
Leadership Personality and Foreign Policy Decision - Making: A Comparative Analysis of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping ¹

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In today's world of politics, the leadership styles of three major world leaders, Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping, and how they affect policy decisions are of the utmost importance. This paper analyzes how the distinct personalities of these leaders affect the foreign policy decision-making process and how they are similar and different. This paper follows a qualitative, comparative, case study method which primarily uses secondary, already published data. Analysis shows that Trump has a foreign policy decision-making style characterized by dominance, impulsiveness, and a lack of complex thought, while Putin has a preference for centralizing, authoritarian, obstructive, and reckless decision-making, and a desire for restoration of a perceived status and risk-absorption for the sake of security. On the other hand, the analysis also highlights that Xi Jinping is characterized by a comprehensive, disciplined, and ideologically consistent approach to foreign policy, and a belief in the centrality of China's comprehensive power to achieve its ends. This research shows that the style of decision-making in foreign policy can alter the means of diplomacy and affect the balance of power in international politics. This study also broadens a previously narrow discourse of leadership and foreign policy in international relations.

Keywords: leadership personality, foreign policy decision making, Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, international relations

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In today's world, foreign policies affect global political stability, economic relations between countries, and international security. Because the world is becoming more uncertain, powerful countries are competing, and many crises are happening, it is essential to examine how foreign policies are formulated and implemented. Many international relations scholars focus on systems, institutions, and state interests, but emerging new literature shows that individual leaders also play an important role. Political leaders not only represent their country's interests but are also shaped by personal beliefs and individual traits that affect their worldview. Combining political science and psychology helps to understand these patterns and their effect. Decision-making is not only influenced by institutional frameworks but also by other factors. People's thoughts, feelings, and past experiences also shape how individuals interpret issues and determine their responses. Scholars have highlighted psychology as a crucial factor in explaining political behavior and decision-making (Ramesh, 2022). So, studying a leader's personality is important to understand how and why a country's behaviour changes in foreign policy. Smith (2012) says that foreign policy is decided by individuals, and studying leaders' traits, motivations, and beliefs helps explain their decisions.

A number of gaps have been discovered in the current literature on leadership and international politics. A major problem is that although some studies examine how a leader's personality affects international relations, most of the literature, such as Kaarbo (2017), focuses on past leaders rather than current ones. This is why such studies do not provide sufficient understanding of the current global political situation. Also, many studies, like Ramesh (2022), describe leaders' traits and their general impact on the international system. However, they do not clearly explain how these traits influence foreign policy decisions. These studies often only describe things instead of explaining them. So, the connection between personality and decision-making is not explored enough. Many studies only focus on the state. They ignore the role of individual leaders (Hafner-Burton et al., 2013). As a result, the role of a leader's personality in foreign policy decisions is often ignored.

All these limitations show that the link between a leader's personality traits and

foreign policy decision-making is still not well studied. Therefore, further in-depth and systematic research is required in this area. To fill these gaps, this study examines leaders' personality traits and carefully analyzes how these traits influence foreign policy decisions in today's world. It is essential to study and understand how a leader's personality affects foreign policy decisions, especially in the world's largest economies. This is due to the fact that their decisions can have a direct and immediate impact on global stability and competition. This research studies the relationship between leadership personality and foreign policy decision-making of leaders of the largest economies; specifically, this study attempts to understand the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, and Xi Jinping. The main objective of this research is to address the existing gap between the personality of leaders and foreign policy decision-making, specifically to offer an intensive analysis of this relationship in contemporary global politics. This study aims to reinforce the role of the personality of leaders in determining foreign policy conduct, especially in relation to the analysis of personality in leadership and foreign policy. This work is presented in multiple parts, which include the introduction as the current section, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion of findings, and finally conclusion.

Literature Review

The increasing personalization of today's politics, particularly with respect to Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping, has stimulated research on individual leaders and how they influence the formulation of foreign policy. Although a thorough understanding of systemic and domestic factors is still essential, a considerable amount of research in foreign policy analysis (FPA) and political psychology shows that the personality, beliefs, and decision-making styles of leaders can shape how a given state perceives and acts on the international environment (Cuhadar et al., 2017; Medeiros et al., 2022).

