decision-making groups  Fritz Gaenslen

Most psychologically oriented research about foreign policy decision making focuses on processes that occur within individuals rather than among them, and relatively few studies with a psychological bent consider how patterns of social interaction among policy makers can affect the decisions they produce. In this chapter, I shall provide a critical overview of those studies that do take the “group” in “group decision making” seriously and regard the process of making foreign policy decisions as, at least in part, a social one. I shall attempt to situate this literature within what I see as its “research tradition,” to chart current developments in the literature, and to outline central issues for further research.

the research tradition

The contours and content of past research on foreign policy making groups can be appreciated most efficiently if we begin by supposing that the relative lack of attention to such groups requires explanation. One argument is that group aspects of decision making are not much studied (and the research tradition is “thin”) because foreign policy decisions are not often made in groups, but this argument is unpersuasive. Even when a single individual has the authority and ability to commit a government’s resources, he or she is likely to have number of incentives to involve other people in the decision-making process.

First, the inclusion of others can enhance a decision’s legitimacy. Because political leaders want to be able to say that their decisions are based on the best advice available, they have an incentive to seek the counsel of experts. More broadly, because political leaders want to be able to say that they govern on behalf of the governed—Mosca’s “political formula”—they have an incentive to include at least a few representatives of the governed in the policy-making process.

Second, the inclusion of others can help reduce the psychological strain of decision making. Most analysts see the issues facing foreign policy decision makers as characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity (see George 1980, 26–28; Steinbruner 1974). Leaders can find it difficult to reconcile the multiple and competing values embedded in a particular issue; they frequently lack the information needed to predict the outcomes associated with various alternatives; and they may even be hard pressed to envision what a satisfactory outcome might look like (see Winham 1977). Given these circumstances, solace and certainty can be sought by obtaining similar opinions from other people (for laboratory support, see Morris et al. 1976).

In some cases, of course, individual leaders have no choice. In some countries, the “rules of the game” require collective decision making (Baylis 1989); in others, the structure of interdependence among leaders—quite apart from any “rules”—appears to be that described by students concerned with the evolution of cooperation among egoists.
(Axelrod 1984; Oye 1985). To the extent that top politicians expect future dealings with one another and to the extent that their interests are (1) sufficiently divergent so as to make a unilateral decision attractive and (2) sufficiently convergent so as to make the gains of mutual cooperation exceed the gains of mutual exploitation, we should expect the decision-making process to be a social one.

Finally, empirical evidence further supports the notion that foreign policy decision making is frequently a group activity. Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing (1977, 357), studying decision making in thirteen international crises ranging from the Fashoda crisis of 1898 to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, identified seventeen of thirty-seven decisions as having been made by groups rather than by individuals. This proportion almost exactly matches that discovered through a different method by M. G. Hermann and C. F. Hermann (1989), who asked area specialists a series of questions about the making of foreign policy in twenty-five different countries for the period 1959–1968. These researchers sought to identify, in a preliminary way, whether the “ultimate decision unit” in each country was a single predominant leader, a single group, or a set of multiple autonomous actors. Although predominant leaders were identified as the ultimate unit, at least some of the time, in eighteen of the twenty-five countries, single groups and multiple autonomous actors were identified as the ultimate units—again, some of the time—in thirteen and four countries, respectively. Also suggestive is another sort of evidence. Joseph de Rivera (1968, 213) has hypothesized that group meetings are more important in the running of government—because it is government’s duty to be representative—than in the running of large business organizations. If true, government meetings are important indeed, because chief executive officers in a variety of North American businesses have been found to spend approximately 69 percent of their time in meetings (see Schwartzman 1986, 253). Similarly, Hickson and his colleagues (1986, 112) report that formal group meetings figured prominently in the making of all but 4 of the 150–strategic decisions—they studied in thirty British organizations. In short, the relative lack of attention to social or group aspects of foreign policy decision making cannot be attributed to a dearth of foreign policymaking groups.

A second possible explanation for the lack of attention to such groups by researchers, then, is simple oversight. The impressive ability of researchers to discover “strangely neglected topics” suggests that lots of such topics are out there, and one might argue that it should not be surprising that one or two have fallen between the cracks. But this argument, too, is unconvincing. In the wake of World War II and with the onset of the Cold War, the sense of purpose and optimism that marked the climate of U.S. foreign policy spilled over into academe. Convinced that a better understanding of how to create and improve democratic organizations was needed, social scientists conducted numerous studies of group discussion, group productivity, ways of changing attitudes, and problems in leadership. For a decade and a half, small group analysis was one of the hottest topics in several disciplines (Zander 1979, 419; Hare 1976), and at least a few students of foreign policy decision making joined in this effort.

Relevant studies emanating from these efforts can be lumped into one of two somewhat artificial categories: those in which the independent variables describe the members or task at the outset of deliberation (structure) and those in which the independent variables describe the internal processes of the group itself (process).
Writing in the 1950s, Richard Snyder and his colleagues were mostly interested in group structure (see Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin 1962; Snyder and Paige 1962). Focusing on decision units, these people sought to identify a number of dimensions along which such units might vary. One set of dimensions describes the location of a decision unit within its institutional setting. From this perspective, decision units can vary (1) in their hierarchical location, (2) in their relative independence from other units, (3) in their relative isolation from other units, (4) according to whether they are ad hoc or permanent, (5) according to whether membership in the unit is the result of automatic assignment or negotiation, and (6) according to the unit's task or objective.

A second set of dimensions describes the internal structure of a decision unit. In this group, decision units can vary (1) according to the number of organizational agencies and roles incorporated, (2) according to the substance of the institutional affiliations, (3) according to whether the role structure in the unit is hierarchical or egalitarian, (4) according to the specificity of role definitions (narrow versus broad), (5) according to the clarity of role definitions (ambiguous versus unambiguous), and (6) according to whether participants are "members," "representatives," or "advisers." Unfortunately, Snyder and his colleagues did not provide theoretical justification for looking at any of these variables; no hypotheses were offered to link them to a dependent variable we care about. Nevertheless, these people did show how thinking about the institutional context of foreign policy making could enrich the concept of group structure.

