

**DECISION-MAKING IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY CRISES:  
PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP AND OUTCOMES**

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**Abstract**

Scholars of foreign policy decision-making (FPDM) have argued that international interactions are ultimately grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups. Unfortunately, data limitations prevent many of these crucial FPDM theories from being rigorously tested and systematically compared to theories from alternative theoretical perspectives. A promising approach to remedying this deficiency is the addition of decision-making variables to existing, large-N data sets. In this study, we coded a series of FPDM variables for all U.S. cases in the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) data set, and examined how these decision-making variables compared to structural factors in shaping crisis outcomes. Our data analysis reveals that when controlling for structural factors such as conflict setting, power discrepancy, and the nature of the crisis trigger, FPDM variables related to leaders' traits, advisory structure, and the political context shaped the centrality and severity of violence employed in U.S. crises in ways consistent with FPDM theories.

\*We are grateful to Hemda Ben-Yehuda, Kyle Beardsley, Michael Brecher, Stephen Dyson and Dennis Foster for helpful commentaries and Hailey Bennett, Marguerite Stip and Daniel Wagner for research assistance.

## Overview

Scholars of Foreign Policy Decision Making (FPDM) have argued that international interactions ultimately are grounded in human decision-makers acting singly or in groups (Hudson and Vore, 1995; Hudson, 2005; Mintz and DeRouen Jr., 2010; Schafer and Crichlow, 2010; Garrison, 2010). As a result, their theories and hypotheses have introduced factors such as organizational processes, bureaucratic politics, individual personality traits, cognitive biases, and group dynamics to explain foreign policy decisions.

Unfortunately, data limitations prevent many valuable FPDM theories from being tested rigorously and systematically compared to theories from alternative perspectives (e.g., theories that focus on regime type or the structure of the international system). We simply do not have large and accessible data sets that include FPDM-related variables; therefore, scholars interested in testing individual and group-level hypotheses in real-world cases typically cannot use statistical methods and are forced to rely on detailed case studies with often suspect generalizability. Important agency-based FPDM theories therefore cannot “compete” on a level playing field with structural and rational choice models. It is possible that agency-based models do a better job predicting outcomes than structural explanations, or that agents and structures interact in important ways, but these questions cannot be tackled rigorously with currently available data.

One other problem, with two components, is associated with the corpus of knowledge about FPDM so far. One component is the tendency to focus on critiques of existing explanations. The other is a focus on particular cases without an attendant ability to explain patterns across cases or engage in forecasting.

In order to remedy the preceding problems, scholars must undertake a rigorous and systematic effort to code FPDM variables across a large number of cases and integrate these new

variables into existing large-N data sets. For reasons detailed below, the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) Project data set is particularly well-suited to this sort of data integration effort in the realm of FPDM. The present study takes the first steps toward building and utilizing an expanded ICB data set by coding four decision-making variables for all U.S. crises in the data set and examining how these FPDM variables compare to structural factors as determinants of crisis outcomes. We begin with U.S. cases due to its role as system leader for the last several decades and accessibility of source material for these crises.

This study will unfold in five additional sections. The next section highlights the ways in which the ICB data set is a natural choice for the integration of FPDM variables. This is followed by a section on theorizing and hypotheses. Data and measurement come next and then data analysis accompanied by case illustrations. The final section sums up what has been learned and suggests ideas for further work.

### **FPDM and the ICB Project**

The ICB data set is widely used and highly regarded among scholars with interests in foreign policy analysis, conflict processes, and security studies.<sup>1</sup> Brecher (1999) provided an authoritative set of references on use of ICB data up to that point. Among the substantive topics studied through ICB data since then are domestic processes and crisis outcomes (Trumbore and

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<sup>1</sup> Among a vast number of studies are Brecher (1999), Brecher and Wilkenfeld (1997, 2000), Carment and James (1998), James and Harvey (1992), Keller (2005a), Rioux (1998), Wilkenfeld (1991), Anglin (1980), Dawisha (1984), Dowty (1984), Hoffmann (1990), Jukes (1985), Shlaim (1983) and James and Oneal (1991).

Boyer, 2000), mediation (Wilkenfeld et al., 2003; Beardsley et al., 2006; Inman et al., 2014), military mobilization (Lai, 2004), gender (Caprioli and Boyer, 2001), ethnicity (Mishali-Ram, 2006), leadership style (Keller, 2005b), territoriality and war (Ben-Yehuda, 2004), and rivalry and protracted conflict (Colaresi and Thompson, 2002a, 2002b; Hewitt, 2005) and extensions to mediation of intrastate crises (Quinn, Eralp and Wilkenfeld, 2012; Quinn et al., 2013; Salmon et al., 2013). Theories applied and evaluated include the democratic peace (Hewitt, 2003), poliheuristic theory (DeRouen and Sprecher, 2004; James and Zhang, 2005), the capitalist peace (Gartzke and Hewitt, 2010), and diversionary theory (Chiozza and Goemans, 2003). Studies based on ICB that have been published in recent years continue to appear in major interdisciplinary journals, most notably the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. Of particular relevance for the present study, a review from the ISA *Encyclopedia* observes that, as compared to other data sets, “the cases recorded by the ICB project allow for a much closer examination of elite decision making in high-stress environments” (Prins, 2010: 4661).