In contrast, structural realists believe that there is a dominant pattern in the international system which dictates how states behave, allowing little scope for leaders to act independently and to make autonomous decisions. Based on this

perspective, great powers act in similar ways because they face the same structural limits. It does not matter who the leader is. This is because survival, secrecy, and material interests tend to outweigh individual preferences (Waltz, 2000, 2015). The argument shows that there is still a gap in research. It is necessary to identify when a leader's personality strongly influences the decisions, and when system forces become more important. This study draws on several important theoretical approaches, including Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Theory and its operationalisation through Leadership Trait Analysis, Richard Snyder's work on Foreign Policy Decision-Making (FPDM), and Robert Jervis's contributions to the political psychology of perception and misperception. Together, these perspectives help explain how leadership personalities can shape the foreign policy behaviour of leaders such as Trump, Putin, and Xi.

Three aspects are particularly relevant in this context. To begin with, leadership personality refers to the way leaders think, what drives them, and how they interact with others. These elements influence how power is understood and exercised, and are often examined through Leadership Trait Analysis (Hermann, 2003). Secondly, foreign policy decision-making focuses on the processes through which leaders and their advisory groups formulate and choose policies in response to external challenges (Al-Najjar & Husien, 2022). Finally, political psychology provides insight into how a leader's beliefs, perceptions, and cognitive biases shape their decisions. It also helps in understanding how these decisions, in turn, affect the broader international system (Jervis, 2017). This study looks at three main areas : (1) it examines key theories by Hermann, Snyder, and Jervis, (2) it studies research on how leaders' personal traits affect foreign policy with particular focus on leaders such as Trump and Putin, and (3) it explores new studies on Xi, ideology, and personalist authoritarianism. The study follows a clear structure. It starts with theory, then explains the process, and finally looks at real examples of major world leaders. The review focuses on studies that clearly connect leaders' personal traits with their foreign policy decisions. It mainly focuses on qualitative and mixed-method research in foreign policy analysis.

Theoretical Frameworks: Hermann, Snyder, Jervis and the Role of Structure

Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) and the research offered in this report cover a number of leadership and personality traits that can be analyzed through the verbal output of a leader's spontaneous comments. Some of the analyzed types of traits, which correspond with different leadership styles (i.e., constraint-respecting vs. constraint-challenging, directive vs. consultative), and also influence the pattern of foreign policy behavior, are the following: belief in ability to control events, power need, cognitive and relational complexity, distrust of other people, in-group bias, and task versus relationship focus. Ultimately, these traits contribute to explaining how leaders process and respond to different constraining factors, and ultimately make the decisions they do regarding foreign policy (Hermann, 2003). Snyder's description of foreign policy decision making puts a focus on the idea of the 'decision unit', along with the broader institutional and bureaucratic context where decisions take place. Decision making by leaders is not an isolated, independent act. This shows that context is critically important to explain what influence leaders can exert, for example, for instance, in situations where there are limited constraints within an advisory system, an organization's decision-making process, and the relevant domestic political system. It also explains how structural and domestic factors influence decisions. However, it still considers the role of individual policymakers (Al-Najjar & Husien, 2022). This study uses Robert Jervis's ideas to understand how leaders think. It looks at how wrong understanding and information processing shape how leaders see global events. A leader's beliefs shape how they see threats and how they respond to other countries. Even if the system is the same, these reactions shape foreign policy outcomes. This explains how perception affects decisions in international politics (Jervis, 2017).

A structural realist perspective says that individual leadership does not matter much. This is because states mainly focus on survival in the international system. Therefore, countries respond in similar ways, irrespective of the leaders (Waltz, 2000). But, in practice, leaders facing the same situation respond differently. Some

become more aggressive while others may take fewer risks in the same situation. This means that the system guides behavior, but it does not control everything. This creates a kind of contradiction. So, while studying both systems, the role of individual leaders should be taken into account.

Structure, Agency, and Foreign Policy Decision-Making

A key debate in foreign policy analysis is about what shapes foreign policy the most. Some scholars focus on the international system, while others focus on individual leaders. Kenneth Waltz and structural realists emphasize the role of the international system. They argue that the distribution of power and security concerns shape state behaviour. From this perspective, leaders have limited freedom to act independently. Their decisions are influenced by external pressures and national interests. As a result, foreign policy is largely seen as a response to the international system. On the other hand, scholars such as Margaret Hermann and Robert Jervis focus on the role of individual leaders. They argue that leaders do not always interpret threats, opportunities, and information in the same way. Because of this, leaders facing similar situations may make different foreign policy choices. A leader's personality and way of thinking can influence how a state responds to international challenges. From this perspective, structural factors and leadership psychology are not competing explanations. Both work together to shape foreign policy decisions.

