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Presidential Personality and Performance

Scientific Inquiries



The basic question

- Fact #1: Presidents differ tremendously in personality
- Fact #2: Presidents vary greatly in their performance as leaders
- How are these two obvious facts related?
- Does the president's personality predict his performance?

Two approaches

- Psychobiography and psychohistory – subjective, qualitative, single-case studies
- Historiometry – objective, quantitative, multiple-case studies

Historiometric: Two issues

- How to measure presidential performance?
- How to measure presidential personality?

Measuring performance

- Objective measures
 - e.g., veto behavior
- Subjective assessments
 - e.g., expert evaluations of performance

Summary of 2009 Survey Results

Top Ten Presidents

1. Lincoln (902)
2. Washington (854)
3. F.D. Roosevelt (837)
4. T. Roosevelt (781)
5. Truman (708)

6. Kennedy (701)
7. Jefferson (698)
8. Eisenhower (689)
9. Wilson (683)
10. Reagan (671)

Bottom Ten Presidents

33. Hayes (409)
34. Hoover (389)
35. Tyler (372)
36. George W. Bush (362)
37. Fillmore (351)

38. Harding (327)
39. W. H. Harrison (324)
40. Pierce (287)
41. A. Johnson (258)
42. Buchanan (227)

Number in parentheses is total score (maximum 1000).

C-SPAN

Measuring personality

- Content analysis
- Expert assessment
- Biographical analysis

Content analysis

- Extracting personality from documents, such as speeches and correspondence
- Illustration: Adaptation of the TAT



The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)

- ***Power motive*** – Concern with impact, control or influence on others; with arousing strong emotions in others; with prestige
- ***Achievement motive*** – Concern with excellence, success in competition, or unique unprecedented accomplishment.
- ***Affiliation motive*** – Concern with friendship, love, or companionate activity; nurturance

Presidential Inaugural Addresses

- Power, Achievement, and Affiliation
Motivation now calculated for all inaugurated presidents prior to Obama
- e.g., ...

Standardized scores
(M=50, SD=10)

President	Year	Ach	Aff	Pow
Truman	1949	53	58	73
Eisenhower	1953	42	54	48
Kennedy	1961	50	74	75
Johnson, L.	1965	54	54	48
Nixon	1969	65	68	52
Carter	1977	73	55	57
Reagan	1981	59	49	61
Bush, G. H. W.	1989	57	79	51
Clinton	1993	71	58	64
Bush, G. W.	2001	45	76	72

No Ford



Presidential Inaugural Addresses

- Moreover, these scores correlate with various indicators of performance
- E.g., ...

Motivation and performance

- *n* Power and *n* Ach positively correlated
- Foreign affairs:
 - War: *n* Power + →
 - war entry &
 - territorial gains
 - Diplomacy:
 - *n* Power - → peace accords
 - *n* Aff + → peace accords

Motivation and performance

- **Administration:**
 - *n* Power + → Cabinet turnover (but competent)
 - *n* Aff + → friends & cronies → scandals
- **Legislation: *n* Power + → veto use**
- **Public relations:**
 - *n* Power + → press relations
 - *n* Power + → assassination attempts

Motivation & performance

- **Ideology: Democrats > Republicans in n Power**
- **Election success:** matching of motive profiles
- **Historical greatness:**
 - high n Power & n Ach
 - low n Aff

Expert Assessment

- **Rubenzer & Faschinbauer (2004)**
- **Big Five Personality Factors**
 - Neuroticism
 - Extraversion
 - Openness
 - Agreeableness
 - Conscientiousness
- **3 or more expert evaluations**
- **E.g., ...**

