has been developed against the background of the political system of the U.S., it is less clear how applicable it is beyond the U.S. context. We have suggested that approaching bureaucratic politics from a comparative angle can help remedying this shortcoming in two respects. First, it leads to a specification as to which types of countries should render the emergence of bureaucratic politics more or less likely. Second, it helps exploring whether the specific

drivers and dynamics of bureaucratic politics are identical across political systems.

The discussion of the first question suggests that the Bureaucratic Politics Model might actually be more broadly applicable than its main proponents have originally given it credit for. Rather than being confined to industrialized (developed) states as per Allison, also lesser developed states could experience bureaucratic politics under the condition that those states feature a certain "level of institutionalization" (Migdal) that amounts, among other things, to "coherent bureaucracies" (Vertzberger). In turn, Brummer's work suggests that among the democratic states that meet this criterion, consensus democracies should in fact be more likely to experience bureaucratic politics than majoritarian systems. So rather than being a "prototype" for bureaucratic politics as it is commonly portrayed, the U.S. might actually be a less likely case for it to emerge compared to consensus democracies. Last but not least, the discussion suggests that bureaucratic politics is not confined to democracies. Indeed, if higher levels of institutionalization or coherent bureaucracies are the key perquisite for bureaucratic politics to emerge, than we should also encounter it in autocracies.

In turn, the discussion of the second question suggests that while conflict between ministries and state agencies over foreign policy can be found in various types of political systems, the drivers and dynamics that underpin bureaucratic politics are not necessarily those that proponents of the Bureaucratic Politics Model have advanced. Scholarship points, for example, to the importance of coalition politics that reinforces, and in the final analysis even supersedes, organizational interests. The intertwining (interdependence) of predominant parties and bureaucracies can have a similar effect, with party factions competing with one another "through" various institutions leading to inter-ministerial conflict.

Hence, comparative work drives home the need to acknowledge equifinality, understood as the same outcome – in our case: inter-ministerial conflict – being triggered by

different factors, such as organizational interests as advocated in the original formulation of the Bureaucratic Politics Model, coalition dynamics (i.e., inter-party conflict), or intra-party politics. In other words, while we could and often times do see inter-ministerial conflict as suggested by the Bureaucratic Politics Model, the reasons for such conflict to emerge might not be those as advocated by the model. This echoes the assessment of Kim (2018: 20) who noted that "The existence of different positions or of competition across ministries is not always a sign of bureaucratic politics." It also aligns with the above-mentioned softening of the link between actors' organizational seats and their policy preferences by Allison himself.

Following from this, the key challenge for future comparative work is to ascertain the independent effect that can, or should, be ascribed to the "original" bureaucratic politics dynamics, particularly with respect to the role of organizational interests as the driver of inter-ministerial conflict. For example, in party-based autocracies we should be more likely to see inter-ministerial conflict due to intra-party rivalry than as the result of competing organizational interests per se. Whether such conceptualizations, which blur one of the core assumptions of the Bureaucratic Politics Model in the form of the stand-sit-proposition, still qualify as bureaucratic politics in a strict sense is open to debate. At the same time, a better categorization of the sources of inter-ministerial contention and conflict would definitely help improving our understanding of foreign policy processes and outcomes in many countries.

EIGHT

Conclusion

Grand theories of International Relations (IR) such as neo-realism or neo-institutionalism suggest that conceiving states as "black boxes" is sufficient since the main drivers for state action are exogenous to states anyway. By implication, exploring what is "going on" inside those black boxes is deemed "reductionist" (Waltz 1979: Chapter 2) and ultimately unnecessary. Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) scholars would beg to differ. From their viewpoint, it is imperative to explore the actors and institutions inside the black box in order to understand processes of foreign policy making, which in turn are intimately linked to foreign policy decisions and outcomes and ultimately to inter-state relations.

A potential pitfall emanating from this line of thinking is to consider every country as unique, which in the final analysis would require having one theory of foreign policy per country. This is neither practically feasible nor intellectually rewarding. Therefore, the way forward taken in FPA scholarship has been to come up with middle-range theories. While not pretending to be capable of explaining every foreign policy decision, such theories claim to have explanatory power that exceeds individual cases. The key issue in this regard pertains to theories' scope conditions that define, or delimit for that matter, their applicability, thus explanatory scope. Arguably, the question of applicability and scope is particularly relevant for FPA theories since most of them come with some kind of U.S. bias, in the sense that they have been developed by U.S. or U.S.-based scholars against the implicit or at times also explicit

background of the U.S. political system to which the theories have subsequently also been frequently applied.