However, foreign policy cannot be explained only by the international system or by a leader's personality. Many other factors also influence decision-making. These include historical experiences, domestic politics, institutions, and foreign relations. Strategic culture also shapes how states view their role in the world and how they respond to threats and opportunities. Historical experiences and political traditions influence national priorities over time. Domestic politics is equally important. Political institutions, bureaucracies, advisors, public opinion, and interest groups all play a role in shaping policy. Sometimes these factors support a leader's decisions, while at other times they limit or change them. As a result, foreign policy is shaped by the interaction of leadership, institutions, domestic politics, and

historical circumstances. Foreign policy is usually shaped by several factors. Leadership is one of them. However, leadership works alongside structural conditions, strategic culture, domestic politics, and institutions. Together, these factors influence how foreign policy is made and implemented. This study mainly focuses on leadership personality. At the same time, it recognizes the importance of domestic and international factors. This provides the basis for a comparative analysis of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping and their approaches to foreign policy.

Mechanisms Linking Personality and Foreign Policy

Threat perception

Leaders who do not trust others and have simple thinking often see unclear situations as threats. They may misunderstand the intentions of others. Because of this, they are more likely to respond with conflict or aggression (Hermann, 2003; Jervis, 2017). This increases the likelihood of choosing coercion or acting early.

Risk-taking

In foreign policy, a leader's willingness to take risks during a crisis depends on their self-confidence. It also depends on how much they want control and dominance (Hermann, 2003).

Advisor selection and management

Leaders' personalities affect the choices and management of advisors. A highly self-confident leader may control everything and reduce opposition. This makes policies reflect the leader's personality (Hermann, 2003; Al-Najjar & Husien, 2022).

Decision processes and information processing

Leaders with high conceptual complexity can think in a more detailed way. They consider more options and look at new evidence. Because of this, they make more careful and well-thought-out decisions (Hermann, 2003; Jervis, 2017). All these factors together help explain how personality connects with foreign policy decisions, especially in the cases of Trump, Putin, and Xi.

Empirical Insights

Trump and Putin

Studies on strong and populist leaders show some common traits like high confidence, distrust of others, and a preference for personal control. These traits can make foreign policy more assertive and sometimes less cooperative. In the case of Donald Trump, research using Leadership Trait Analysis and Operational Code Analysis points to traits like dominance, impulsiveness, and lower conceptual complexity (White, 2022). Because of this, his foreign policy often focused strongly on national interest, but at the same time it could appear inconsistent or unpredictable (Özdamar et al., 2023). These traits also affect how threats are seen and how decisions are made. Leaders like this may take more risks, depend less on advisors, and rely more on their own judgement. This can make foreign policy more personal and sometimes difficult to predict (White, 2022). In that sense, Trump's foreign policy often looked unpredictable, even though there were some patterns behind it. However, it was actually shaped by his personality traits and beliefs. So, his actions were not completely random. His style of making quick deals and using provocative language made him seem unpredictable. But his actions still showed some consistency (Bentley & Lerner, 2021). Here, Snyder's FPDM approach helps explain how Trump's leadership style worked within a strong but divided advisory system. At the same time, Jervis's political psychology explains his simple way of thinking and that he often distrusts both friends and rivals. Trump's foreign policy cannot be explained only by his personality traits. Peterson (2018) argues that foreign policy behaviour is shaped by both leaders and broader structural forces, including institutional arrangements and international political conditions. This view is similar to Kenneth Waltz's structural realism. Waltz argues that the international system creates opportunities and constraints for states. From this perspective, a leadership personality is important. However, it must be understood within the wider international political context.

In Putin's case, recent studies using Leadership Trait Analysis show that his thinking is less complex. He tends to see the world in a rigid and "either-or" way. This kind of thinking seems to have pushed policies in a more forceful and escalating direction, especially during the invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, Putin appears to have a strong belief in his own ability to control events. There is also a clear preference for

maintaining control, which shapes the way he leads. His style tends to centralise power, push against limits, and at times take significant risks in order to restore status and security. His personality also affects how threats are understood. NATO expansion and Ukraine's increasing independence are not seen as neutral developments, but as serious challenges. This helps explain why he has been willing to take major risks, even when the military and economic costs are high. Decision-making, meanwhile, remains restricted to a small circle of trusted advisors, which further reinforces a personalised approach to foreign policy (Terkulova, 2023; Novruzov, 2024; Wulandari, 2025). The studies highlight that even in the context of strong structural drivers – NATO expansion, regional rivalries, domestic polarization, – the variation of leaders' traits helps to explain the variation in the timing, framing, and mechanisms of foreign policy actions. However, Russian foreign policy cannot be explained solely through the personality of its leaders. Tsygankov (2012) emphasizes the importance of Russia's strategic culture, historical experiences, and great-power identity in shaping its behaviour on the international stage. This suggests that while Putin's personality plays an important role, foreign policy decisions are also influenced by broader political and geopolitical factors.