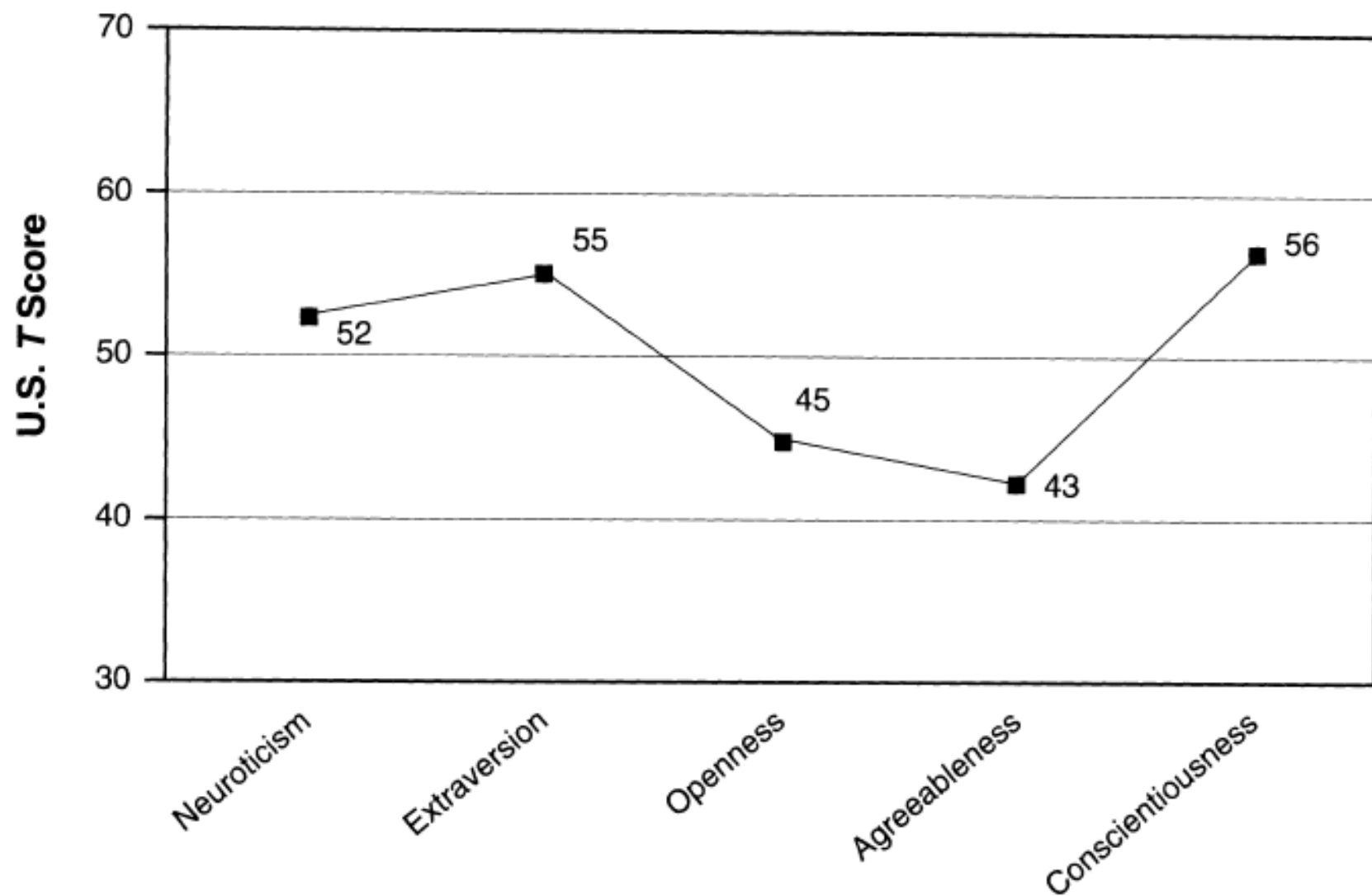


Figure 1. Average T scores of U.S. Presidents on Revised NEO Personality Inventory factors.