Adding FPDM variables to the ICB data set will permit aggregate assessment of ideas that have evolved from classic works on high-level leadership in small groups (most notably in crisis situations) such as Allison (1971) on bureaucratic politics and Janis (1972, 1982) on groupthink. While much work has accumulated on groupthink and bureaucratic politics over the last several decades, we need to consider the observations of Garrison (2010: 6459) about these frameworks in an authoritative review from the ISA *Encyclopedia*: “Critics of both perspectives argue that the assumptions of these models are ambiguous, that the propositions taken from their assumptions are not rigorously derived and that the relations of the variables are left obscure.” Explanations of decision-making, furthermore, have moved past cursory references to symptoms of groupthink or bureaucratic roles (Garrison, 2010: 6461). Thus what is needed now, to

advance the study of small groups in foreign policy decision-making, is precisely the rigorous data creation and hypothesis testing that is outlined below with regard to structure and dynamics of decision-making in the domain of crisis.

Key theoretical questions that this expanded data set will help to answer involve the ways in which group cohesion, group norms, information processing, and bureaucratic conflict shape the tools (military, diplomatic, etc.) employed in crises and the quality of the crisis outcome in terms of goals achieved and tension reduced. Of particular interest is the explanatory power of these individual- and group-level variables when controlling for well-tested alternative explanations including power capabilities, rivalry, and the nature of the crisis trigger.

Given our focus on group-specific attributes and processes, we will add the new variables to the *foreign policy crises portion* of the ICB data set (which focuses on the experience and responses of each state involved in a crisis) rather than the *international crises portion* (which focuses on features of each crisis as a whole). Treating the *foreign policy crisis* as the unit of analysis facilitates how a range of system-level, domestic structural, group, and leadership variables—from multiple levels of analysis—interact to shape states' crisis responses (e.g., Hermann and Hermann, 1989; Keller, 2005a; Dyson and Preston, 2007; Keller and Yang, 2008). Such analyses would not be possible at the broader *international crisis* level. ICB's data set includes crises triggered by internal events as well as by external sources, so it covers comprehensively all crises in world politics.

Anticipated advantages of appending new FPDM variables to cases within the existing ICB data set, to sum up, are fivefold:

- (1) this approach greatly enhances the scope and efficiency of the coding enterprise, as coders will not need to establish criteria for case selection or search for relevant cases;
- (2) it will allow scholars, when examining the influence of decision-making variables, to easily control for the key military, political, and economic variables that are presently included in the ICB data set;
- (3) source material is particularly likely to be available for these crises;
- (4) crises represent an ideal substantive domain for studying decision-making, as studies have shown that when the stakes are particularly high, decision-making authority contracts upward to a small group of elites whose characteristics and interactions exert considerable influence on policy choices (Hermann, 1972; Hampson, 1988; 't Hart, 1990; Garrison, 2010); and
- (5) the new variables will enlarge the scope of existing ICB coverage of such crises.

The following section identifies the new FPDM variables that we have coded in this initial effort to expand the ICB data set, and discusses the theoretical links between these variables and crisis outcomes. The principal outcome variables pertain to centrality and severity of crisis management techniques – an obvious set of initial priorities. Note again that the ensuing research design is monadic in focus – foreign policy crises, which are defined at the actor level.

### **Theorizing and Hypotheses**

The first stage of our effort to add decision-making variables to the ICB data set and to examine their influence focuses on four new variables: advisory system (i.e., those consulted by the leader), margin of victory in the last presidential election, and two elements of presidents' belief systems with particular relevance for crisis decision-making: belief in ability to control

events and distrust. In each instance the goal is to assess the connection with centrality and severity of violence in crisis management techniques.

We have chosen these variables not only for their theoretical importance, but also because they have been measured successfully in previous empirical studies. For example, we have decided not to include certain variables such as experiential learning and leaders' physical/mental impairment given the lack of well-established coding criteria or readily accessible data.

### Advisory System

Consider the people with whom a leader consults – the advisory system. It is an important matter for FPDM. Through the leader's conversations with the immediate circle of advisors and associates, policy decisions take place. Advisory groups can shape foreign policy “by helping set the agenda, manipulating information, framing alternative courses of action, controlling the flow of information, preventing contradictory and non-supportive information from filtering in, interpreting incoming information for policy makers in certain ways, and serving as gatekeepers” (Mintz and DeRouen Jr., 2010: 31). Classic works in the study of advisory systems by Johnson (1974) and George (1980) describe an advisory structure and process based on the formal structure and patterns of interaction among advisers. They differentiate among formalistic (or hierarchical) systems, competitive systems, and collegial systems. In the hierarchical or closed advisory system, national security, or other central advisers, can exclude rivals from important decisions. In contrast, the more open competitive system pits advisers against one another and the collegial system allows many individuals to participate and influence policy debates in a system with multiple advocates. More importantly,

advisory structure determines the way in which advisors interact, which in turn affects policy outcomes (Allison 1971; Janis 1982).