Xi Jinping, Ideology, and Personalized Authoritarian Leadership

Research on Xi Jinping is less available compared to Trump and Putin, particularly studies using systematic methods like Leadership Trait Analysis. One reason is the strict control over information about Xi. Political and language barriers also make research difficult. Nevertheless, studies indicate that Xi has consolidated his control over power. He has moved away from the earlier system that limited individual authority after Mao. Instead, he has concentrated power in both the state and the Communist Party. This breaks from the earlier practice of collective leadership (Shirk, 2018). Recent studies have also highlighted the institutional dimension of Xi's leadership. Cabestan (2017) argues that Xi strengthened his control over foreign and security policy through institutional reforms. These changes increased the role of the top leadership in policymaking. Cabestan (2021) further notes that the reforms strengthened central foreign policy institutions and expanded Xi's influence over foreign and security policy.

His leadership is also marked by more assertive and clear policies. For example, he promotes ideas like “Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics.” He also actively pushes for the expansion of China’s core interests (Iida, 2020). These policies have further contributed to Xi’s political power. Studies of his public speeches show that his individual leadership style influences China’s foreign policy. He often talks about national rejuvenation, strategic goals, and global leadership. All of this highlights the significance of his personal role in shaping China’s foreign policy (Douglas, 2017). However, some scholars argue that China’s foreign policy should not be understood only through Xi’s personality. Zhang (2015) points out that China’s growing global influence, national interests, and long-term goals have also shaped its more active foreign policy. This suggests that leadership personality is only one factor. Domestic and international conditions also influence foreign policy decisions. Overall, the literature shows that leadership personality can be especially important in foreign policy. This is often the case when leaders hold significant power and operate in uncertain international environments. However, personality alone cannot explain foreign policy. Leaders are also influenced by state structures, institutions, and domestic politics. Foreign policy is shaped by the interaction between leadership personality and the broader political context. Although many studies have examined Trump, Putin, and Xi separately, there are fewer comparative studies that examine all three together. This creates a gap in understanding how personality influences foreign policy across different political systems.

Methodology

This study uses behavioral leadership theory and foreign policy analysis. It also uses psychological studies of Trump, Putin, and Xi. It examines how their personalities influence policy-making by using a qualitative comparative case study. It also looks at how this shapes their foreign policy choices.

The research combines three related theories. These are : Hermann’s Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), Snyder’s Foreign Policy Decision Making (FPDM) Framework, and Jervis’s Political Psychology of Perception and Misperception. LTA provides different traits to study leaders. These include belief in control over events, power motivation,

conceptual complexity, distrust of others, and focus on tasks or relationships. These help us understand the personalities of the three leaders. Snyder's FPDM framework looks at how decisions are made. It focuses on decision-making groups, advisory systems, and institutional settings. Jervis's framework, on the other hand, studies perception, misperception, and cognitive biases. It helps explain how leaders assess threats and make strategic choices. These three frameworks support each other. They do not oppose one another. Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis focuses on identifying leaders' personality traits. Jervis's political psychology explains how these traits shape leaders' perceptions and interpretations of world events. Snyder's Foreign Policy Decision-Making model examines how these perceptions are translated into decisions within institutional settings. Together, these frameworks help explain the link between leadership personality and foreign policy behaviour.

The qualitative secondary data used in this analysis are drawn from the scholarly literature, policy papers and analyses, published research on Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), and the literature on the foreign policies of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping. The intent of this study is not to conduct an original Leadership Trait Analysis by using primary data of speeches or interviews, but rather to consider the findings of previous research to analyze prominent leadership characteristics. The aim is not to create personality categories. Instead, it seeks to understand how leadership traits influence foreign policy decisions in different political settings. To do this, the study examines threat perception, risk-taking, advisor selection, and decision-making processes. Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping were selected because they are contemporary leaders of major powers and have had a significant impact on international politics. They differ in their political systems, institutions, and leadership styles. This makes them suitable for comparison. Studying these three leaders helps explain how personality influences foreign policy decisions in different political contexts. The findings section presents three case studies. Each case is linked to the relevant theoretical framework. The analysis uses secondary information on leadership traits and major foreign policy decisions. It also examines the four key mechanisms. The analysis uses a structured comparative approach. The same analytical framework is

applied to all three cases to ensure consistency. The discussion compares the cases side by side to examine the relationship between leadership personality and foreign policy behaviour. It also highlights differences in political systems, institutions, and broader international contexts.