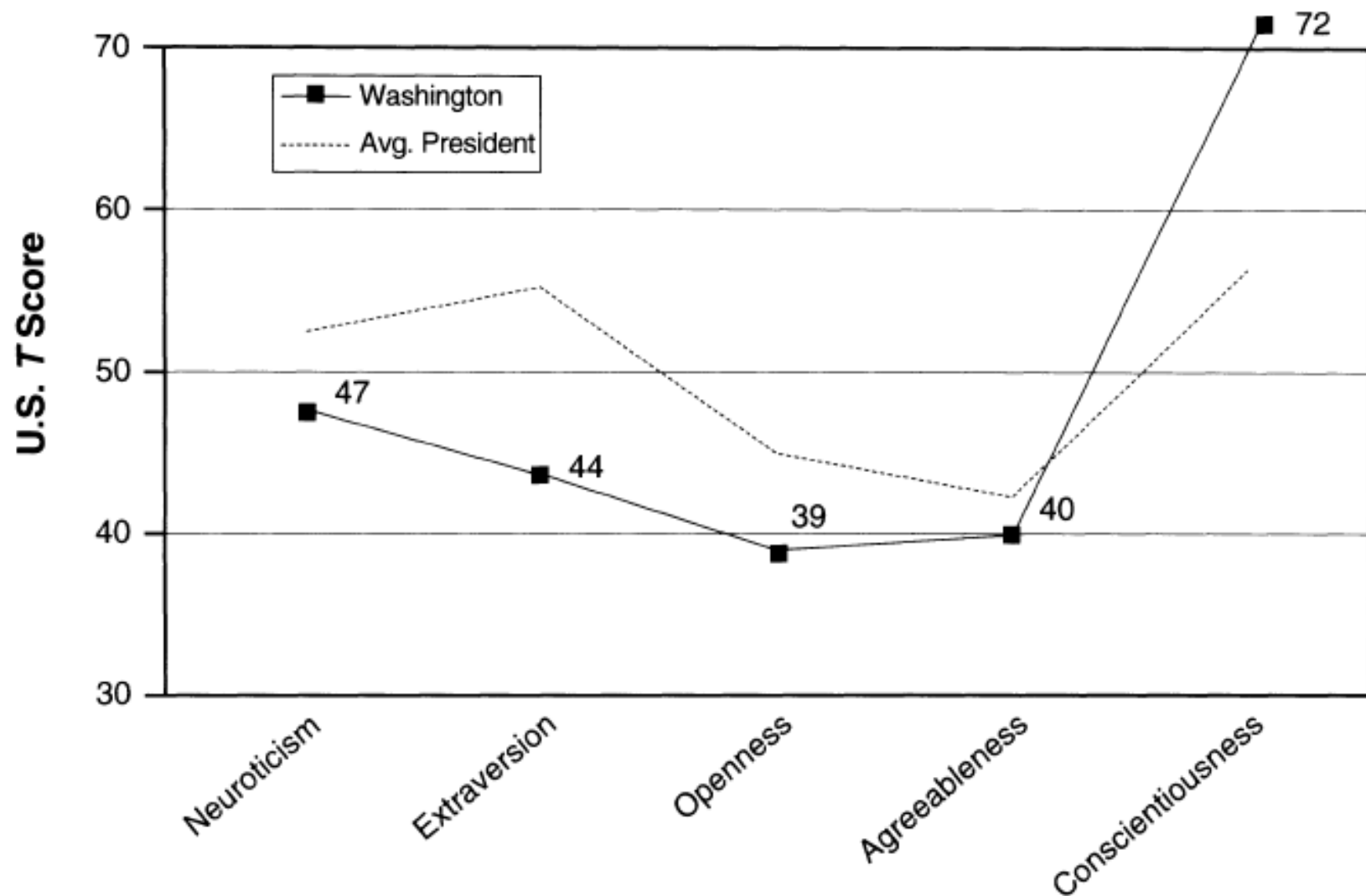


Figure 2. T scores of Washington on Revised NEO Personality Inventory factors.