In terms of the impact of advisory group structure on the violence-related dependent variables, we expect that formal (hierarchical) systems, compared to informal or collegial systems, are more self-insulated in processing outside information and alternative views. Consequently, groups structured as such will be more likely to adopt more extreme measures in resolving a crisis. Lack of exposure to new information and inability to consider outside/alternative views also tend to result in suboptimal decision-making. Thus expectations for formal systems of advising tilt more toward centrality and severity of violence with regard to foreign policy crises.

**Advisory System Hypothesis:** If a state's foreign policy advisory system is formal rather than informal or collegial, then its crisis behavior will feature violence as a more central and more severe crisis management technique.

Note that propositions about two specific dependent variables are embedded within this general hypothesis and others that follow. The focus on violence is an appropriate starting point and, of course, a wider range of dependent variables should be explored if connections emerge regarding violence, a basic and essential aspect of crisis behavior.

### Margin of Victory

A key feature of the domestic political context is the degree to which a government enjoys widespread support or faces determined opposition from important constituencies. In the

American political context, one measure of support for an administration is the president's margin of victory in the last election. Work on diversionary war suggests that when leaders face domestic political opposition they may respond by engaging in aggressive behavior toward foreign actors (Mueller, 1973; Ostrom and Job, 1986; James and Oneal 1991; Morgan and Bickers, 1992; DeRouen, 1995; Morgan and Anderson, 1999). The logic of diversion is that involvement in disputes abroad will create domestic rallies behind the government, distract from domestic problems, and/or create national cohesion by focusing attention on a foreign adversary. Other measures of domestic support vs. opposition, including public approval ratings and the party makeup of Congress, tap into different facets of opposition and should be added to the ICB dataset as this data gathering effort proceeds. But we include margin of victory in our initial analysis as an indicator of the administration's overall level of national support the last time these opinions were actually registered through behavior (rather than merely attitude surveys, which may not capture the intensity required to translate opinions into votes). We expect that leaders who narrowly win elections will be under greater pressure to demonstrate their leadership through forceful foreign policy actions and may engage in diversionary efforts in an effort to blunt political opposition. As a point of qualification, it must be observed that the hypothesis that follows pertains to the subset of democracies in the system.

**Margin of Victory Hypothesis:** Leaders who have gained office through more narrow electoral victories will employ violence as a more central and more severe crisis management technique.

### Belief in Ability to Control Events

Leaders' attitudes toward risk are an important predictor of their willingness to use military instruments to deal with foreign policy problems. In his influential book *Risk Taking and Decisionmaking: Foreign Military Intervention Decisions*, Vertzberger (1998) notes that leaders' beliefs about the controllability and predictability of historical-political developments<sup>2</sup> shape their perception of risk and their inclination to resort to military options. Specifically, those who believe that events can be manipulated, consequences can be foreseen, escalation can be controlled, and adverse outcomes reversed do not see forceful foreign policy actions as particularly risky and are therefore more likely to initiate such behavior. Vertzberger concludes that "belief in the controllability of escalation reduces anticipation of post-decisional dissonance. Hence the reluctance to make risky decisions decreases" (Vertzberger, 1998: 69). Research by Boettcher (2005) and Keller and Foster (2012) on presidential risk behavior in foreign policy reaches similar conclusions. We therefore view leaders' belief in their ability to control events (Hermann, 1999) as an important individual-level addition to the ICB data set, with implications for risk-taking in general and the use of violent foreign policy instruments in particular.

**Belief in Ability to Control Events Hypothesis:** Leaders who score higher on belief in ability to control events will rely on violence as a more central and more severe crisis management technique.

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<sup>2</sup> These beliefs figure prominently in research on Operational Codes (George, 1969; Holsti, 1970, 1977; Walker, 1990; Walker, Schafer and Young 1998; Schafer and Walker 2006), which continues to flourish at present.

### *Distrust*

A second individual-level variable with great relevance for crisis decision-making is distrust. Research in political psychology suggests that distrust is perhaps the most important cognitive precursor to a hardline orientation in political leaders, since distrust magnifies threat perceptions and encourages reliance upon aggressive policy instruments to deal with these threats. Distrust is the general belief that others' statements and actions are often insincere and that one should regard with suspicion the motives underlying others' behavior (Tucker 1965; Stuart and Starr 1982). Leaders with higher levels of distrust see the world as more threatening and their adversaries as more implacably hostile than leaders who are more trusting, and these magnified threat perceptions lead to an enhanced willingness to use forceful policy instruments in order to neutralize those threats (Holsti 1962; Driver 1977). Therefore, distrust implies a Hobbesian view of the political universe and a hawkish disposition toward the use of force.

Quite compelling is the analysis of Rathbun (2012), who reveals an important causal role for (dis)trust with regard to international organizations. Rather than following on from the existence of an international organization, trust must precede such entities for them to form in the first place. Research on cases such as the UN and NATO demonstrates the key role of trust in the creation of institutions that, in turn, foster cooperation among members (Rathbun 2012).

**Distrust Hypothesis:** Leaders who score higher on distrust will rely on violence as a more central and more severe crisis management technique.