What hypotheses were suggested by the work on small groups by social psychologists? Alexander George (1980, 81–108) has reviewed this early literature with an eye to its implications for the use and misuse of information and advice by U.S. presidents, and he extracts a number of hypotheses from one prominent structural variable in this literature, group size. The smaller the group, the less specialization within the group, the less formal the group’s procedure, the more broadly group members define their roles, the less parochial their views about the values at stake, the less bargaining, the more genuine persuasion, the fewer opportunities for factions to form, the greater the pressure for conformity, and the fewer policy options considered. George also notes the finding of Robert Bales that when a group’s size exceeds seven, lower-ranking participators tend to cease talking to each other and to center their infrequent communications on a few top people. (The magic number seven, we should note, is frequently exceeded in governmental groups. Paige [1972, 45], for example, puts Truman’s Korean crisis group and Kennedy’s missile crisis group at fourteen and sixteen members, respectively. The average size of the CPSU's Presidium/Politburo between 1954 and 1985 was twelve members.)

A second structural variable that George singles out for discussion is group diversity. The more diverse the perceived interests and knowledge of group members or the more group members are members of other groups, the more role differentiation within the group and the greater the freedom to deviate from majority opinion.

A third structural variable is disparity in status. The greater the salience of status differences within a group, the greater the possibility that these differences will affect evaluations of members’ contributions; the greater the possibility that members will import into the decision-making arena such private concerns as their self-esteem, their career prospects, and the approval or disapproval of others; and the greater the possibility that lower-status
individuals will conform to the views of higher-status individuals. A fourth and last structural variable is the hierarchical location of the group. The higher the location, George notes, the more group members will define their roles broadly, the more they will face competing demands on their time, and the more likely it is that they will lose contact with information and sources of expertise.

Not surprisingly, the literature relating group structure to foreign policy decision making is richer in hypotheses than in findings. Snyder and Diesing (1977, 357, 375) provide an example of the latter in their study of decision making in international crises. They conjectured that decision units made up of “one or two people” or “one person within collegial limits” would be more likely than decision units composed of a “central decision maker with advisers,” “a committee,” or members of a “divided government” to construe decision making as “problem solving” rather than as “coalition building.” Following this logic, Snyder and Diesing further conjectured that the latter types of decision unit would be more likely than the former to consider at least two strategies, and they found strong support for this conjecture. Only 12.5 percent (n=16) of the smaller decision units considered two or more strategies in contrast to 92.9 percent (n=14) of the larger ones.

The best known analysis of the impact of group process on foreign policy decision making is Victims of Groupthink by Irving Janis (1972; 2d ed. 1982). Janis defines groupthink as premature concurrence seeking, “a mode of thinking” in which the motivation to achieve group unanimity overrides the motivation to appraise realistically alternative courses of action (1972, 9), and he finds evidence of groupthink in the decision making associated with several U.S. foreign policy “fiascoes”: the lack of military preparedness for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the pursuit of the defeated North Korean army beyond the thirty-eighth parallel, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the escalation of the war in Vietnam. He finds little evidence of groupthink in the drawing up of the Marshall Plan or in the managing of the Cuban missile crisis.

Where does groupthink come from? According to Janis’s theory, its antecedent conditions are to be sought in feelings of stress among group members, group cohesiveness, a group’s insulation from the judgments of qualified outsiders, an absence of systematic methods for gathering and appraising information, and in group leaders who assertively promote their own opinions. How can we recognize groupthink when we see it? Janis proposes eight symptoms: an illusion of invulnerability; an unquestioned belief in the group’s inherent morality; stereotyped views of enemy leaders as evil, weak, or stupid; a shared illusion of unanimity; collective efforts at rationalization; self-censorship of deviations from the apparent group consensus; direct pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group’s stereotypes; and the emergence of self-appointed “mind guards” – members who protect the group from adverse information (Janis 1972, 197–98). Janis’s analysis has both shortcomings and virtues. The central shortcoming, in my view, is its frequent bundling together of two phenomena that ought to be kept conceptually distinct: sincere (or internalized) agreement and insincere (or compliant) agreement. In most of his discussion, Janis seems to define groupthink the first way. The danger, he writes (1972, 201) “is not that each individual will fail to reveal his strong objections to a proposal favored by the majority, but that he will think the proposal a good one, without attempting to carry out a critical scrutiny that could lead him to see that there are grounds for strong objections.” Yet several of
Janis’s symptoms of groupthink—self-censorship, direct pressure on deviants, and the emergence of “mind guards”—seem to imply the second definition, that the failure to reveal objections is the principal danger after all. The distinction is important if we believe that we would evaluate decision makers differently and prescribe different remedies depending on which of the two processes was at work. In this chapter, I shall use “groupthink” to refer to the first process.

Janis’s book also has several virtues. First, it is hard to read the case material—especially the chapter on the Bay of Pigs invasion—without becoming convinced that group processes do make a difference. Second, although Janis is often imprecise about the relationships among individual variables, often treating his variables as “a loose bag of partially related ideas” (Longley and Pruitt 1980, 80), the variables themselves seem theoretically interesting. In particular, most of Janis’s symptoms of groupthink deserve to be dependent variables in their own right. Third, Janis specifies a set of normative standards by which to evaluate the quality of decision making independent of policy outcomes. It is hard to imagine much increase in our knowledge about group decision processes without some such standard to guide research. What, according to Janis, are the characteristics of bad decision making? They are discussion of only a few alternative courses of action; an incomplete survey of objectives; failure to reexamine the course of action initially preferred by the majority; neglect of courses of action initially evaluated as unsatisfactory; little effort to obtain information from experts; selective bias in reacting to factual information; and failure to develop contingency plans. Alexander George (1972, 769–80) has outlined a somewhat similar set of “malfunctions,” but his list (of nine) is tailored much more specifically to the U.S. presidency and to the relationship between presidents and their advisers. Both authors are primarily concerned with the deleterious effects of conformity—a concern amply warranted by a venerable body of research in social psychology (for example, Asch 1951; Milgram 1974). Accordingly, both Janis and George recommend measures that would encourage the expression and confrontation of a variety of viewpoints.

However, a different set of social psychological findings trumpets the dangers, not of conformity, but of conflict. This literature, which compares cooperation with competition (for example, Deutsch 1973) and problem solving with bargaining (for example, Walton and McKersie 1965; Kelley and Thibaut 1969), urges group participants to stress their similarities and common interests and to minimize the salience of their differences; disagreements should be treated as mutual problems to be resolved by collaborative effort. Cooperative group processes, more than competitive ones, have been found to foster mutual trust, open communication, the division of labor, and role specialization. These processes are thought to create a more stable basis for continuing cooperation and to generate greater task productivity through a more economic use of personnel and resources (for a review, see Gaenslen 1980).