Summary of the argument

Against this background, this volume explores the extent to which extant FPA theories "travel" beyond the U.S. context. This volume approaches this question from a comparative perspective. We subscribe to Rosenau's argument regarding the general value of a comparative lens:

> Why compare? … Comprehension of the external activities undertaken by one national system is not sufficient to answer the questions of systemic adaptation and political process that are inherent in foreign policy phenomena. The repeated experiences of two or more systems must be carefully contrasted for an answer to such questions to begin to emerge. (Rosenau 1968: 329)

Specifically, the key dimension for comparison employed in this volume are differences in political systems rather than, say, engaging in comparisons over time or across issue areas. Differences in political systems pertain not only to other types of democratic systems than the American one, most notably parliamentary democracies, but also to other types of regimes in the form of autocracies.

Thus, the goal of this volume is to offer suggestions regarding the specification of the analytical scope – and ultimately to enhance the explanatory power – of FPA theories by increasing their sensitivity to context through the adoption of a comparative lens that evolves around differences in political systems. Specifically, the volume asks whether, and how well, the systematized concepts along with the indicators used for the concepts' operationalization that are contained in several of the most prominent theories of FPA travel to settings beyond the U.S. To that end, the volume discusses several

leader-centred theories, in the form of: Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), Operational Code Analysis (OCA) (both in Chapter 3), the Analogical Explanation Framework (AEF) (Chapter 4), and the Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making (PHT) (Chapter 5). In addition, it examines two theories that explore foreign decision making in group contexts, namely the Groupthink Model (Chapter 6) and the Bureaucratic Politics Model (BPM) (Chapter 7). By focusing on either individuals or groups, the discussion follows Hudson's much-quoted dictum that the actions of individuals or groups are "the ground of IR" (Hudson 2005: 1).

What, then, are some of the key insights gleaned from a comparative perspective for the respective FPA theories in terms of their explanatory scope – including potential limits therein and how to overcome them by increasing the theories' sensitivity to context? Starting with LTA and OCA, both leader-centred theories have been applied multiple times to non-Western leaders. This, in turn, suggests that there is nothing intrinsic in those theories' core concepts that would limit their applicability to Western, let alone U.S. leaders. Having said that, their context-sensitivity could nonetheless be further increased in terms of the equivalence of measurements of concepts across settings. In fact the barriers to comparison are primarily *methodological*: the collection of comparable data for quantitative analyses are constrained by the quality of data, linguistic differences and cultural interpretive "signalling through use of language". This relates to the fact that both theories use automated coding schemes to identify leaders' traits and beliefs respectively. In turn, those coding schemes currently still depend essentially on the availability of English-language statements by the leaders under examination. From this follow several challenges, ranging from a lack of availability of the required types of sources (especially of spontaneous statements by a leader in English) to potential inaccuracies of translations. A way forward would be to develop coding schemes for languages other than English. Those coding

schemes should not only be sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of the respective languages in order to be able to code leaders in their own tongues but also fulfil the requirement of measurement equivalence of concepts across settings so that the findings generated by the use of different coding schemes (say, for English and Spanish) are actually comparable.

Contrary to both LTA and OCA, the Analogical Explanation Framework (AEF) has seen only few empirical applications, and most of the studies that do exist focus on Western leaders. Thus, drawing on empirical work, it is next to impossible to draw meaningful conclusions for the theory's explanatory scope. Having said that, psychological research suggests that it is quite "human" to draw on the past in order to make sense of current situations, and there is nothing to suggest that this human propensity should be categorically irrelevant in the context of decision making in the realm of foreign policy. In addition, the six diagnostic tasks contained in the AEF appear sufficiently broad and general to be of relevance for, thus applicable to, any leader. Hence, as mundane as it might sound, the obvious way forward to test the explanatory scope of the AEF is to "simply" apply it to non-Western leaders in order to ascertain whether there are systematized concepts contained in the theory that do not travel (well) to non-Western settings after all. Maybe such scholarship reveals that leaders from societies that place stronger emphasis on groups rather than individuals employ systematically different analogies (e.g., less personal and more collectively oriented). Similarly, leaders who primarily use religious analogies as their "analogical base" might be driven into different directions when engaging in analogical reasoning since, for instance, the assessment of the stakes and even more obviously the assessment of the moral rightness of options could be systematically different.