### Key Control Variables

Previous research from the ICB Project confirms the importance of a set of variables that will be included in the present design. Exclusion of these factors – protracted conflict, power discrepancy, gravity and trigger violence – would produce omitted variable bias. The anticipated connections are straightforward in each instance and summarized in various assessments of ICB research such as Brecher, James and Wilkenfeld (2000). A setting of protracted conflict creates a more difficult context for crisis management and resolution because of accumulated prior unpleasant interactions between the adversaries. Power discrepancy in favor of the crisis actor also is expected to produce greater centrality and severity of violence. Crises of higher gravity – meaning there is more on the line in terms of issues involved – also are anticipated to be more difficult to manage and resolve, with violence becoming more likely. Most obviously, a violent crisis trigger will get things off to a bad start, which in turns complicates crisis management and resolution.

## **Data and Measurement**

### **Expanding ICB's FPDM Component**

Below we introduce the variables that we have appended to the ICB dataset. We cover, in turn, new independent variables, key control variables and dependent variables.

### New Independent Variables<sup>3</sup>

We code each *advisory system* as formalist versus collegial or informal. The formalistic system emphasizes a hierarchical structure with a clear chain of command. In the collegial advisory system, advisors typically debate policy alternatives with one another as a group. Advisory structures of all U.S. presidents from FDR to George W. Bush have been coded based on the above system by Johnson (1974), George (1980), Mitchell (2005) and Garrison (2005). We adopt these published measures to create the following variable: Advisory System (ADVISORY), 0 = informal/collegial and 1 = formal.

*Margin of victory* is simply the percentage of the popular vote by which a U.S. president prevailed in the most recent presidential election. Scores for the two leadership traits (*belief in ability to control events* and *distrust*) are generated for each president using the Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) system, a method of assessing leaders' characteristics "at a distance" by employing content analysis of spontaneous verbal material (Hermann, 1987). The LTA system has been frequently employed by political psychologists to examine the effects of leadership traits on foreign policy behavior (e.g., Hermann and Hermann, 1989; Boettcher, 2005; Keller, 2005a; Dyson and Preston, 2006; Keller and Foster, 2012). For each president we randomly selected, from the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*, four press conferences per year and coded all responses of 100 words or greater. We doubled the sample to eight press conferences per year—when available—for presidents whose terms lasted four years or less.

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<sup>3</sup> More precise coding criteria for these four variables and others that we intend to add to the ICB data set, along with selected variables for one case (the Iran Hostage Crisis (ICB Crisis #309)) are available in Appendices A and B.

This technique yielded at least 20 press conferences for each president, with most presidents having 30 or more. This produced far more than the minimum number of coding units (fifty 100-word responses) required by the Hermann system (1987, 1999) to develop a leadership profile.

### Control Variables

We include four existing ICB variables that are expected to be particularly important in shaping the centrality and severity of violence employed by states. *Gravity of threat* identifies the most serious threat perceived by the crisis actor's principal decision makers at any time during the crisis. It ranges from 1 (limited threat, other) to 10 (threat to existence). *Power discrepancy* indicates the difference between the capability scores of the crisis actor and its principal adversary. Overall capability scores for the crisis actor and adversary are calculated based on size of population, GNP, territorial size, alliance capability, military expenditure, and nuclear capability. ICB also records information about the nature of the *crisis trigger*; we have recoded this variable to focus on whether the triggering event was a non-violent act (coded as 0) or a violent act (coded as 1). Finally, *conflict setting* refers to the context in which a crisis erupts: is there no history of long-term hostility between adversaries (non-protracted conflict, coded 1), an environment of ongoing disputes (protracted conflict, coded 2), or a setting of pervasive and continuous warfare (long-war protracted conflict, coded 3)?

### Existing Dependent Variables

ICB contains a wide range of variables that are interesting to explain for academic as well as policy reasons.<sup>4</sup> We convey a subset of those that appear as dependent variables in our research design: centrality and severity of violence.

Centrality of Violence (CENVIO) refers to the importance of violence in the pursuit of goals as perceived by decision-makers. The categories are (1) no violence; (2) violence minor; (3) violence important; and (4) violence preminent. An example of the coding would be the minor role violence played (i.e., category 2) for Panama in managing a crisis with the U.S. over the Panama Canal in 1964. For this dependent variable, lower/higher centrality of violence is associated with higher/lower quality of decision-making as coded for the independent variables. The rationale is straightforward: the more decision makers in a crisis rely upon violence, the further they have departed from a final outcome that might have been achieved without such destructive behavior. There is always an agreement that might have been made that would leave both sides better off without crisis violence. The reason is that violence causes loss of life and property, so some amount of value might have been redistributed in order to secure a bargain. Thus decision-making that leads to violence, aside from other harmful effects, must be regarded as suboptimal (James, 1988; see also Coase, 1960).

Severity of Violence (SEVVIO) focuses on the degree of violence experienced within the foreign policy crisis. The variable's categories are (1) no violence; (2) minor clashes; (3) serious

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<sup>4</sup> Other outcome variables from ICB, such as content of crisis outcome, escalation or reduction of tension, and extent of satisfaction about outcome, are available for inclusion in further investigations.

clashes; and full scale wars. An illustration of full scale war (i.e., category 4) would be intensely violent conflict that occurred in the crisis and subsequent war in Iraq from 2003. The logic for this variable in relation to decision-making is the same as for centrality of violence – lower quality is associated more severe violence.