Evidence also suggests that cooperative groups may do better than their competitive counterparts at appraising the external environment. In a laboratory study, Okun and DiVesta (1975) found that internally cooperative groups outperform internally competitive ones in both cooperating and competing with an external group. Consistent with this result, Kuhlman and Wimberley (1976) found that people who are personally disposed to behave competitively in a variety of experimental games perceive others as similarly competitive; people who are personally disposed to behave cooperatively, on the other hand, perceive others as either cooperative or competitive depending on the true facts of the case.
These findings suggest that in developing a standard to evaluate the quality of group decision making, the dangers of conformity need to be balanced against the dangers of competition. As Longley and Pruitt (1980, 77–78) observe, effective decision making probably requires processes of both “differentiation” (the proliferation of ideas and debate) and “integration” (efforts to achieve unity). Groupthink, they argue, ought to be conceived of as a decision process with not enough of the former and too much of the latter.

I doubt that either Janis or George would quarrel with this conclusion, as both recognize in their analyses the need for some degree of “integration.” Janis, for example, is careful to note some of the possible undesirable side effects of his prescriptions for preventing groupthink. Similarly, George distinguishes the system of multiple advocacy he recommends from the more unrestrained conflict of bureaucratic politics and partisan mutual adjustment. Nevertheless, the integrative features of good decision making remain underspecified in both discussions. Such features are present but largely hidden, one could argue, in the concrete reality of the U.S. presidency, a reality that needs to be made less concrete, more abstract, and more theoretical.

To summarize this portion of the discussion, the enthusiasm shown for small group research by numerous social scientists in the 1940s and 1950s did not go unnoticed by students of foreign policy decision making. Therefore, the absence of a more extensive research tradition is not to be sought in a simple lack of awareness.

The most convincing explanation for the lack of research on foreign policy making groups is the difficulty of studying them. Whether we ply decision makers with questions, peruse the paper trails they leave behind, or simulate their behavior in the laboratory, no approach seems terribly satisfactory. With the aid of evidence and illustration, I propose to make this familiar fact more vivid. Given limited space, I shall focus only on the “paper trail” approach because of its privileged status among students of foreign policy decision making, but readers should understand that the other approaches are no less susceptible to criticism. My ultimate purpose will be to argue that research has been, paradoxically, more limited than it had to be.

**difficulties in the study of decision making**

A common way to find out how government officials collectively make foreign policy decisions is to rely on available archival materials—memoranda, reports, and transcripts of meetings. It is difficult to generalize about such materials, in part because the materials themselves vary tremendously from case to case and in part because scholars who rely on such materials often leave it to the reader of their works to surmise the truth of the tale from the artfulness of its telling—at least until some other scholar comes along with a “new” and “better” version. Yet one can legitimately ask of documentary sources the usual questions about reliability and validity. Does document X really say what I think it says and does it accurately describe what really happened? Three points are worth emphasizing. First, although archival materials are usually generated for institutional reasons and not for public consumption, this fact does not preclude their being tainted by image-management concerns. Their authors may plausibly be thought to be presenting a favorable image of themselves to immediate superiors, other elites with access to the documents, and even future historians. Let us ponder for a moment the well-known willingness of political elites in China and the Soviet Union to falsify the past for the sake of the present (Schoenhals 1989; Davies 1989).
The official transcript (released in February 1987) of a speech given by Deng Xiaoping at the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference in February 1962, a time when the Chinese Communist Party was turning away from the disastrous policies of the Great Leap Forward, might be examined for clues about the nature of the relationships among China’s top leaders. The speech suggests a businesslike equality and collective leadership of the Party, with Deng referring to his colleagues as “Comrade Mao Zedong,” “Comrade Liu Shaoqi,” “Comrade Zhou Enlai,” and so forth, and identifying policies as “our Party’s policies.” As it happens, however, an earlier and probably more accurate version of this speech has been discovered among some Cultural Revolution materials at Beijing University (Schoenhals 1988). In this version, Deng refers to Mao more respectfully as “Chairman Mao” and to his other colleagues more intimately as “Comrade Shaoqi” and “Comrade Enlai.” Moreover, in the earlier version, Deng describes the Party as clearly subordinate to Mao and, indeed, as belonging to Mao. The two versions of the 1962 speech, then, offer radically different images of the possible group dynamics among China’s top leaders, with the official version reflecting the 1987 concern to downplay the importance of Mao and “the cult of personality” in the Party’s history. But the larger point is this: If political elites are willing to falsify the past for the sake of the present, it strains credulity even less to believe that they are willing to falsify the present for the sake of the future.

A second point about the reliability and validity of archival materials is that they do not usually have commentary attached to provide a context for the data contained in them. Levi and Tetlock (1980) analyzed the statements of Japanese decision makers appearing in the transcripts of liaison conferences and imperial conferences held between June 1941 and the attack on Pearl Harbor in December and sought to measure the cognitive complexity of each statement in order to test the hypothesis that crisis-induced stress tends to lead to simplified information processing. In comparing statements made in the early and late periods of the 1941 crisis, Levi and Tetlock found only weak evidence of cognitive simplification over time, but they also found something else. Statements made in liaison conferences were significantly less complex than statements made in imperial conferences. One interpretation of this puzzling result goes this way. Policies were formulated by top civilian and military leaders in liaison conferences, but these policies had to be defended before and approved by a respected and skeptical audience in imperial conferences—notably, the emperor and his advisers. It was the prospect of having to win their approval that induced the greater complexity of thought that we find in the imperial conference statements. This interpretation—the one offered by Levi and Tetlock—is noteworthy because it implicitly attributes considerable responsibility to the emperor for the actions of the Japanese government.

There is a different interpretation as well. Real decision making in Japan in the later months of 1941 took place in liaison conferences and imperial conferences were largely ceremonial, rubber-stamp affairs. In the aftermath of a liaison conference, Japanese decision makers had time to ponder individually the conference decision, to organize their thoughts about it, and to review the events of the meeting in a more considered fashion. The result was a greater complexity of thought, which was later revealed in the imperial conference statements. This interpretation, by attributing less importance to the imperial conferences, also attributes less responsibility to the emperor for the Japanese government’s actions. Which, if either, of these interpretations is correct? One thing is certain: The answer is not to be found in the documents themselves.
A third problem with archival materials is that they are generally incomplete, for at least two reasons. First, not all discussion that is relevant to a decision occurs in formal meetings and thus is subject to the taking of minutes and notes. As Stocker-Kreichgauer (1982, 474) explains:

Groups [that have worked] together for a long time and [that are] engaged on important problems displace a good deal of interaction from their formal group sessions to informal meetings before the final decision is made. [Participants] speak to each other [informally] partly to obtain more confidence in their own beliefs and preferences (social validation), and partly to influence other's preferences and to gain support for their own point of view (informal coalition formation). [As a result,] the observed . . . session of the group can become a mere “theater session” about a problem already decided, often with pseudo-arguments given in the discussion, while the real arguments and causes of action remain in the dark.