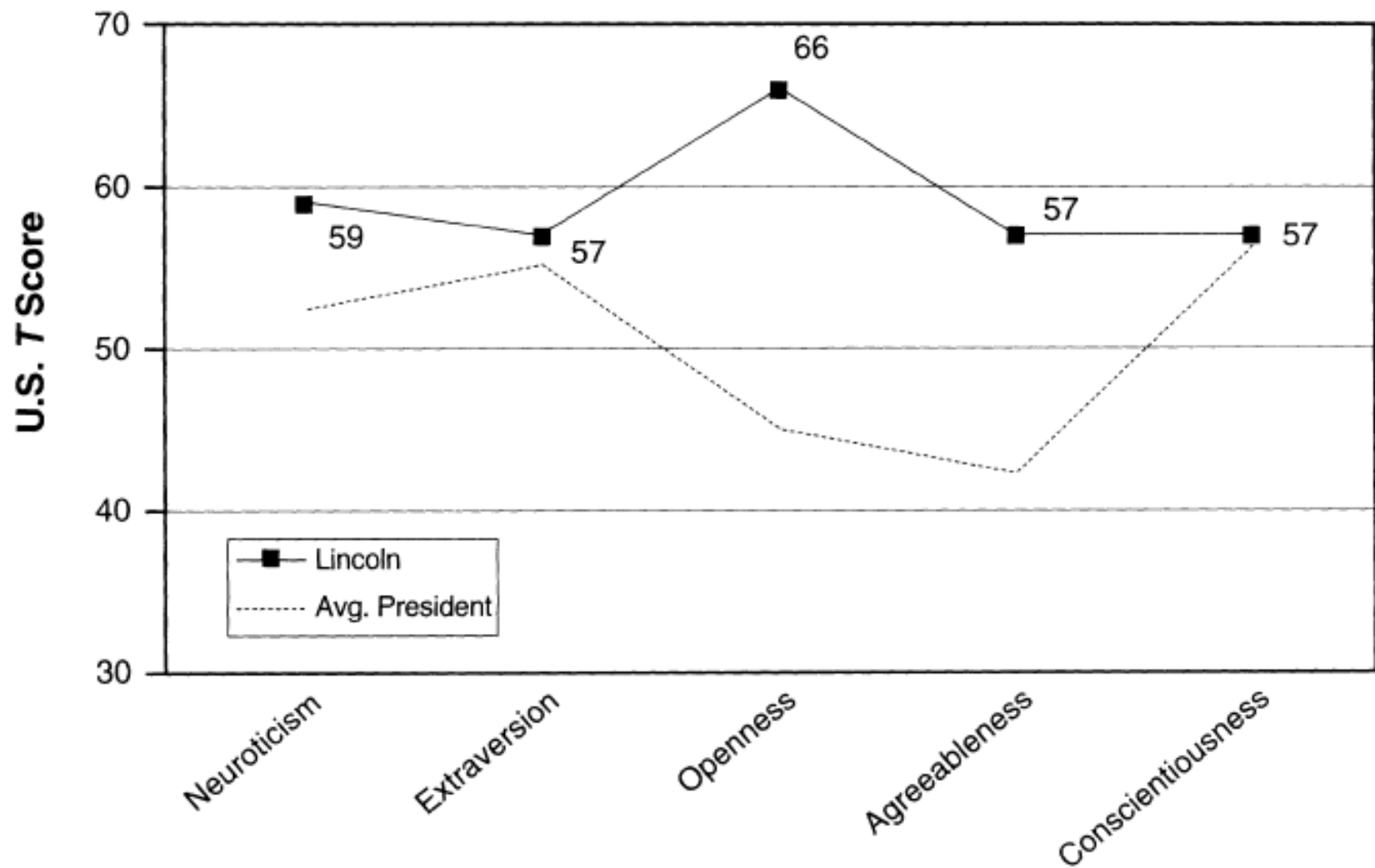
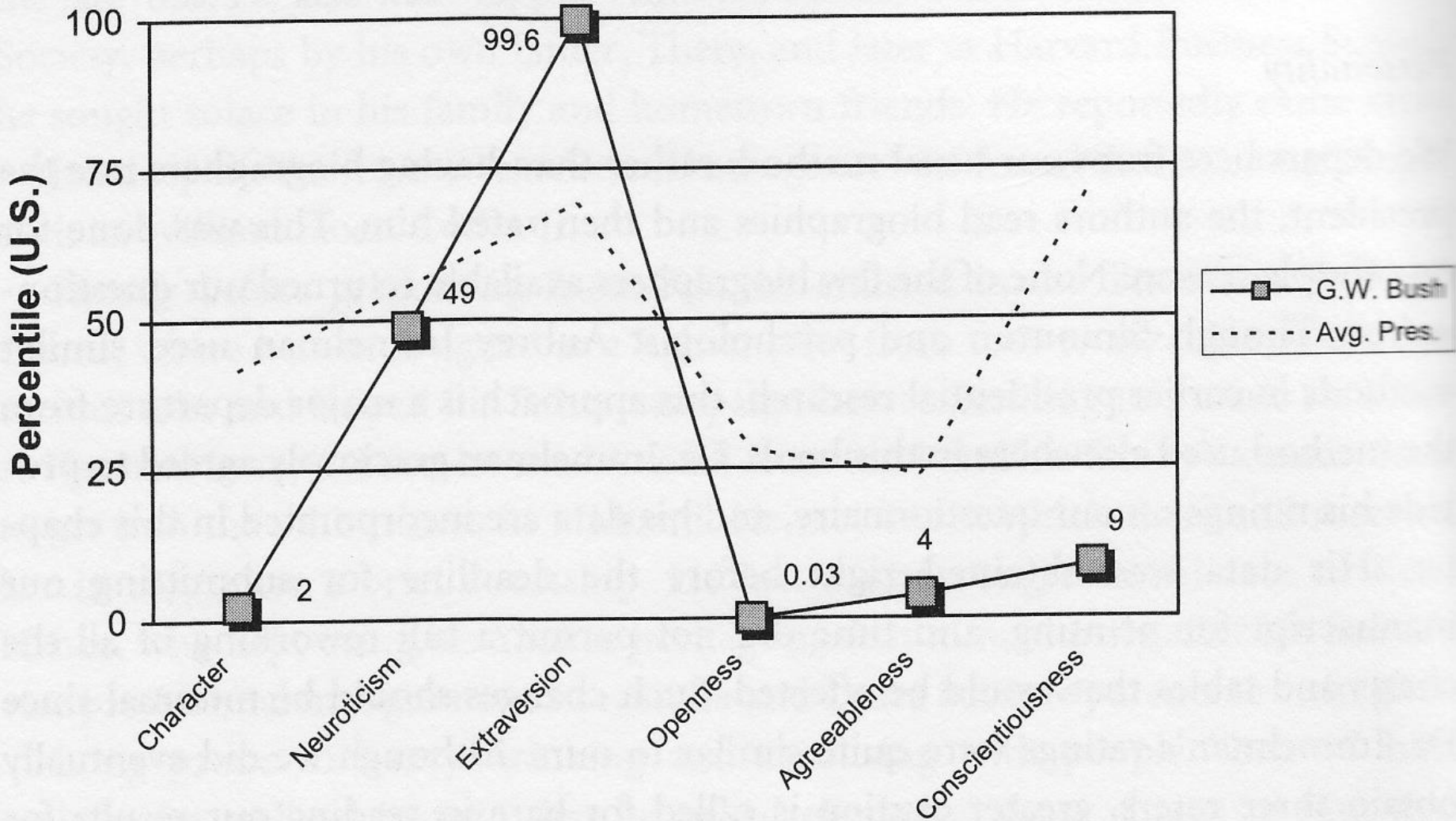