## **Data Analysis**

Since the dependent variables under investigation are ordinal, we employ ordered probit analysis to test our hypotheses. We also use the Clarify program to generate predicted probabilities, based on these probit results, that each category of the dependent variable will be the outcome when independent variables take on certain values.

### *Centrality of Violence Findings*

Table 1 shows the ordered probit results for the Centrality of Violence dependent variable.

**Table 1 about here.**

The existing ICB (or control) variables included in our analysis affect centrality of violence as expected, with one exception. A violent crisis trigger, a greater power discrepancy in favor of the U.S., and the presence of a more protracted conflict all lead to a greater reliance on violence as a central crisis management technique. However, contrary to our expectations, more grave threats (e.g., threats to existence, influence, and territory) actually reduce U.S. reliance on violence as a crisis management technique. This counterintuitive finding may reflect the fact that U.S. leaders exhibit greater circumspection and caution when facing particularly grave

threats, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Escalation in these cases may be the shortest route to suffering the grave damage leaders are seeking to avoid, whereas less threatening crises may free up leaders to behave in a more risk-acceptant fashion.

More to the point for our present study, three of the four new decision-making variables had a significant effect on the centrality of violence, and the fourth variable (margin of victory) was approaching significance ( $p < .063$ ). As hypothesized, more formalistic advisory systems are associated with a greater reliance on violence ( $p < .016$ ). As shown in Table 2, when all other variables are held at their means, moving from an informal/collegial advisory system to a formal advisory system has a striking impact on violence centrality. The probability that the U.S. will avoid violence altogether falls from 93.3% (under informal/collegial systems) to a mere 38.4% under formal advisory systems. Even more striking, the likelihood of the U.S. employing violence as an important or preeminent crisis management technique increases tenfold as advisory system varies: it increases from a miniscule 5.6% under informal/collegial systems to 57.4% under formal advisory systems. This is consistent with the view that formal advisory systems tend toward extreme outcomes (particularly violent outcomes) since they reduce decision-makers' exposure to outside information and alternative perspectives that may promote flexibility and a greater appreciation for risks and policy alternatives.

**Table 2 about here.**

Belief in ability to control events also affected violence centrality as hypothesized. That is, presidents scoring higher in this trait were more likely to rely on violence as a crisis management technique ( $p < .001$ ). Table 3 provides a substantive window into these results

using predicted probabilities. A leader who scores low (at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile) on belief in ability to control events is almost certain to avoid violence (a 98.2% probability). In contrast, a leader who scores at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on this characteristic is only expected to avoid violence about half the time (51.1%), and may employ violence as an important (30.4%) or even the preeminent (14.1%) crisis response. This finding supports previous work on risk-taking and foreign policy that suggests a belief in the controllability of outcomes yields more aggressive foreign policy behavior while a conviction that one cannot control events produces great caution.

**Table 3 about here.**

Distrust has a significant effect on centrality of violence ( $p < .005$ ), but the direction of the relationship is the opposite of our hypothesis. Interestingly, U.S. leaders scoring higher on distrust are less likely to rely on violence during foreign policy crises than their more trusting counterparts. The explanation for this surprising result may actually be linked to our findings with regard to gravity of threat. It may be that distrustful leaders—who have a heightened sense of threat perception—are actually deterred from using violence during crises by their fear that these grave threats will harm their country. This finding is at odds with much of the previous work on distrust (which links distrust to more violent foreign policy behavior), so there may be something about this sample—perhaps its exclusive focus on U.S. foreign policy crises—that is unusual. This would be an intriguing topic for further study. Although this result did not support our hypothesis, the fact that both distrust and belief in ability to control events had a significant impact on crisis responses when controlling for the other variables is strong evidence that the inclusion of leadership variables in the ICB dataset can bear empirical fruit.

Finally, while margin of victory was not quite significant at the  $p < .05$  threshold, it was close enough ( $p < .063$ ) to warrant some discussion. As shown in Table 4, as margin of victory increases, U.S. presidents become less likely to rely on violence as a crisis management technique. A president who enjoys a 10% victory margin is expected to employ no violence nearly 75% of the time. In contrast, a president who ties the opponent in the popular vote (a 0% margin), will only avoid violence an estimated 44% of the time. Put another way, a leader with a comfortable 10% victory margin will only employ violence as an important or preeminent technique 23.6% of the time, but a leader who barely squeaks into office (a 0% margin) is over twice as likely to do so (51.5% of the time). This finding is consistent with the basic proposition that a leader who narrowly wins the presidency (e.g., John F. Kennedy in 1960 or George W. Bush in 2000) takes office “under a cloud” and is under greater pressure to demonstrate that he belongs in the White House and can forcefully exercise the powers of the office. Of course, in the U.S. system the executive generally has greater opportunity to exercise unfettered power in the foreign policy domain than the domestic arena.

**Table 4 about here.**

### *Severity of Violence Findings*

Table 5 shows the results for the severity of violence dependent variable. These results are very similar to those for the centrality of violence, which is not surprising given the correspondence between these two dependent variables. Nonetheless, violence centrality and severity are measuring two somewhat different aspects of the crisis outcome, so examining the severity of violence results can yield additional insights into the sources of crisis behavior.