Some empirical support for this view is provided by Hickson and his colleagues (1986, 257, 270). In their study of 150 strategic decisions in both public and private organizations, these researchers found that the average decision process lasts approximately one year and involves considerable informal interaction.

Second, even what gets written down at formal meetings will inevitably reflect the inclinations and limitations of the writer. Materials from the Cuban missile crisis (International Security 1985, 196–200; International Security 1987, 30–62) suggest how minutes of meetings may differ from what occurred during the meetings themselves. Consider in particular Bromley Smith’s minutes of ExComm Meeting No. 7 on October 27, 1962, and the available transcript—edited and “sanitized”—of the White House tape recording of the same meeting. It was during this meeting that Kennedy and his advisers received Khrushchev’s famous second letter proposing that U.S. Jupiter missiles be removed from Turkey in exchange for the removal of the Soviet missiles in Cuba. Khrushchev’s first letter of the night before had seemingly proposed something different—the removal of Soviet missiles in exchange for a U.S. promise not to invade Cuba. The minutes differ from the transcript of the tape in several important respects, beginning with the fact that the minutes exaggerate the extent to which the proceedings were marked by “cold cognition.” They inadequately capture the sense of urgency expressed several times by both the president and his brother, and they also give short shrift to a sense of frustration with Khrushchev personally. At one point, Kennedy interrupts the flow of discussion to assert that Khrushchev is trying to embarrass the United States by playing havoc with U.S.-Turkish relations (International Security 1987, 40). A short while later, Defense Secretary McNamara asks, “How can we negotiate with somebody who changes his deal before we even get a chance to reply?” (Ibid., 42). These characterizations of Khrushchev help to establish a definition of the situation in which the Russians are somehow in charge and the Americans are the ones with all of the problems. They also help to cut short any analysis of Khrushchev’s first letter and the situation that produced it and to focus discussion instead on how to respond to the second letter.

The minutes also exaggerate the degree of equality among the participants. Although Kennedy is easily the most frequent speaker whatever the source, his remarks in the minutes give the appearance of a series of isolated contributions to a common pool of wisdom. On tape, however, these same remarks add up to one side of a disagreement pitting the president against nearly all of his senior advisers. To Kennedy’s advisers, trading missiles in Turkey for missiles in Cuba means complicating relations between the United States and its NATO allies. Such a trade,
therefore, seems ill advised. Kennedy, however, appears to regard world opinion as being more important than NATO opinion: Trading missiles in Turkey for missiles in Cuba, he says repeatedly, will seem to most people to be a reasonable solution to the crisis. By himself, Kennedy brings the discussion to an impasse.

The minutes also give an inadequate account of influence processes among participants, of who says what to whom with what effect. Missing entirely from the minutes, for example, is a contribution by Llewellyn Thompson, special advisor for Soviet affairs. In the context of a direct disagreement with the president, Thompson states, “The important thing for Khrushchev, it seems to me, is to be able to say ‘I saved Cuba, I stopped an invasion” (International Security 1987, 59). This statement is significant because it represents an attempt to redefine the situation as one in which the Russians, too, face difficulties. This redefinition is taken up with alacrity by the president’s brother: “He [Khrushchev] must be a little shaken up or he wouldn’t have sent the [earlier] message to you in the first place” (ibid., 60). The discussion finally moves forward when Kennedy appears to agree to send a message in which the swapping of missiles is not the proposed basis for resolving the conflict.

What is the moral of this story? It is not that relying on archival materials is a particularly bad way to study group decision making, but that because all ways are bad, students of foreign policy decision-making groups have no good reason to prefer one way to another and every reason to prefer not only a variety but a combination of ways. Combining archival materials and interviews seems to me the best bet for identifying a group’s structure. The consequences of structure for process, however, might better be pursued in the laboratory via experiment and simulation. As this sort of division of labor has been rare (see the next chapter for an example of what I have in mind), past research on foreign policy making groups has been limited, and as a result, the research tradition is less rich than it ought to have been. The best current research moves somewhat more easily across disciplinary and methodological boundaries.

current developments

structure

Charles Hermann and his colleagues have sought to imbue some of the analytic categories suggested by Richard Snyder in the 1950s with greater theoretical significance, and the work of the former represents the most systematic effort thus far to think about the implications of group structure for foreign policy decision making. Hermann’s 1978 formulation focuses on three variables—group size, power distribution, and member role—and these variables are translated into three questions: (1) Is the decision unit a small group or an assembly? (Hermann suggests that the division point lies somewhere between twenty and thirty people.) (2) Is there an authoritative leader, someone who can commit the group against the opposition of every other member? (3) Are members free to take any position they wish, or are they delegates who must seek the approval of the agencies and bureaus they represent? The answers to these questions yield a typology of eight different group structures, and these structures, Hermann argues, predispose groups to engage in particular kinds of processes which, in turn, increase the likelihood of particular foreign policy behaviors.
To illustrate, let us consider those structures Hermann identifies as small groups rather than assemblies. The leader-staff group, as Hermann describes it, consists of the leader and of subordinate aides who owe their positions to the leader, who are without power bases of their own, and who occupy no roles granting them independent sources of information. This structure suggests a decision process in which subordinates tend to reinforce the leader’s preferences and to express any disagreements only informally and indirectly. In other words, the process tends to increase the leader’s certainty about his or her own inclinations. The resulting decision, then, is likely to come more quickly and to be less cautious than if the leader did not consult with aides at all.

The leader-autonomous group consists of the leader and of subordinates who can be removed by the leader but only at some political cost, who have independent bases of power and information, and who can offer advice without clearing it with some outside body. This structure suggests a decision process analogous to a judge hearing and deciding among advocates having various points of view. The process also encourages innovative behavior because advocates are free to shift their positions in response to new ideas. The process also encourages recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of a chosen course of action because the participants are able to bring to bear a diversity of perspectives.