Figure 3. T scores of Lincoln on Revised NEO Personality Inventory factors.

CHART 14.1

George W. Bush's Scores on Character and the Big Five Traits



Biographical analysis

- Simonton (1986-2006)
 - Creation of biographical sketches
 - Evaluation on various scales
 - Generation of 110 personality scores
 - Consolidation into 14 personality factors

"He was morally and physically courageous, even-tempered and conservative, secretive and sagacious, skeptical and cautious, truthful and honest, firm in his own convictions and tolerant of those of others, reflective and cool, ambitious and somewhat selfish, kind to all and good-natured, sympathetic in the presence of suffering or under an imaginative description of it, lived in his reason and reasoned in his life. Easy of approach and perfectly democratic in his nature, [he] had a broad charity for his fellow man and had an excuse for unreflective acts of his kind, and in short he loved justice and lived out in thought and act the eternal right. ... I do not say that he never deviated from his own nature and his own rules. His nature, the tendency of it, is as I state. [He] struggled to live the best life possible. This I know."

- absent-minded
1
- active
2
- adaptable
3
- adventurous
4
- affected
5
- affectionate
6
- aggressive
7
- alert
8
- aloof
9
- ambitious
10
- anxious
11
- apathetic
12
- appreciative
13
- argumentative
14
- arrogant
15

- cheerful
31
- civilized
32
- clear-thinking
33
- clever
34
- coarse
35
- cold
36
- commonplace
37
- complaining
38
- complicated
39
- conceited
40
- confident
41
- confused
42
- conscientious
43
- conservative
44
- considerate
45

- dependent
61
- despondent
62
- determined
63
- dignified
64
- discreet
65
- disorderly
66
- dissatisfied
67
- distractible
68
- distrustful
69
- dominant
70
- dreamy
71
- dull
72
- easy going
73
- effeminate
74
- efficient
75

- foresighted
91
- forgetful
92
- forgiving
93
- formal
94
- frank
95
- friendly
96
- frivolous
97
- fussy
98
- generous
99
- gentle
100
- gloomy
101
- good-looking
102
- good-natured
103
- greedy
104
- handsome
105

- impulsive
121
- independent
122
- indifferent
123
- individualistic
124
- industrious
125
- infantile
126
- informal
127
- ingenious
128
- inhibited
129
- initiative
130
- insightful
131
- intelligent
132
- interests narrow
133
- interests wide
134
- intolerant
135

- | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original
166 | <input type="checkbox"/> reasonable
196 | <input type="checkbox"/> sharp-witted
226 | <input type="checkbox"/> superstitious
256 | <input type="checkbox"/> unscrupulous
286 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> outgoing
167 | <input type="checkbox"/> rebellious
197 | <input type="checkbox"/> shiftless
227 | <input type="checkbox"/> suspicious
257 | <input type="checkbox"/> unselfish
287 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> outspoken
168 | <input type="checkbox"/> reckless
198 | <input type="checkbox"/> show-off
228 | <input type="checkbox"/> sympathetic
258 | <input type="checkbox"/> unstable
288 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> painstaking
169 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> reflective
199 | <input type="checkbox"/> shrewd
229 | <input type="checkbox"/> tactful
259 | <input type="checkbox"/> vindictive
289 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> patient
170 | <input type="checkbox"/> relaxed
200 | <input type="checkbox"/> shy
230 | <input type="checkbox"/> tactless
260 | <input type="checkbox"/> versatile
290 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> peaceable
171 | <input type="checkbox"/> reliable
201 | <input type="checkbox"/> silent
231 | <input type="checkbox"/> talkative
261 | <input type="checkbox"/> warm
291 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> peculiar
172 | <input type="checkbox"/> resentful
202 | <input type="checkbox"/> simple
232 | <input type="checkbox"/> temperamental
262 | <input type="checkbox"/> wary
292 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> persevering
173 | <input type="checkbox"/> reserved
203 | <input type="checkbox"/> sincere
233 | <input type="checkbox"/> tense
263 | <input type="checkbox"/> weak
293 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> persistent
174 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> resourceful
204 | <input type="checkbox"/> slipshod
234 | <input type="checkbox"/> thankless
264 | <input type="checkbox"/> whiny
294 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pessimistic
175 | <input type="checkbox"/> responsible
205 | <input type="checkbox"/> slow
235 | <input type="checkbox"/> thorough
265 | <input type="checkbox"/> wholesome
295 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> planful
176 | <input type="checkbox"/> restless
206 | <input type="checkbox"/> sly
236 | <input type="checkbox"/> thoughtful
266 | <input type="checkbox"/> wise
296 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pleasant
177 | <input type="checkbox"/> retiring
207 | <input type="checkbox"/> smug
237 | <input type="checkbox"/> thrifty
267 | <input type="checkbox"/> withdrawn
297 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> pleasure-seeking
178 | <input type="checkbox"/> rigid
208 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> snobbish
238 | <input type="checkbox"/> timid
268 | <input type="checkbox"/> witty
298 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> poised
179 | <input type="checkbox"/> robust
209 | <input type="checkbox"/> sociable
239 | <input type="checkbox"/> tolerant
269 | <input type="checkbox"/> worrying
299 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> polished
180 | <input type="checkbox"/> rude
210 | <input type="checkbox"/> soft-hearted
240 | <input type="checkbox"/> touchy
270 | <input type="checkbox"/> zany
300 |