**Table 5 about here.**

Three of the four control variables drawn from the existing ICB dataset have a significant effect on violence severity. As hypothesized, a greater power discrepancy favoring the U.S. and a more protracted conflict both lead to the use of violence in more severe forms. Contrary to our hypothesis (but consistent with the centrality of violence findings), threats of greater gravity produce less violent behavior by the U.S. Surprisingly, the nature of the crisis trigger (violent vs. non-violent) does not have a significant impact on the severity of violence employed as a crisis response.

When we move to our new decision-making variables, we find that three of the four have an effect on violence severity. As expected, U.S. administrations with more formal advisory systems engage in more severe levels of violence during foreign policy crises ( $p < .004$ ). As shown in Table 6, full-scale war is very rare, regardless of advisory system. But when one looks at the use of force short of full-scale war, some striking differences emerge. Administrations with informal or collegial advisory systems are expected to avoid violence altogether (a 92.7% probability) whereas those with formal advisory systems will, more likely than not, engage in some form of violent action (a 60.2% probability of minor clashes, serious clashes, or full-scale war). All else being equal, moving from an informal/collegial advisory system to a formal advisory system increases the probability of minor clashes by 21.8% and the probability of serious clashes by 29.6%.

**Table 6 about here.**

As hypothesized, presidents scoring higher on belief in ability to control events use more severe forms of violence in foreign policy crises ( $p < .001$ ). Table 7 shows the predicted probabilities of various crisis outcomes for leaders scoring at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile and the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on this characteristic. Moving from the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile reduces the likelihood of avoiding violence by 39.9% (from 95.3% to 55.4%). Leaders who have little confidence in their ability to manipulate events and control escalation (those scoring at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile) are very unlikely to engage even in minor clashes (a 3.4% chance), to say nothing of serious clashes (a 1.3% chance). In contrast, leaders with a high level of confidence in their ability to control events (those scoring at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile) are much more likely to engage in minor clashes (a 24.5% chance) and serious clashes (a 19.4% chance).

**Table 7 about here.**

As with the violence centrality dependent variable, distrust proves to be a significant predictor ( $p < .003$ ) of violence severity, but in the opposite direction from our expectations. Leaders who score higher on distrust use less severe forms of violence in response to foreign policy crises. As noted above, this may fit with the findings regarding gravity of threat, and reflect the fact that distrustful leaders' heightened threat perceptions (at least in the context of U.S. crises, some of which involve nuclear brinkmanship) produce greater caution in an effort to avoid suffering damage from looming threats. Finally, the margin of victory variable was not a significant predictor of violence severity, and unlike the violence centrality findings, it was not close to being significant ( $p < .178$ ).

For purposes of illustration regarding the aggregate results, two cases will be reviewed briefly at this point. Each corresponds approximately to one of the ideal types from Gerring (2007) vis-à-vis case studies: an exemplar and an anomaly. An exemplar is a case in which the values of all independent variables are in synch with the observed outcome. By contrast, an anomaly is a case in which the outcome observed is exactly opposite of what would be expected based on the values of the independent variables. With a relatively small number of cases and several variables, it is not possible to find a pure case of either kind. Moreover, the hypotheses have performed reasonably well, so anomalies are quite rare. But the two cases that follow are close to fitting the respective profiles for an exemplar and anomaly.<sup>5</sup>

Increasing tensions over the alarming decline of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the summer of 1961 focused on the escape hatch through Berlin. In the month of July, the number of citizens fleeing the GDR from East to West Berlin had reached 30,000. Depopulation threatened the very existence of the Soviet-sponsored and highly unpopular dictatorship. On August 13, the USSR and GDR began construction of a wall, which triggered a foreign policy

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<sup>5</sup> The case summaries that follow are based on those that appear in the ICB data set, corresponding to Berlin Wall (#185) and Nicaragua MIG-21s (#354). Additional sources consulted on Berlin are Bell (1962), Gelb (1986), Dean (1991), Lang (1995), Freedman (2000), Dallek (2003), Smyser (2009) and Wilke (2014); for Nicaragua see Hufford (1985), Kornbluh (1987), Smith (1996) and Paszyn (2000)

crisis for the US.<sup>6</sup> The US responded by strengthening the Berlin garrison with an additional 1,500 troops. From August 22 onward, GDR forces began to enforce a no-man's land of 100 meters on either side of the Berlin Wall. Western forces, led by the US, began to patrol the area to the west, while GDR forces did the same thing in the east.

Escalation reached its height during a short but disturbing confrontation between Soviet and US tanks at "Checkpoint Charlie". From October 25 to 28 the tanks stayed poised across from each other. When the US and USSR reached an agreement to back away, the crisis came to an end and the Berlin Wall solidified into the status quo for decades to follow.

This case is close to a pure exemplar in the current context. President John F. Kennedy had an informal advisory system. Consider this amusing account of a meeting with advisors during the Berlin crisis (Smyser 2009: 86):

Kennedy brought members of his cabinet and of his White House staff to Hyannisport on weekends to think and talk about Berlin. This led to wild culture clashes, with some of Kennedy's advisors swimming around his yacht, the *Marlin*, as they tossed ideas around while Rusk remained on board in his formal suit and tie.