The leader-delegate group is structurally similar to the leader-autonomous group except that the subordinates are spokespersons who are expected to protect and further the interests of their constituents. As a result, there is a greater inflexibility with respect to viewpoints and a greater tendency to distort information. Hermann proposes two alternative processes. Either the subordinates will get together in the absence of the leader to decide on a single recommendation that protects everybody’s “turf,” or the subordinates will argue their positions before the leader, exaggerating both the virtues of their own views and the shortcomings of those of their opponents. The first process, Hermann suggests, tends to generate the repetition of past actions. The second process may produce a deviation from past policy, but the change will be stated in vague terms so as to paper over any existing disagreements.

Hermann also identifies two small group structures without authoritative leaders: the autonomous group and the delegate group. Members of an autonomous group share responsibility for the group’s performance and see the group as the primary focus of their loyalty. Because they will need to work with each other in the future, they tend to adopt decision processes that foster group cohesion. Following Janis, Hermann argues that the desire for cohesion tends to short-circuit efforts at critical analysis. The result, he suggests, is a proclivity for behavior that is highly assertive and expressive of strong commitments.

Members of a delegate group are tightly bound to the organizations they represent, and the process leans toward incremental bargaining, which, in turn, increases the likelihood that new information will find its way into the proceedings. Hermann proposes two plausible outcomes: a compromise action that avoids extremes but appears lacking in logical coherence or a deadlock that results in no action at all.

In subsequent work, Hermann and his colleagues have attempted to support some of these arguments with evidence from the domain of foreign policy decision making. As I noted at the outset of this chapter, one set of studies (M. G.
Hermann and Hermann 1982; M. G. Hermann, Hermann, and Hagan 1987; M. G. Hermann and Hermann 1989) distinguishes among three ultimate decision units: predominant leaders, single groups, and multiple autonomous actors. This formulation can be seen as both an elaboration and a simplification of the earlier one, and the elaboration serves the interest of theory building. When a group has an authoritative leader, knowledge about the leader will be at least as important to us as knowledge about the group—hence, the category “predominant leader.” Similarly, when a group is composed of delegates, we will need to know something about the nature of political competition in the wider regime—hence, the category “multiple autonomous actors.” However, because interactions between both leader and group and group and regime are often difficult to observe, these interactions have been largely (but not completely) removed from the new framework. The “single group” is a narrower, less variegated entity than the group discussed in Hermann’s earlier formulation.

The newer studies give special prominence to a particular structural variable: the susceptibility of a group to outside influence. This choice is felicitous for three reasons. First, a focus on this variable gives us a conceptually neat way of including outside influences in our analyses (and of reintroducing the interactions discussed above).

Second, we can link this structural variable to an important process variable identified by Janis: the rapidity with which groups are able to reach agreement. When agreement does not come quickly, group members will feel encouraged to seek outside information and allies, and outsiders will feel encouraged to attempt to influence the group’s deliberations. Groups that are more susceptible to outside influence, in other words, will be less susceptible to groupthink.

Third, we can link the susceptibility of a group to outside influence to other structural variables. As has been pointed out, we should expect this susceptibility to be negatively associated with the smallness and homogeneity of a group, the extent to which a group’s members possess identical information and owe their primary loyalty to the group, and the presence of a dominant group leader. These associations can be expected to be useful in identifying whether a particular group is susceptible to outside influence or not.

Constructing measures from expert ratings of government decision units in twenty-five countries and from 5,179 events in the CREON data set, Stewart, Hermann and Hermann (1989) tested two hypotheses. Because groups that are less rather than more susceptible to outside influence are more likely to be unaware of the complexities of a situation, they are more likely (1) to express hostility toward other governments and (2) to engage in behavior that limits future options either through the allocation of resources or the generation of expectations in others. The researchers found support for both hypotheses, and they also found that single groups are more likely to express hostility than either predominant leaders or multiple autonomous actors.

The work of Hermann and his colleagues has two strengths. First, the analysis is sufficiently rich to suggest additional lines of inquiry. For example, a familiar question follows both from the distinction between autonomous and delegate groups and from the focus on group susceptibility to outside influence: Under what conditions does where you stand depend on where you sit? Laboratory studies of bargaining (Pruitt 1981, 41–44, 60) suggest that group members will
feel less autonomous when they perceive themselves to be distrusted by constituents, of lower status than constituents, subject to the rewards and punishments of constituents, and susceptible to the scrutiny of their behavior by constituents. They will also feel less autonomous when there is no group leader. Second, the arguments and evidence presented by Hermann and his colleagues seem ample to accomplish the aim set forward over thirty years ago by Richard Snyder: to place the study of decision unit structures firmly on the agenda of political science research.

process
Recent studies of group process can be divided into two rough categories: those inspired by data and those inspired by theory. Studies in the first category attempt to dispel misconceptions about what it is that foreign policy decision makers do; studies in the second category explore one or another aspect of Janis’s theory of groupthink.

What Decision Makers Do. Groups engaged in decision making frequently have been represented as moving through a series of stages. Burnstein and Berbaum (1983), borrowing from the organizational behavior literature (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Théorêt 1976), suggest three: an identification stage, in which decision makers recognize and diagnose a problem; a development stage, in which decision makers seek out possible solutions or design new ones; and a selection stage, in which decision makers screen out the worst proposals, evaluate the remaining ones, and obtain authorization for the one selected. Burnstein and Berbaum illustrate these categories by retelling the story of the Kennedy administration’s decision to scuttle the joint U.S.-British Skybolt missile project in 1962-1963 (Neustadt 1970) and the story of the decisions by the Israeli cabinet first to initiate and then to terminate deep-penetration bombing of Egypt in 1969-1970 (Shlaim and Tanter 1978). What each tale reveals (and what stage-based accounts of complex decision processes invariably reveal) is movement back and forth between stages. In Burnstein and Berbaum’s examples, these ‘cycles of issue redefinition’ are reasonable responses to changes in the external environment. They note, however, that cycles can also have their roots in a group’s internal processes and in the cognitive limitations of individual participants.