The Poliheuristic Theory of Decision Making (PHT) differs from the three previous approaches in that it places greater emphasis on the "politics" of foreign policy decision making. Crucially, it conceives of leaders' aversion of domestic political

losses as a key element of decision making, most notably when determining which courses of actions should *not* be pursued. In so doing, the theory offers a "natural" segue to comparative work that is grounded in differences in political systems. It is therefore not surprising that PHT has already been applied to leaders hailing from various types of political systems. Having said that, the key challenge for the theory in terms of specifying its explanatory scope has been to pin down what the concrete reference points in terms of what constitutes unacceptable domestic political losses in different types of political systems actually are.

Against this background, scholars employing a comparative lens have started looking into different subtypes of political systems, both autocratic and democratic ones, and to associate specific operationalizations of unacceptable domestic political losses to those subtypes. As importantly, comparative work that moves the analysis away from the more powerful to the less powerful states is very likely to discover that it is no longer domestic politics that serves as leaders' main reference point for determining unacceptable political options in the first place. Instead, other substantive domains are likely to come to the fore when leaders from weaker states assess the general viability, or lack thereof, of policy options – maybe even in the sense the domestic losses are replaced by foreign policy losses as the crucial yardstick, for instance whether options might challenge a weak state's relationship with a powerful "patron."

This plays out in the context of the ongoing discussions of "hedging" in contemporary IR, where dependency on patrons is defined in sectoral terms such as security and/or economics (Figiaconi 2025). Here the foreign policy decision is not focused solely on a menu of policy preferences measured through a two-step process that involves a choice between, for instance, buying Russian natural gas or seeking out alternative energy sources but rather it operated across a number of multi-levelled decision making "arenas" where a parallel weighting of options is made that contributes to an

overall hedging strategy (Figiaconi 2025). It is possible to envisage linking this complex decision-making framework more readily to Amitav Acharya's "multiplex" idea for the world order in transition which claims that multilateralist framework is being replaced by a diversity of arenas and platforms for foreign policy (Acharya, Estevadeordal, and Goodman 2023; Acharya 2017). Multi-level foreign policy decision making would, in this context, attempt to account for the differences between risk management in foreign policy that are strategic in nature and more tactical decisions that seem to run counter to these strategies. It would also allow for approaches that challenge the logic of hedging like Evelyn Goh's assessment that "enmeshing" strategy in a world of revisionist powers (Goh 2007; 2025).

Moving from theories that zoom in on individual leaders to those that emphasize the role of small groups in and for the making of foreign policy, the Groupthink Model has seen only few applications to empirical studies, most of which have focused on the U.S. Thus, similar to the AEF, it is next to impossible to draw meaningful conclusions on its explanatory scope based on empirical studies. Yet another similarity is that also the Groupthink Model does not seem to contain systematized concepts that should be categorically inapplicable and/or irrelevant for other types of political systems or political regimes. After all, foreign policy decision making in group settings is by no means confined to the U.S. Having said that, employing a comparative lens suggests that majoritarian democracies like the American one – and arguably also subtypes of autocracies where decision groups, be they military or party-based in nature, play a key role – should be particularly conducive to the emergence of groupthink. This is due to certain structural features (e.g., concerning the emergence of highly cohesive groups) contained in those systems that render concurrence-seeking and the ensuing negative effects on foreign policy making processes and outcomes particularly likely. At the same time, a

comparative lens might nuance the discussion about the effects of groupthink by bringing to the fore cases where the quality of a decision has actually benefitted from the emergence of concurrence-seeking, thus moving the discussion away from its lopsided focus on fiascos.

Finally, directing a comparative lens on the Bureaucratic Politics Model (BPM), which contrary to the Groupthink Model emphasizes conflictual group interaction patterns, suggests that the theory's explanatory scope could be specified in terms of both the emergence and the drivers of inter-ministerial conflict. For starters, a comparative perspective shows that bureaucratic politics is by no means confined to industrialized states as originally argued. So rather than tying it to economic development, its emergence should be considered as a function of the level of a state's institutionalization. In addition, while attention has been spent on bureaucratic politics in the U.S. context, majoritarian systems should actually be less likely to exhibit bureaucratic conflict than consensus systems since the latter add party political conflict (so: different parties running different ministries) to the "classical" inter-ministerial causes of bureaucratic conflict concerning competencies, finances, etc. This is also the segue to lending nuance to the drivers of inter-ministerial conflict, where a comparative lens shows that political conflict between ministries is not necessarily always grounded in the dynamics that proponents of the model have outlined with regard to the U.S. political system. Instead, or rather in addition, competing governing parties or, as the Chinese case indicates, between factions of one and the same party, can play out their ideological differences "through" ministries so that what appears as typical bureaucratic politics might be actually grounded in non-bureaucratic factors.