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<sup>6</sup> The focus here is on the foreign policy crisis for the US rather than the international crisis as a whole, which involved five other actors – GDR, Soviet Union, France, Great Britain and Federal Republic of Germany.

The culture clash, of course, refers to style of a much more formal type of person, such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk, which went against the new president's tendencies when consulting advisors.

Kennedy also scored low on belief in ability to control events (0.32). For example, at a press conference on 11 October 1961, Kennedy asserted that the advancement of science in conjunction with "man's inability to control his relationship one with another" had made current times the most dangerous ever (quoted in Dean 1991: 532). Moreover, analysts of Kennedy's decision-making about Berlin have emphasized the president's "sense of the necessity of avoiding occasions of miscalculation between American and Russia, in this case by achieving an agreed understanding of the *status quo*" (Bell 1962: 15). The president acknowledged the real and ongoing risk of the situation getting out of control and leading to all-out war.

Kennedy scored low on distrust (0.07) relative to other presidents. In the context of Berlin, consider Kennedy's view of the Wall as a signal from Khrushchev of *limited* ambition. The president observed to a key advisor that the Wall would not have been constructed if Khrushchev really intended to seize all of Berlin (Dallek 2003: 426). This reasoning would not have been likely from someone more distrustful, who then naturally would have seen the Wall as a step toward gaining control of the entire city.

Kennedy did, however, score very low in margin of victory (0.2%) – a trait associated with the likelihood of crisis violence. This lack of mandate in relative terms became even more challenging when, by all accounts, Kennedy stumbled badly with the Bay of Pigs crisis near the outset of his administration (Lang 1995: 324). Yet he averted violence in the Berlin Wall crisis, in spite of aggressive actions by the Soviet Union in its effort to save the GDR.

The Berlin Wall case produced much tension but no violence, fitting in with three of the four linkages posited here. It is easy to imagine, given the intensity of the tank-based controversy in October, that Kennedy's particular lack of a belief in ability to control events worked to his advantage in crisis management – unlikely for that reason to overplay his hand. At the edge of World War III, perhaps, it helped to have a president with a relatively high level of trust and an informal advisory system that by intuition would have encouraged greater flexibility in handling the sudden and aggressive Soviet action that closed travel between East and West Berlin.

Later and lesser in intensity is the Nicaragua MIG-21s foreign policy crisis, which took place from 6-12 November 1984. President Ronald Reagan, in the years leading up to this event, had a hostile relationship with the left-of-center Sandinista government that took power in the revolution of 1979. Reagan saw Nicaragua as a client state of the Soviet Union and held deep suspicions about its role in destabilizing Central America. On November 6, reports came to Reagan that a Soviet cargo ship, the *Bauriani*, would arrive in Nicaragua soon, carrying MIG-21s for the Sandinista regime. Coincidentally, the reports came on the US's election day, on which Reagan won a one-sided victory for another term. The US responded on November 7 by increasing the number and visibility of military exercises carried out by the US in Honduras, along with a show of force at sea and on land. Nicaragua feared a US invasion and approached the UN Security Council for an emergency meeting on November 9. The crisis began to wind down on that same day when Moscow announced that their ship did not carry MIG-21s. On November 12 the US State Department issued a categorical statement that no preparations existed for an invasion of Nicaragua.

Given Reagan's basic traits and the structure of his advisory system, the lack of violence in this instance might be regarded as an anomaly. Only margin of victory (11.7%) points away from violence in crisis management. Reagan had a formal advisory system and scored high on belief in ability to control events (0.39) and high in distrust (0.16) compared to other presidents. Consider, for instance, the Reagan administration's view of their Sandinista adversaries: "the Sandinistas would never have considered holding elections without military pressure from the contras" (Hufford 1985: 80). In addition, once Nicaragua did schedule elections, "the Administration made every effort to wreck the electoral process" (Hufford 1985). All of that derived from Reagan's fundamental distrust of left-of-center governments.

All but one of the preceding conditions would suggest a greater tendency toward centrality and severity of violence in crisis management. At the same time, the crisis did not have a violent trigger, which may have played some role in pushing crisis management in a more pacific direction.

## **Conclusion**

Agency-based FPDM variables are commonly believed to play crucial roles in shaping policymakers' decisions and states' behavior, yet data limitations have made it very difficult to empirically evaluate the impact and relative potency of these variables across a large sample of real-world cases. We believe that this problem can be overcome through coding efforts that integrate FPDM variables with existing large-N data sets. In an initial test of this approach, we coded four FPDM variables, added them to the ICB data set, and examined their associations with the employment of violence in foreign policy crises for the U.S. The results suggest that

this approach holds considerable promise for permitting rigorous analysis of how well FPDM theories perform when pitted against each other and against structural drivers of crisis outcomes.

Specifically, even after controlling for the major factors (at systemic or dyadic levels) believed to influence crisis outcomes available in the existing ICB data set, we discovered that advisory system, political context (margin of victory), and leadership traits had a significant effect on crisis outcomes. These results convincingly demonstrated the theoretical merit and policy relevance of integrating FPDM variables into the ICB data framework.