Evidence for the existence of internally generated cycles can be found in analyses of detailed records of high-level government meetings. Purkitt, for example, in her analysis of verbatim transcripts of several Cuban missile crisis meetings (see Chapter 9), found that remarks about the scope and nature of the problem occurred in every quarter of every meeting with no discernible pattern across quarters. Similarly, Anderson (1983, 1987), in his analysis of the records of thirteen foreign policy meetings under three U.S. presidents (Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy), found that the identification of goals was an ongoing activity in every case, a process Anderson characterizes as “decision making by objection.” Objections to proposals for action lead to the discovery of new goals, new proposals in light of these goals, new objections, and so forth, so that ‘the structure of alternatives facing decision makers was not so much a branching decision tree as a binary maze’ (Anderson 1987, 296). In sum, the analyses of both Purkitt and Anderson serve to undermine the common stage-based understanding of what foreign policy decision makers do.

Robert Axelrod (1977) has sought to undermine a more specific image of decision making—what he terms “the defense/attack model” of argumentation. In this image, participants try to build a defense for their own arguments by supporting them with evidence or by marshaling multiple arguments in case one line of defense fails.
seek out and attack the undefended spots in their opponents’ arguments. Examining causal assertions in transcripts of
meetings from three different foreign policy settings (the British Eastern Committee in 1918, Hitler and Chamberlain in
1938, and the Japanese Council on National Security in 1970), Axelrod found little support for the defense/attack
model. Participants rarely supported their assertions with specific evidence, almost never offered mutually supporting
arguments, and did not seem to discriminate between defended and undefended arguments in their attacks. Indeed,
Axelrod found that explicit disagreements of any sort were relatively rare, a finding also supported by Anderson.

Finally, Semmel and Minix (1979 and Semmel 1982) have sought to undermine yet another image of foreign policy
decision making, one that portrays group decisions as compromises and depicts the decision-making process as a
convergence toward the mean of individual preferences. They presented six crisis’ scenarios (for example, a Soviet
naval blockade of the Strait of Hormuz or the occupation by terrorists of the U.S. Embassy in the Hague) to 123
subjects drawn from three different U.S. populations—university students, ROTC cadets, and army officers. Each
subject was asked, for each scenario, to recommend one action from a list of ten arranged in order from “least
extreme” to “most extreme.” The subjects were then combined into twenty-six small groups and asked to reach group
decisions. Comparing each group’s response with the mean response of its members acting in isolation, the researchers
found almost no indication of convergence. Instead, groups composed of army officers and ROTC cadets chose actions
that were more extreme than those picked by the average of their individual members, and groups composed of
university students tended to choose actions that were less extreme than those chosen by the average of their
individual members. Convergence occurred in only 3 of 148 cases.

All of the above findings have one thing in common. Their significance is unclear. Consider first the findings of Semmel
and Minix. The phenomenon they report is widely known as “group polarization” and has been documented in dozens of
studies (see Lamm and Myers 1978). Group polarization is said to occur when an initial tendency of group members
toward a given direction is enhanced following group discussion. Two major explanatory mechanisms have been
suggested: social comparison processes and persuasive argumentation (see Isenberg 1986).

According to the social comparison view, people are constantly motivated both to perceive and to present themselves
in a socially desirable light. They continually monitor how other people present themselves and adjust their own self-
presentations accordingly. In one case, individuals prior to discussion understate their own true preferences because
they are uncertain about the group norm. In another case, they are again uncertain about the group norm, but their
primary motivation is, not to find a compromise between self-interest and conformity, but to be different from other
people in a socially desired direction. In both cases, individuals shift their positions as they get a better idea of what
their fellow decision makers really think. Numerous laboratory studies have demonstrated that simple knowledge
about other group members’ positions by itself can produce polarization effects.

Strong support exists as well for the persuasive argumentation perspective. In this view, an individual’s position prior
to discussion is a function of the number and persuasiveness of pro and con arguments that he or she can recall from
memory. Group discussion will cause a shift in this position to the extent that the discussion raises additional
persuasive arguments, arguments that the individual had not previously considered. Thus, whereas group discussion in
the social comparison view serves to reduce uncertainty about the group norm, in the persuasive argumentation view, it serves to reduce uncertainty about the issue.

So, what do the findings reported by Semmel and Minix mean? Although these authors seem inclined to adopt a social comparison explanation, and to see group polarization as a pathological phenomenon, their analysis is not convincing. Without a good theory that specifies the conditions under which group processes will be more affected by either social comparison or persuasive argumentation, the significance of their findings is difficult to determine.

The findings derived from detailed records of high-level government meetings seem similarly opaque. First, although Purkitt, Anderson, and Axelrod all have occasion to refer to the frequency of various types of verbal behavior as either “high” or “low,” it is hard to know what these frequencies mean in the absence of a theory-based standard. How many references to information, unique alternatives, and disagreements should there be? Second, the decision processes described by Purkitt, Anderson, and Axelrod, no less than those described by Semmel and Minix, admit multiple interpretations. If Semmel and Minix tell a “social comparison” story about the relationship of individuals to the group and neglect an “information processing” story about the relationship of individuals to the issue, the other researchers do the reverse.

Third, even if we grant the primacy of the “information processing” tale, the discovery of meaning is further hindered by the difficulty of distinguishing cognitive biases (where decision makers are the victims of their own limited mental capacities) from cognitive heuristics (where decision makers deliberately and purposefully select problem-solving routines to aid judgment, decision, and inference). Anderson (1983) plausibly argues that “decision making by objection” leads to a heightened emphasis on doing something and to a reduced focus on the probability of success. It is one possible explanation, he suggests, for the frequent lack of coherence in government action. Is decision making by objection a bias or a heuristic? It sounds like the former, but it could be the latter (decision makers may perceive alternative processes as worse), and Anderson himself appears appropriately ambivalent.

Axelrod stresses the purposive or heuristic character of decision processes. Why did his decision makers not adopt the defense/attack strategy of argumentation? Because, Axelrod proposes (inspired by the work on persuasive argumentation described earlier), this strategy was not likely to be as effective as the one they apparently chose: Subject your opponents to a barrage of arguments and hope that some of those arguments will strike them as novel (and, therefore, persuasive). Axelrod’s decision makers, then, seem a far cry from Anderson’s. How do we reconcile the difference?

One lesson seems clear. A meaningful account of what decision makers do must ultimately refer to their intentions, purposes, and particular circumstances. Unfortunately, these are not automatically revealed in the transcripts of meetings.

Groupthink Revisited. Janis’s theory of groupthink has stimulated a number of empirical investigations. In reviewing this research, I shall begin at the end with Janis’s seven characteristics of defective decision making, move to the
beginning and some of the proposed structural antecedents of those defects, and conclude with the process that supposedly joins the two.