Findings

Case Study 1: Donald Trump's Leadership Personality and Foreign Policy Decision Making

Donald Trump's foreign policy decision-making can be understood by using Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), Snyder's Foreign Policy Decision Making (FPDM) framework, and Jervis's political psychology together. Instead of seeing his actions as completely random, this approach explains how his personality, institutions, and thinking together shape foreign policy decisions. From an LTA perspective, Trump's personality is characterized by high-dominance, narcissistic, extroverted, and impulsive personality, characterized by a low level of behavioral conscientiousness, as well as a low level of behavioral or cognitive operational complexity (Immelman, 2017; Griebie, 2021). Within the context of "Psychological Profiling", these traits and personality features provide the basis for the "psychological foundation" of the "America First" approach, as well as the transactional and unpredictable nature of President Trump's foreign policy. His leadership style matches what Immelman (2017) calls an influential leadership orientation. It shows a strong desire for power, a belief in personal control, and an aggressive way of dealing with others. This type of leader tries to influence others and shape the global system. These traits are seen in his decision-making style. Trump often makes quick decisions without much thinking and focuses more on political gains than long-term planning (Immelman, 2017). He does not engage much with detailed briefings or structured policy plans. This further supports a simple and personalized style of decision making. Studies using LTA and Operational Code Analysis (OCA) show that he has a high level of distrust, especially toward those seen as outsiders. He also shows strong nationalism and in-group bias, which makes him less willing to cooperate with other countries (White, 2022). Snyder's FPDM framework explains how these traits work within the decision-making system. Trump's leadership is highly personal and

centered around the leader himself. As a result, institutional processes and advisory systems are often weakened or even ignored. After these disruptions, advisory systems became less organized, which increased the influence of Trump's personal traits on decision-making. In his case, decision-making often involves only selected advisors with a clear preference for direct leader-to-leader diplomacy instead of traditional bureaucratic channels (Immelman, 2017). This reduced the role of institutions and made Trump's personal preferences more dominant. To understand how Trump sees international events, Jervis's political psychology is useful. His low cognitive complexity and high distrust make him see the world in a simple way. He often divides countries into allies and enemies. The idea of being "predictably unpredictable" explains this behavior. His actions may seem inconsistent, but they follow a pattern based on short-term thinking and personal judgment. Özdamar et al. (2023) argue that he focuses on immediate gains that are visible at home. His policies are presented as successes for national interests even when they are unconventional and reactive. What he considers "positive" is usually reactive and different from traditional approaches. However, these decisions still remain consistent within his own belief system.

His thinking shapes how he takes risks. Trump's impulsiveness and confidence increase the chances of risky decisions, and his preference for personal style also influences how he handles diplomacy. Because of this, uncertainty became a normal feature of his foreign policy. Some analysts interpret this unpredictability as a deliberate strategy to gain advantage, while others see it as a reflection of deeper psychological tendencies (Bentley & Lerner, 2021).

Analyzing Trump's personality helps explain some aspects of his foreign policy behaviour. However, personality alone cannot explain everything. During his presidency, structural, institutional, and geopolitical factors also influenced U.S. foreign policy (Peterson, 2018). For this reason, Trump's foreign policy is best understood through the interaction of his personality and broader political and international factors.

Trump's case shows that a leadership personality can play an important role in foreign policy. Traits such as dominance, nationalism, distrust, and impulsiveness help explain the risks he took, the advisors he selected, and the way he processed information.

Although his foreign policy often appeared unpredictable, it was often consistent with his personality and decision-making style. At the same time, policy outcomes were also shaped by the political and diplomatic environment of the United States and by international developments.

Case Study 2: Vladimir Putin's Leadership Personality and Foreign Policy Decision Making