110 Adjectives → 14 Factors

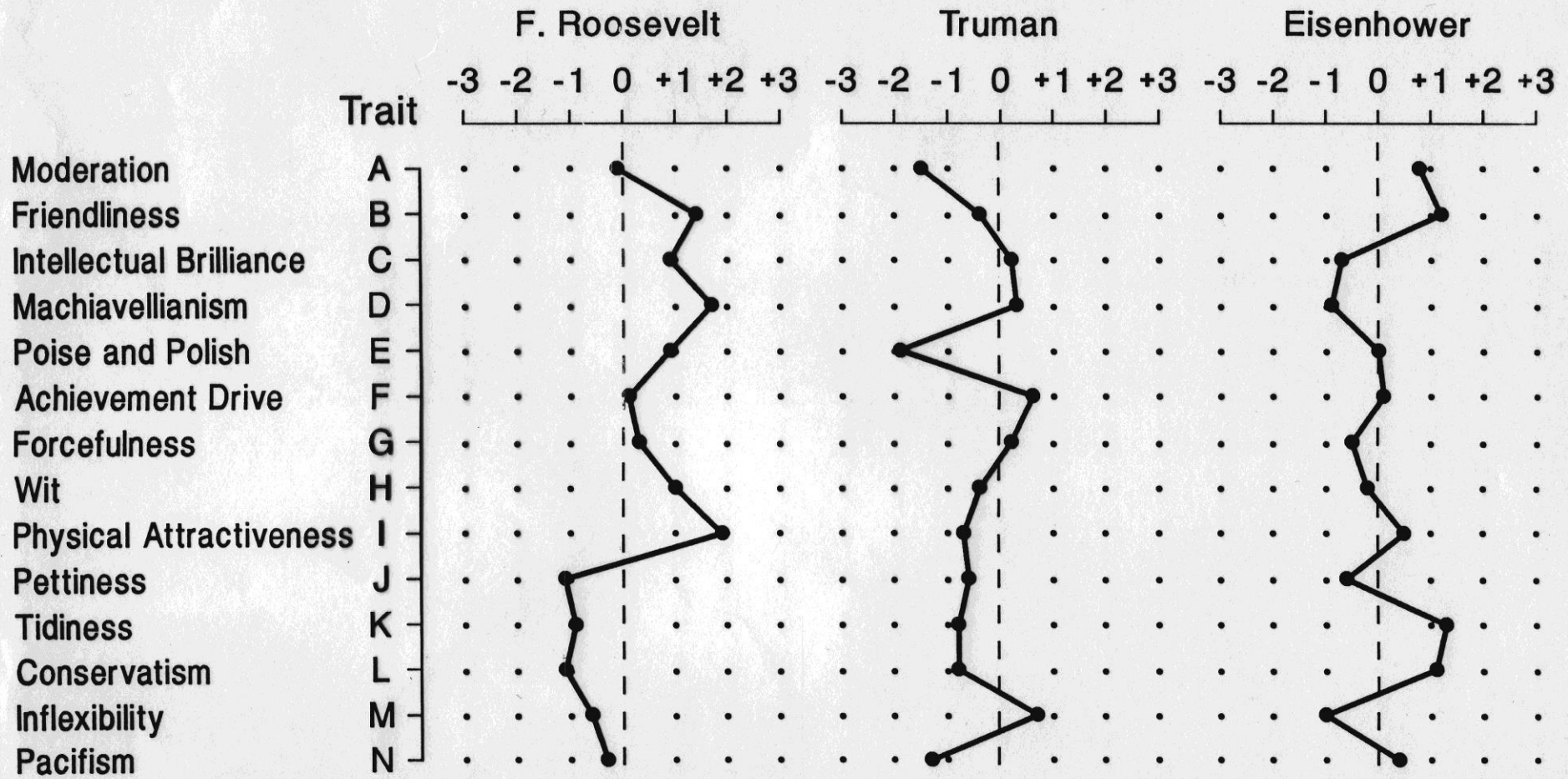
- Moderation
- Friendliness
- Intellectual brilliance
- Machiavellianism
- Poise and polish
- Achievement drive
- Forcefulness
- Wit
- Physical attractiveness
- Pettiness
- Tidiness
- Conservatism
- Inflexibility
- Pacificism

Factor 3: Intellectual Brilliance

Positive loadings. Interests wide (.85), Artistic (.84), Inventive (.76), Curious (.74), Intelligent (.64), Sophisticated (.62), Complicated (.61), Insightful (.54), Wise (.46), Idealistic (.43).

Negative loadings. Dull (−.71), Commonplace (−.41).