Outlook

The preceding discussion suggests that approaching and probing extant FPA theories from a decidedly comparative

lens holds the promise of specifying their analytical scope and thereby in the final analysis enhance their explanatory power. In terms of next steps several issues come to mind. For starters, the assumptions proposed in our "theoretical exploration" for "our" six theoretical approaches under examination would have to be followed up by empirical work in order to substantiate, or refute for that matter, the expectations that we have arrived at in this volume. A key obstacle in this regard will be questions of availability of and/or access to necessary sources. This not only pertains to autocratic countries which, by definition, pose a challenge in this regard (e.g., Feng 2015: 16–18; Zhang 2016: 440–441) but is by no means a given for democracies, either (e.g., Ganguly and Pardesi 2015: 64; Kim 2018: 21).

Furthermore, additional theories employed in the field of FPA could be explored through a comparative lens, such as Integrative Complexity (e.g., Suedfeld, Guttieri and Tetlock 2005), Image Theory (e.g., Cottam 1986), Schema Theory (e.g., Larson 1994), the Organizational Behaviour Model (e.g., Allison and Zelikow 1999), or Role Theory (e.g., Thies and Breuning 2012). In addition, FPA literature highlights various additional potential drivers of, or at least relevant factors for, foreign policy processes and outcomes. While not (yet) formalized into specific theories, which is why they were excluded from this volume from the outset, those factors play out differently, thus impact foreign policy differently, in varying political contexts. Cases in point are the effects of governing coalitions (e.g., Kaarbo 2012), political parties (e.g., Hofmann and Martill 2021), and parliaments (e.g., Raunio and Wagner 2017) in and on foreign policy.

Lastly, rather than seeking to decentre FPA by rendering extant FPA theories less U.S-/Western-biased as this volume has set out to do, one could flip the entire perspective by taking processes of foreign policy making in non-Western countries as one's point of departure. Thus, embarking from an inductive perspective that gives sufficient attention also to insights

generated in Area Studies scholarship, one could try to infer from the empirical record potential drivers of foreign policy that the "Western" literature does not acknowledge enough, or at all, and develop novel analytical constructs on that basis. Yet also from this very different perspective will employing a comparative lens that is cognizant of variation in non-Western political systems and how those differences impact alternative drivers of foreign policy be beneficial.

But obstacles to this process are apparent. As one study demonstrates, the application of FPA middle range theories to explain foreign policy in countries like Brazil does not correspond to an impulse by local scholars to contribute overtly to theory-building. "[A]lmost all BFP (Brazilian Foreign Policy) production using FPA conceptual apparatus is problem-driven and rarely theory driven. Only a handful of studies attempt to make theoretical refinements of FPA models or create new models applied to the Global South context" (de Sá Guimarães and Estre 2021).

At the same time, authors of a review of Indonesia's foreign policy put forward a research agenda for non-Western FPA that explicitly utilizes case studies to critique, refine, and develop FPA:

> Promoting Indonesia's foreign policy studies as a case for non-Western FPA is essential. First, it can change the traditional understanding of the conduct of Indonesia's foreign policy, which is regarded as reflexive of foreign actors' interests. Second, an Indonesian approach to Indonesia enforces the view that the country has intrinsic importance to reach in the global and regional arenas. Third, it opens up the space for new and different outlooks on policy making and execution in Indonesia. (Wicaksana and Karim 2022: 163–164)

All of this suggests that the fundamentals of knowledge creation that goes beyond the simple adoption of Western concepts to

explain non-Western case studies are beginning to take place, setting in motion a process within FPA which promises to both widen the scope of comparative FPA as a subject area as well as broaden its conceptual horizons (Viramontes 2022; Wicaksana and Karim 2022).

Notes

one Introduction

1 There have been similar assessments highlighting the pitfalls of applying theories that have been developed for Western (developed) countries to different contexts in other sub-fields of IR, such as International Political Economy (IPE) where Myrdal argued already in the mid-1950s that "When economists…treat the commercial policy problems of underdeveloped countries within the framework of general theories that are fitted to the conditions and interests of advanced countries, they are following a procedure which is intellectually false" (quoted in Irwin 2020: 3).

2 A similar debate, in terms of whether theories (here: theories of the policy process) that have been developed for democracies can be fruitfully applied also to autocratic settings, is also unfolding in the Public Policy scholarship (for a brief overview, see Schlaufer and van den Dool 2024).