Vladimir Putin's Leadership Personality and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Putin is an example of extreme centralization and personalization of leadership characterized by particular attributes and is especially vivid during the Ukraine crisis. Analyses of his leadership often describe it as directive, somewhat authoritarian, and at times even Machiavellian. These features help explain how Putin is able to maintain his authority. At the same time, there is a clear effort to restore national pride and strengthen Russia's position in the international system. Traits such as intelligence, persistence, and self-confidence seem to play an important role here. His ability to connect with both political elites and the broader public also adds to his influence. Together, these factors make it easier for him to build support for a more revisionist foreign policy (Novruzov, 2024). In turn, this helps justify decisions that may involve high political, economic, or military costs. For example, interventions in Ukraine are presented as necessary. He argues they are needed to restore Russia's global position. These traits helped him stay in power after the Soviet Union collapsed. Research using Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) shows that Putin has low cognitive complexity compared to many world leaders. This means he tends to see the world in a simple, black-and-white way. This low cognitive complexity is not just a personality trait. It also has real effects on foreign policy. Terkulova (2023) argues that Putin's personality traits, particularly his constricted black and white worldview, drove him to see the world in friend-enemy terms and to be willing to use military force to defend perceived threats, significantly shaping his decision to invade Ukraine in 2022. She argues that another leader in the same situation would have made a different decision. This shows that individual traits matter in this case. Snyder's Foreign Policy Decision Making (FPDM) framework helps explain how these traits operate within institutional structures. Research on Putin shows that he is the main

leader shaping Russia's foreign policy. He also represents Russia in international affairs. Hussain and Shakoor (2017) describe him as "the face of Russia's foreign policy" and "Russia's supreme leader" (Hussain & Shakoor, 2017, p – 1-25) They argue that his personality and ideology play a significant role in shaping Russia's position in world politics. His centralized leadership limits different viewpoints and reduces the role of advisors. Decision-making is limited to a small group. This makes it more likely that policies reflect his personal beliefs and strategies. This centralization also affects how perceptions are turned into actions. By studying his speeches toward the EU, US, China, Turkey, and the Middle East, they suggest that his views of other actors shape Russia's behavior. He sees some as hostile and others as cooperative. These perceptions influence Russia's foreign policy patterns. Within the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, this perspective views NATO expansion and Ukraine's independence as major policy issues. These are considered existential threats to Russia's security and influence.

Jervis's political psychology helps explain the thinking behind Putin's decision-making. Putin's centralized leadership affects how perceptions are turned into actions. Wulandari's analysis of the Russia-Ukraine war highlights the role of aggression, self-confidence, and authoritarian leadership. Wulandari states that Putin prefers a centralized and hierarchical way of thinking. This has played a significant role in increasing conflict. It also shows how a leader's personal traits can shape large-scale crises (Wulandari, 2025). When power is concentrated, fewer people give advice or disagree. This makes his aggressive and simple decision style more influential in risky decisions. Putin's personality helps explain many aspects of Russian foreign policy. However, other factors also matter. Russia's strategic culture, historical experiences, and desire to maintain its status as a major power influence how it sees threats and opportunities (Tsygankov, 2012). Waltz's Structural Realism also suggests that the international system creates opportunities and constraints for Russian foreign policy. Therefore, Russian foreign policy is best understood through a combination of personality, culture, and broader international factors.

The literature describes Putin as a leader with high self-confidence and a strong desire to control events. His style of governance gives him greater control over the political

system. As a result, foreign policy decisions often become more consistent and assertive. However, foreign policy outcomes are not shaped by leadership alone. They are also influenced by political, strategic, historical, and security factors. Putin's case shows how leadership personality and situational factors work together. This combination influences foreign policy behaviour. For this reason, Putin is an important case for studying the relationship between personality and foreign policy.

Case Study 3: Xi Jinping's Leadership Personality and Foreign Policy Decision Making

Xi Jinping's foreign policy decision-making can be better understood by using Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), Snyder's Foreign Policy Decision Making (FPDM) framework, and Jervis's political psychology together. Rather than focusing only on the leader, this approach explains how personality, institutions, and perceptions interact to shape foreign policy decisions. Leadership Trait Analysis suggests that Xi focuses strongly on long-term goals. This can be seen in ideas such as the "Chinese Dream" and national rejuvenation. His attention is directed more towards long-term national objectives than short-term political concerns. As a result, China's foreign policy often appears more consistent and planned. Xi also places great importance on leadership in foreign affairs. This is reflected in his centralization of power and stronger control over policy direction. Because of this, China's foreign policy focuses on long-term development, great-power status, and national interests (Lida, 2020). Xi's strong focus on goals and his long-term ideological vision are linked to the centralization of power and the weakening of collective leadership. This concentration of power allows Xi to choose his advisors carefully. He can also control information and shape decision-making according to his preferences (Shirk, 2018; Lida, 2020). In FPDM terms, this shows a highly centralized decision-making system. Only a few people are involved, and different viewpoints are limited. This centralization has important effects on how advisors operate. Decision-making is limited to a small and loyal group. This reduces disagreement and makes it more likely that policies reflect Xi's personal views. As a result, advisory systems become less diverse. Cabestan (2017) argues that Xi introduced important institutional changes in China's foreign and security policy. Although many organizations are involved in decision-making, Xi strengthened his control over key