One virtue of Janis's work, as I have noted, is his willingness to prescribe standards by which to distinguish bad decision processes from good ones. Moreover, Janis's particular list of decision-making defects has considerable face validity. Recall that the list includes gross omissions in surveying both alternatives and objectives, failure to reexamine the costs and risks of the preferred choice, poor information search, biased processing of available information, failure to reconsider originally rejected alternatives, and failure to work out implementation, monitoring, and contingency plans. Herek, Janis, and Huth (1987) have attempted to demonstrate that the list has more than face validity by testing the following hypothesis: High-quality decision-making procedures during crises are associated with better crisis outcomes than are defective decision-making procedures.

The researchers began by presenting to outside experts a list of seventy-six international disputes that occurred between 1945 and 1975. They asked the experts to select the major crises for each presidential administration and to rank the crises in terms of the severity of threat to the security of the United States. The four highest-ranked crises for each administration were selected for the sample. Using scholarly works rated high in quality by the same outside experts, the researchers then examined each crisis and rated each characteristic of defective decision making as either present or absent. Two outside experts with opposing personal views about the Cold War were asked to rate the crisis outcomes. Did the outcome of the crisis advance, hinder, or have no immediate effect on U.S. vital interests? Did the outcome of the crisis increase, decrease, or have no immediate effect on the level of international conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union or China? The researchers found that crisis outcomes tended to have more adverse effects on U.S. interests and were more likely to increase international conflict when the decision-making process was characterized by a large number of defects.

How confident can we be in these results? Of particular concern is the ability of the researchers to assess accurately the presence or absence of a defect. Welsh (1989), for example, gives a much poorer rating than do Herek, Janis, and Huth to the Kennedy administration's decision processes during the Cuban missile crisis. In a later article (1989), Herek, Janis, and Huth defended their original assessment.

Two other studies shed some light on the general issue. Brian Ripley (1989) examined eight episodes of decision making concerning U.S. policy toward Third World Asian countries during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and rated them (high, medium, or low) for each of the characteristics of defective decision making. Three of Ripley's cases appear as well in the Herek, Janis, and Huth study. How do the assessments compare? In the instances where comparison is easy, the Ripley and Herek ratings agree eight times and disagree four times. More generally, both studies give high marks to the decision making surrounding the 1961 Laos crisis and relatively poor marks to the processes associated with the 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident and (to a lesser extent in the Ripley study) the 1965 escalation in Vietnam.

Burke and Greenstein (1989) have made possible a second set of comparisons. In research based largely on official
documents and other archival materials, they examined (in nonquantitative fashion) the quality of decision making associated with Eisenhower’s response to the French collapse at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and with Johnson’s commitment of U.S. ground troops to Vietnam in 1965. Burke and Greenstein agree with Herek, Janis, and Huth that Eisenhower’s decision processes were high in quality and that Lyndon Johnson’s were not. In sum, although the available evidence is neither extensive nor unequivocal, readers wishing to forego agnosticism have some grounds for putting their faith in the Herek study assessments of decision-making quality.

Two other findings from the Herek study deserve mention. First, decision makers utilized high-quality decision processes (one defect or less) in eight of nineteen crises (42 percent) and poor-quality decision processes (four defects or more) in seven crises (37 percent). Second, some defects were more common than others. The most frequent decision-making error (occurring in fifteen cases) was the failure to reconsider originally rejected alternatives. This finding is consistent with Anderson’s (1983, 1987) description of decision making as a sequence of binary yes/no choices over a wide array of independent actions. The least common error (occurring in three cases) was poor information search, which is also the least common error in Ripley’s (1989) data. Indeed, both studies suggest that a principal difficulty facing foreign policy decision makers is not so much the gathering of information as the biased use of information that is already available.

Let us now turn from decision-making defects to their antecedent structural conditions as proposed in Janis’s theory. The effects of one or another of these antecedent conditions have been explored in laboratory experiments (Flowers 1977; Courtright 1978; Callaway, Marriott, and Esser 1985; Leana 1985), in correlational studies based on the self-reports of group participants (Moorhead and Montanan 1986), and in comparative case studies of foreign policy decision making (Ripley 1989; Burke and Greenstein 1989; also M. G. Hermann and Hermann 1989). In addition, McCauley (1989) has reexamined Janis’s own evidence to see how well the original statement of the theory had been supported. As many of these studies have been reviewed elsewhere (Longley and Pruitt 1980; Tetlock 1983; McCauley 1989), I shall not recapitulate them here. Instead, I shall merely offer my own conclusions.

The careful conclusion is this: The evidence is sufficiently murky to remind us of the complexity and variety of decision processes, on the one hand, and the crudeness of our concepts and measurement procedures, on the other. Less carefully, three antecedent conditions do seem to contribute to some of the decision-making defects identified by Janis: the insulation of the group from outsiders, the absence of norms requiring methodical procedures, and an inclination on the part of a group’s leader to act as an advocate for his or her own proposals rather than as a facilitator exploring the proposals of others.

The heart of Janis’s theory, however, consists of neither its definition of decision-making defects nor its identification of structural antecedents but the process that comes in between—groupthink. Recall that groupthink does not stem from an excessive fear of social disapproval; it is not conformity born of compliance. Groupthink results from an excessive faith in one’s fellow decision makers, a faith that denies the need for critical thinking. The principal distinction between groupthink and high-quality decision making, then, lies in the expenditure of cognitive effort. We might say that groupthink involves information processing that is “peripheral” rather than “central” (Petty and Cacioppo
heuristic” rather than “systematic” (Chaiken 1987), and “mindless” rather than “mindful” (Langer 1989). Decision makers engaged in groupthink, then, might be expected to reveal simpler thought processes than those engaged in quality decision making. This idea is the basis of a creative study by Philip Tetlock (1979).

Tetlock performed a content analysis of the public statements made by key decision makers during each of the foreign policy crises studied by Janis—both groupthink and nongroupthink. Consistent with Janis’s theory, groupthink decision makers were more simplistic in their perceptions of policy issues than nongroupthink decision makers, and they made more positive references to the United States and its allies. Inconsistent with Janis’s theory, groupthink decision makers did not make significantly more negative references to Communist states and their allies. As Tetlock recognizes, however, the more simplistic tone of the groupthink statements is open to an alternative explanation: The simplicity of utterance may reflect not so much simplicity of thought as the need of decision makers to muster public support for militaristic lines of action. To the extent that this alternative explanation is plausible, Tetlock’s findings shed little light on the validity of Janis’s theory.