3 For a general discussion on the genesis and usefulness of the "Global North versus Global South" distinction, see Haug, Braveboy-Wagner, and Maihold (2021) and Thérien (2024). On the current level of solidarity within the Global South as operationalized through membership in the G77, see Draguljić and Anspach (2025).

two A Brief Overview of Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis

1 See Chapter 7 of this volume on inter-ministerial conflict regarding such a nexus between governmental position and foreign policy.

three Traits and Beliefs

1 For an alternative conceptualization of major personality traits, see the "Big five" in the form of: agreeableness; conscientiousness; extraversion; neuroticism; and openness to experience (e.g., Gerber et al. 2014).

2 While the individual traits can be aggregated into several intermediary dimensions and ultimately into eight leadership styles, we confine our discussion to the individual traits since this is also the level on which the vast majority of empirical LTA studies focuses on.

3 Both coding schemes are freely available for academic use through profilerplus.org.

[4] At the same time, there were no significant differences with respect to leaders' diagnosis of the political environment (i.e., in the philosophical beliefs).

four Historical Analogies

[1] Yet George and Bennett (2005: 195) rightly observe that the diagnostic tasks are not confined to diagnosis but in fact also include "choice propensities," thus rendering them rather similar to the different functions that OCA ascribes to political beliefs.

five Political Loss Aversion

[1] Additional processing characteristics that characterize leaders' decision-making during the first stage include: a non-holistic information search; dimension-based processing; and satisficing (Redd, Brulé, and Mintz 2010).

[2] For a broader discussion on political survival and the (especially for autocratic leaders often times very negative) effects of losing office, see, for example, Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2005) and Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza (2009).

[3] As per Selectorate Theory (Bueno de Mesquite et al. 2005: Chapter 2) on which Kinne draws, every leader, including those in personalist autocracies, depends on the continued support of a sub-set of the "selectorate" (i.e., those that have a say in the selection of a leader) called the "winning coalition" (i.e., those among the selectorate whose support endows a leader with political power) in order to survive in office.

[4] Conceiving parties as unitary actors suggests that they vote "in toto" with or against the government. While there obviously are factions within parties that may hold different substantive preferences as well as individual parliamentarians who may or may not follow the party line, the parties as unitary actor-assumption has been shown as helpful for theory building (Müller and Strøm 2000: 6–7).

seven Inter-Ministerial Conflict

[1] For a recent overview of the first perspective, which is covered by the "organizational process (behaviour) model" (e.g., Allison 1969; Allison and Zelikow 1999) and which has seen relatively few empirical applications in the FPA scholarship, see Brummer and Oppermann (2024): Chapter 7.

[2] Originally, Allison referred to his model III as the "bureaucratic politics" model (Allison 1969). Later, he replaced this term with "governmental politics" model (e.g., Allison and Zelikow 1999). However, the substance of the model has essentially remained unchanged, and the broader FPA literature continues to refer to it primarily as the "bureaucratic politics" model, which is why we also stick with the term here.

[3] For other applications of the Bureaucratic Politics Model to non-Western countries, see for example Kim (2018) on South Korea, Permana et al. (2021) on Indonesia, and Okolie, Nnamani, and Mbaegbu (2023) on Nigeria.

[4] The work by Nossal (1979) on Canada suggests that the Bureaucratic Politics Model is also applicable to parliamentary systems that Lijphart qualifies as majoritarian, even though bureaucratic politics dynamics might be better described by "friendly competition, and not conflict" (Nossal 1979: 626) in that case.

[5] Those studies are based on earlier pioneering works that have highlighted the role of bureaucracies in Chinese policy making, albeit without a particular interest specifically in foreign policy making (e.g., Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988; Lieberthal and Lampton 1992).

[6] In turn, Jones (2017) uses insights from the Bureaucratic Politics Model to advance the role theoretical literature on the sources of domestic contestations over national role conceptions (NRCs), conceiving of bureaucracies as carriers of different and potentially competing NRCs.

[7] Zhang (2016: 443) also points out that in China there are different labels for bureaucratic politics, such as factionalism or sectarianism, which denote the essentially same phenomenon.

[8] Following Vertzberger (1984: 74), a faction can be defined as "a temporary alignment of individuals which constitutes a fragment of a larger entity, group or organization, whose members think and act collectively."

[9] Leaning on Gramsci, Duggan (2020) suggests that bureaucratic politics emerges as result of ministries and agencies developing different, and competing, interpretations of "hegemonic ideas" and the goals that are associated with them. As result, "we should see that there is a major difference in the actions of each actor, which quite often are counterproductive, despite the fact that the actors claim, and truly believe, that they are working towards the achievement of the goals established by the hegemonic discourse" (Duggan 2020: 43).

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