leadership bodies and policy coordination mechanisms. This reduced the influence of collective leadership. It also increased the authority of the top leader in foreign policy. As a result, China's foreign policy reflects Xi's preferences and long-term goals more than earlier periods. This became even more visible after Xi introduced further institutional reforms. Cabestan (2021) argues that Xi strengthened central foreign policy institutions to increase his control over foreign and security policy. Many important decisions are now coordinated through bodies that report directly to the top leadership. According to Snyder's FPDM, when power is concentrated and fewer alternative views are present, a leader's beliefs have a stronger influence on policymaking. This means that Xi's views play a greater role in shaping foreign policy decisions.

Jervis's political psychology helps explain how Xi understands international developments, since his ideological framework shapes how he sees both threats and opportunities. This is particularly important given China's global position. His focus on national rejuvenation and global leadership leads him to interpret external challenges as long-term strategic competition rather than short-term crisis (Douglas, 2017). This way of thinking gives structure and reduces uncertainty, but it can also narrow the range of policy options he considers. Xi's approach is careful and planned rather than impulsive, and his foreign policy decisions are not random but follow a broader strategic vision. Understanding Xi's personality helps explain some aspects of China's foreign policy. However, it cannot explain everything. Broader structural factors also play an important role. China's growing economic power, expanding global presence, and changing position in the international system have created new opportunities and challenges. Zhang (2015) argues that Xi has promoted a more proactive foreign policy focused on protecting China's interests while supporting continued national development. Therefore, China's foreign policy is shaped by both Xi's personality and China's broader role in global politics. The case of Xi highlights the important role of leadership in foreign policy. This is especially true in a highly centralized authoritarian system. When decision-making becomes more centralized, the leader's influence becomes more visible. As a result, China's foreign policy reflects Xi's preferences more clearly. However, foreign policy outcomes are not shaped by leadership alone.

Institutional frameworks, global developments, and national interests also play an important role. The case of Xi shows that foreign policy is influenced by both leadership personality and broader political structures.

Discussion of Findings

This research paper examines the role of leadership personality in foreign policy decision-making, even within highly structured political systems. This study analyzes the individual differences between Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping and the effect of personality constructs, such as conceptual complexity, need for power, ideological conviction, and leadership style, and the way these personality traits influence leaders' perceptions of threats, information processing, and policy choices. The study shows that despite the importance of structural factors, a leader's personality does act as an important variable that influences the different aspects of foreign policy. One key finding of the study is that low conceptual complexity, along with high self-confidence and dominance, leads to more aggressive and risky foreign policy choices. This is especially true for Trump and Putin, while they are different in many ways. Trump's decision-making is impulsive and based on personal judgment. This leads to a view of international relations as two opposing sides. As a result, actions become unpredictable and unilateral. Putin has lower cognitive complexity and a more rigid worldview. He divides others into friends and enemies, which leads him to be more likely to use force. These results support Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis. They show that low complexity and a strong belief in control lead to more aggressive foreign policy.

The study further observes that when authority is centralized, the leader's personality has a stronger impact on decision making. Power centralization, especially in the cases of Putin and Xi Jinping, reduces institutional constraints. It also limits the number of voices involved in decision making. At the same time, it helps control dissent and discourages people from speaking against authority. However, the results are different in Putin's case because of differences in personality and how he thinks about strategy. In his case, the centralized system strengthens his tendency to take risks. It is also linked to his preference for gaining status. This explains his willingness to take extreme and risky actions, such as the conflict in Ukraine. Unlike Xi, other leaders do not

centralize power in a strict way. They think more in the short term and use simple judgments. Their decisions are less planned. So, their foreign policy can look random and less ideological. This means centralization does not work the same for everyone. Its influence depends on the personality of the decision-maker. It also depends on the political situation. There are clear differences in the decision-making styles of the three leaders. Putin is often willing to take risks to achieve long-term goals. Trump's decisions are usually more personal and focused on short-term outcomes. Xi Jinping tends to take a more cautious and long-term approach. These differences help explain variations in the predictability and consistency of their foreign policies. By focusing on ideology, beliefs, and systems, the findings change how we understand foreign policy narratives and perceptions. Looking at individual leaders, Trump's ideology is flexible and based on deals. Putin's ideology is shaped by nationalism and security concerns. Xi's ideology is more structured and based on the Chinese Communist Party. Xi's focus on national rejuvenation and global influence shows how ideology can support foreign policy. It links domestic legitimacy with global goals. This matches what Robert Jervis says. He argues that a leader's beliefs and perceptions are very important for understanding how they see the world and respond to it. The study shows that personality and institutions work together. Traditional realists like Waltz focus on structure as the main factor that shapes state behavior. The analysis shows that democratic (Trump) and authoritarian (Putin and Xi) leaders in different institutional contexts show differing degrees of foreign policy behavioral outcomes resulting from variations in their personalities. Even in authoritarian systems, where institutional and structural factors are often expected to have a strong influence, leadership personality continues to shape how leaders perceive threats, process information, and make policy decisions. These findings suggest that political structures alone cannot explain differences in foreign policy. Leadership remains an important part of the explanation.