Our next step is to code more variables based on prominent FPDM theories. Examples of these variables include: ultimate decision unit, group cohesion, prior action, bureaucratic politics, etc. The proposed data gathering enterprise, once completed, will allow scholars, for the first time, to gauge the broad accuracy of a variety of decision-making theories. It not only strengthens one of ICB project's key contributions – synthesis of theory and methods – but also provides important policy relevant insights to leaders and practitioners of national security and foreign policy.

Other research priorities pertain to refining the propositions. Two examples come to mind. Given that more formal, hierarchical advising systems are more likely to adopt extreme measures, a test involving a measure of variance could supplement what has been implemented so far regarding levels of violence. Another idea would be to assess whether the margin of victory is a factor that might diminish over time.

Finally, the US may be the obvious starting point for analysis, but what about the rest of the world? How do the propositions fare beyond the US and other advanced democracies in

particular? To answer such questions, a great deal of data collection would be entailed. All of that remains for future research.

**TABLE 1. Effects of Existing and New ICB variables on Centrality of Violence in U.S. Foreign Policy Crises**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>
Gravity of Threat	-2.115*	1.032
Violent Trigger	1.899**	.690
Power Discrepancy	.019*	.009
Protracted Conflict	1.075*	.475
Advisory System	2.150*	.889
Belief in Ability to Control Events	107.30**	30.93
Distrust	-44.39**	15.90
Margin of Victory	-.081	.043

N = 46

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.

**TABLE 2. Probability of the U.S. Employing Violence as an Increasingly Central Crisis Management Technique, as Advisory System Varies (All other variables at means)**

<b>CRISIS RESPONSE</b>	<b>Informal/Collegial Advisory System</b>	<b>Formal Advisory System</b>	<b>Change in Probability</b>
<b>No Violence</b>	0.933	0.384	-0.549
<b>Violence Minor</b>	0.011	0.043	+0.032
<b>Violence Important</b>	0.046	0.342	+0.296
<b>Violence Preeminent</b>	0.010	0.232	+0.222

**TABLE 3. Probability of the U.S. Employing Violence as an Increasingly Central Crisis Management Technique, as Belief in Ability to Control Events Varies (All other variables at means)**

<b>CRISIS RESPONSE</b>	<b>Low Belief in Ability to Control Events (10<sup>th</sup> percentile)</b>	<b>High Belief in Ability to Control Events (90<sup>th</sup> percentile)</b>	<b>Change in Probability</b>
<b>No Violence</b>	0.982	0.511	-0.471
<b>Violence Minor</b>	0.003	0.045	+0.042
<b>Violence Important</b>	0.012	0.304	+0.292
<b>Violence Preeminent</b>	0.004	0.141	+0.137

**TABLE 4. Probability of the U.S. Employing Violence as an Increasingly Central Crisis Management Technique, as Victory Margin Varies (All other variables at means)**

<b>CRISIS RESPONSE</b>	<b>0% margin</b>	<b>5% margin</b>	<b>10% margin</b>	<b>Change in Probability</b>
<b>No Violence</b>	0.441	0.592	0.728	+0.287
<b>Violence Minor</b>	0.044	0.043	0.035	-0.009
<b>Violence Important</b>	0.326	0.263	0.182	-0.144
<b>Violence Preeminent</b>	0.189	0.102	0.054	-0.135

**TABLE 5. Effects of Existing and New ICB variables on Severity of Violence in U.S. Foreign Policy Crises**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Standard Error</b>
Gravity of Threat	-.493*	.208
Violent Trigger	.651	.443
Power Discrepancy	.022**	.008
Protracted Conflict	1.441**	.415
Advisory System	1.921**	.667
Belief in Ability to Control Events	68.92**	21.08
Distrust	-28.51**	9.66
Margin of Victory	-.041	.030

**N = 46**

**\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01.**

**TABLE 6. Probability of the U.S. Employing Violence as an Increasingly Severe Crisis Management Technique, as Advisory System Varies (All other variables at means)**

<b>CRISIS RESPONSE</b>	<b>Informal/Collegial Advisory System</b>	<b>Formal Advisory System</b>	<b>Change in Probability</b>
<b>No Violence</b>	0.927	0.398	-0.529
<b>Minor Clashes</b>	0.053	0.271	+0.218
<b>Serious Clashes</b>	0.020	0.316	+0.296
<b>Full-Scale War</b>	0.000	0.015	+0.015

**TABLE 7. Probability of the U.S. Employing Violence as an Increasingly Severe Crisis Management Technique, as Belief in Ability to Control Events Varies (All other variables at means)**

<b>CRISIS RESPONSE</b>	<b>Low Belief in Ability to Control Events (10<sup>th</sup> percentile)</b>	<b>High Belief in Ability to Control Events (90<sup>th</sup> percentile)</b>	<b>Change in Probability</b>
<b>No Violence</b>	0.953	0.554	-0.399
<b>Minor Clashes</b>	0.034	0.245	+0.211
<b>Serious Clashes</b>	0.013	0.194	+0.181
<b>Full-Scale War</b>	0.000	0.006	+0.006

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