Tetlock’s study illustrates the difficulty of identifying groupthink empirically. Nevertheless, his approach—measuring the cognitive complexity of individuals—seems both insightful and potentially useful. Two alternative approaches would focus more directly on group deliberations, but their underlying logic is similar to Tetlock’s: Groupthink deliberations should be characterized by less cognitive effort than quality deliberations.

Consider first a study of juries by Reid Hastie and his colleagues (1983, 163). Hastie discovered two styles of jury decision making. Groups adopting what I shall call a “data-driven” style appear to begin by asking, “What has happened and why?” Groups adopting a “solution-driven” style appear more likely to ask, “What should we do?” Data-driven groups, in other words, are more outward looking, at least initially, than solution-driven ones. More to the point, they appear to expend greater cognitive effort. Not only do data-driven groups uncover more relevant facts than their solution-driven counterparts, they also probably ponder these facts more deeply given the comparative absence of alternative foci to direct their attention toward, and proposals for action and the emergence of factions occur later in data-driven groups than in solution-driven ones. Other studies suggest the reliability of this distinction. Inexperienced negotiators have been found to engage in positional commitments sooner than experienced ones (Pruitt 1981), and groups composed of novices have been found to offer solutions to a budgeting problem sooner than groups composed of experts (Purkitt and Dyson 1988). In sum, groupthink is more likely to be a solution-driven process than a data-driven one.

A second approach to identifying groupthink is suggested by the literature on minority influence (see Moscovici 1985; Maass, West, and Cialdini 1987). Evidence suggests that when minority opinions become the object of scrutiny, they are capable of inducing considerable thought and reflection. In certain circumstances, decision makers appear to ask themselves, “Why do they (the minority) think X when the rest of us think Y?” Nemeth (1986) and her colleagues have shown that minority viewpoints are important because they can stimulate divergent attention and thought—so that even when the minority is wrong, it contributes to the detection of novel facts and solutions. If these effects are to occur, however, the minority must be both noticed and taken seriously.
The literature focuses on a number of “behavioral styles” (see Brown 1988), one of which is consistency. By maintaining a steadfast position, members of a minority can create an impression in the minds of the majority that what they stand for is not some passing whim but perhaps a position of real substance. A second behavioral style is investment. Minorities are likely to be more influential to the extent that they can be seen as advocating their position at some personal cost to themselves. Endorsements that are fairly painless will be treated less seriously. A third behavioral style is autonomy. A minority is likely to be more influential to the extent that it is perceived as acting out of principle rather than from some ulterior motive.

A fourth behavioral style is flexibility. Although minorities must consistently maintain their position in order to be influential, they must at the same time create the appearance of reasonableness and open-mindedness. To do otherwise is to risk being regarded as an out-group, and out-group minorities have been found to be less influential than in-group minorities. A fifth and final behavioral style might be called “strength in numbers.” As the number of people favoring a minority position grows, majority members are likely to find it more difficult to dismiss the minority position as the product of aberrant personalities or of idiosyncratic personal circumstances. The attention of majority members is likely to shift from who is doing the talking to what is being said. All these behavioral styles should be less evident in groupthink deliberations than in deliberations that are high in quality.

Careful readers will have noticed a problem: These two approaches to identifying groupthink risk foundering on the same shoals as Tetlock’s. If we can be sure that foreign policy decision making is essentially a cognitive activity engaged in by information processors with little on their minds but the immediate task at hand, then our principal assignment is indeed to distinguish decision processes that promote more cognitive effort from those that promote less. But if we believe that foreign policy decision making is potentially more complex than this, that the concerns of decision makers may transcend the immediate issue, then a prior question presents itself: Information processing for what? More specifically, in order to distinguish groupthink from conformity born of compliance, we once again need a theory specifying the conditions under which group processes will be more affected by either “persuasive argumentation” or “social comparison.” To build such a theory, we need a deeper understanding of decision makers as social beings.

directions for future research

Studies of foreign policy decision making frequently assume that the centrality of a particular decision for the analyst assures its centrality for the participants. Where such an assumption is made, accounts of decision processes will inevitably emphasize proximal causes more than distal ones, cognition more than social motivation, and events within individuals more than events among them. A more “social” understanding of decision making, then, requires that we move away from the decision and the crisis and pay greater attention to the group and its members. Data presented in the Herek, Janis, and Huth (1987) study suggest that the quality of crisis decision making varied considerably during the Truman and Nixon administrations but was fairly constant (although at different levels) during the Eisenhower and Johnson administrations. If these temporal patterns are real, how are they to be explained? More generally, we need to ask about the determinants of group structure, the history of groups and their members, and how particular
decisions fit into the ongoing lives of participants (for an example of this approach, see Stewart, Hermann, and Hermann 1989). In short, we need to consider the group as it exists in time.

We also need to consider the group in space. The vast bulk of the literature on foreign policy making groups focuses on the U.S. presidency, which means that the problem solving and cognitive aspects of decision processes have been allowed to vary while many of the coalition building and social aspects of decision processes have been held constant. The result, arguably, has been a lack of appreciation for the importance of the latter. Evidence suggests that for both normative and practical reasons, the requirements of coalition building tend to be more stringent among Chinese, Japanese, and Russian political elites than among U.S. ones. This difference has consequences not only for group structure but also for the content and nature of information processing (Gaenslen 1986, 1988).

A third candidate for future research is the feeling of responsibility among decision makers. Given that the decisions of political elites can affect the quality of our lives, we ought to be interested in whether and how this fact is appreciated and in the implications that follow (see Tetlock 1985). Are some group structures more associated with some definitions of responsibility than others? When do groups accept responsibility and when do they “diffuse” it? In groups with predominant leaders, what are the effects of leadership style? Does it make a difference if advisers are permanent civil servants, “in-and-outers,” or clients in a patron-client network? How, in the end, do feelings of responsibility shape decision making?

Finally, we need research comparing information processing by individuals with information processing by groups. A voluminous amount of literature now exists that addresses how individuals use (and misuse) information to make causal attributions, estimate probabilities, and frame decision-making problems. Do groups carry out these activities in the same way that individuals do? The question is important precisely because foreign policy decision making is so difficult to study. When we are confronted with yet another “black box” and tempted once again to carry on with “unitary actor” assumptions, we ought at least to have some idea of the potential costs. We ought, in other words, to take the “group” in “group decision making” seriously.

bibliography