A leader's personality affects decisions and the whole decision-making process. It also influences who advises him, whose advice is heard, and how information is understood. For example, Trump's leadership led to weak and fragmented advisory systems, with poor flow of information. In Putin's system, centralization reduced the number of

advisors and strengthened his own beliefs. Similarly, Xi's system is also centralized. It has strong regulation of information flow, which supports his long-term strategic goals. These differences show that the decision-making system, the information used, and the ideas followed are largely shaped by a leader's personality.

This comparison shows that personality-driven foreign policy can lead to either unstable or predictable behavior, depending on the leader. Trump shows that strong personal traits can make foreign policy more unstable and inconsistent, which makes it harder to predict. Xi, on the other hand, follows discipline and a clear ideology, which makes his foreign policy more stable and consistent. Putin is in between. He combines long-term goals with risky methods. This shows that personality effects depend on the situation and on which traits are combined in a given context. From a broader perspective, the findings show that leadership personality is important in foreign policy. However, it should not be studied in isolation. It needs to be understood within broader political structures. This challenges the realist idea that leaders simply follow what the international system forces on them. Instead, values and beliefs also shape how leaders define national interests, understand threats, and choose policy options. In this sense, leaders are not only shaped by structure but also play an active role in shaping outcomes. The comparison highlights clear differences among the three leaders. Trump's leadership style is often impulsive and highly personalized. It is also marked by dominance, distrust, and low conceptual complexity. Putin's leadership is characterized by centralization, strong self-confidence, and a tendency to view international politics as a zero-sum competition. Xi Jinping's leadership is also highly centralized, but it is more focused on long-term planning and strategic goals. These differences show that leadership traits can shape foreign policy in different ways. However, outcomes do not depend only on individual characteristics. They are also influenced by the political situations leaders face.

Lastly, the study shows that foreign policy decision-making cannot be fully explained without considering leadership personalities. In the cases of Trump, Putin, and Xi Jinping, personal traits and institutional systems work together to shape different results ranging from unpredictable behavior to more calculated and ideological actions.

By combining political psychology and international relations, the study offers a more complete way of understanding foreign policy. It also helps balance the role of both structure and individual leadership in explaining state behavior.

The findings also have broader implications for foreign policy. The three cases show that leadership personality and structural factors are not opposing explanations. Instead, they work together. Leadership traits, institutions, strategic culture, and the international environment all influence foreign policy outcomes. The role of personality becomes stronger when power is concentrated, and institutions allow greater flexibility. For this reason, personality should not replace structural explanations. Rather, it helps explain how leaders perceive and interpret different domestic and international situations.

Conclusion

This research examined the impact of leadership personality on foreign policy decision-making through a comparative analysis of Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping. The findings show that individual traits play a major role in shaping how leaders understand and respond to international issues. While structural and institutional factors do not lose significance, they do not fully explain foreign policy behavior. Instead, leadership personality emerges as a key but often overlooked factor that helps explain differences in foreign policy outcomes even within the same international context.

The analysis reveals clear differences in the leadership styles of the three leaders. Trump's style is more impulsive and less complex. This often makes his foreign policy appear unpredictable and inconsistent. Putin follows a more controlled approach and is generally more willing to take risks to achieve strategic goals. Xi's style is more strategic and influenced by ideology. He places strong emphasis on long-term planning, China's rise, and national rejuvenation. These differences affect how the three leaders process information, choose advisors, and set foreign policy priorities.

More broadly, this research highlights the importance of political psychology in International Relations. Studying structures and institutions alone is not enough. It is also important to understand the beliefs, perceptions, and personalities of leaders. The findings show that foreign policy outcomes are shaped by the interaction of leadership

traits, institutions, and international conditions. By comparing Trump, Putin, and Xi Jinping, this study demonstrates how leadership personality helps explain differences in foreign policy choices.

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