Standardized Scores



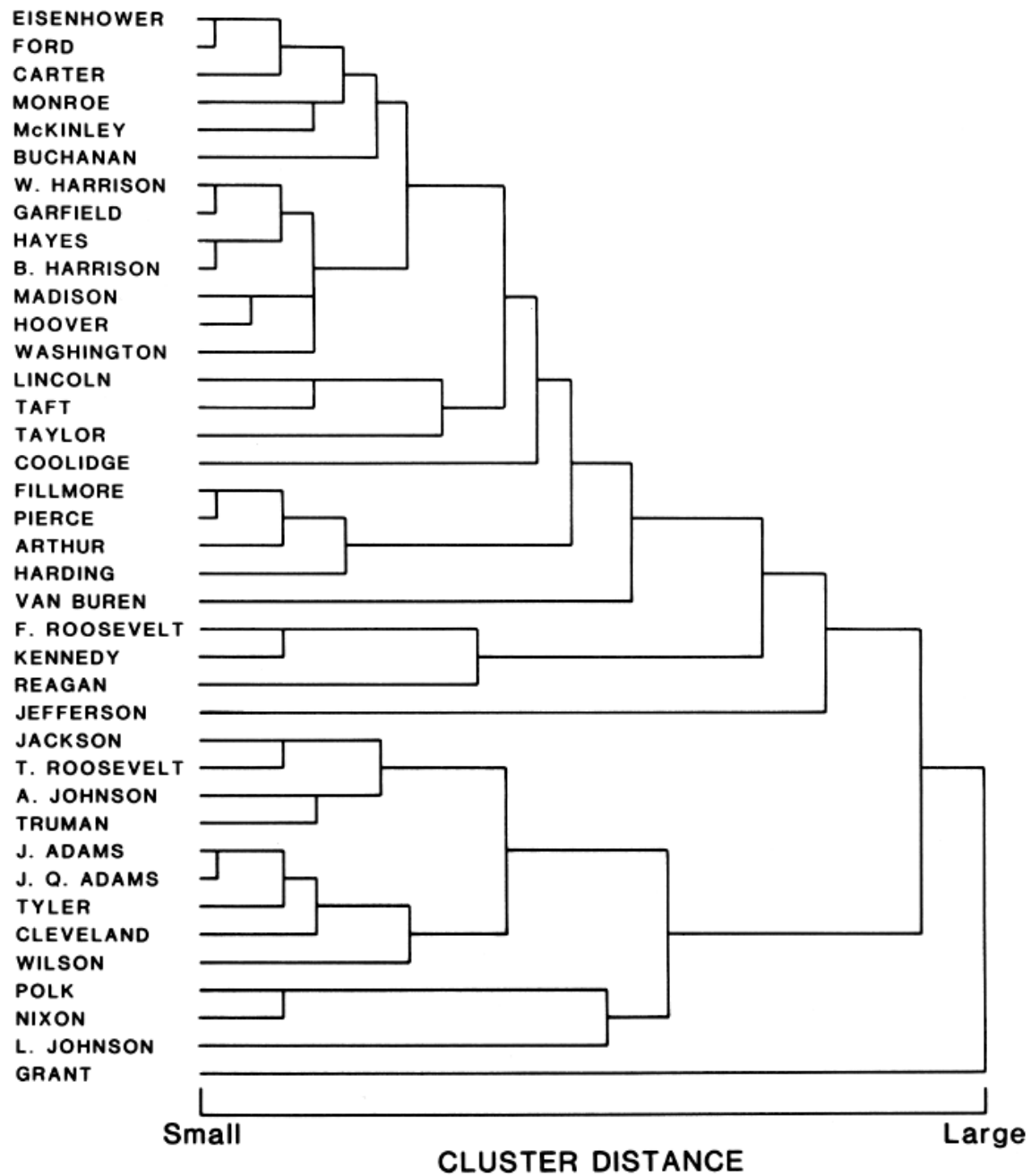


Figure 1. Dendrogram from hierarchical cluster analysis of the 39 presidents according to the 16 personality factors.

Personality and biography

- Large families positively related to Moderation, Poise and polish, but negatively related to Inflexibility and Forcefulness
- Professors score high on Inflexibility

Personality and performance

- Intellectual brilliance positively related to greatness but negatively related to electoral success
- Legislative success positively related to Machiavellianism, Forcefulness, Moderation, Poise and polish, and negatively related to Inflexibility
- Inflexibility and veto power (contingent on context)
- Controversiality positively related to Achievement drive, Forcefulness, Pettiness, and Inflexibility but negatively to Moderation, Friendliness, and Wit

Presidential style study

- Same biographical sketches, but
- New raters
- Different items
 - all having to do with leadership style

Interpersonal

- Gives credit to others for work done
- Endears himself to staff through courtesy and consideration
- Willing to make compromises
- Is not impatient or abrupt in conferences

- Millard Fillmore
- George Washington
- Gerald Ford



Gerald Ford

Charismatic

- Enjoys the ceremonial aspects of the office
- Has a flair for the dramatic
- Uses rhetoric effectively
- Is a dynamo of energy and determination
- Keeps in contact with the American public and its moods
- Rarely shy or awkward in public

- Franklin Roosevelt
- Andrew Jackson
- Lyndon Johnson
- John Kennedy
- Theodore Roosevelt
- Ronald Reagan



Ronald Reagan

Deliberative

- Able to visualize alternatives and weigh long-term consequences
- Keeps himself thoroughly informed
- Cautious and conservative in action
- Avoids emotional outbursts

- Millard Fillmore
- George Washington
- James Madison



George Washington

Creative

Initiates new legislation and programs
Innovative in his role as an executive
Rarely a middle-of-the-roader

- Andrew Jackson
- Thomas Jefferson
- Franklin Roosevelt
- Richard Nixon



Franklin Roosevelt

Neurotic

Places political success over effective policy
Suffers health problems during difficult and critical periods in office
Avoids the direct, uncomplicated approach

- James Polk
- Ulysses Grant
- Martin Van Buren
- Lyndon Johnson



Lyndon Johnson

Leader style and personality

- **Interpersonal –**
 - **positive correlations with Moderation, Friendliness, Physical attractiveness, Conservatism, and Pacifism**
 - **but**
 - **negative correlations with Machiavellianism, Forcefulness, Pettiness, and Inflexibility**

Personality and style

- **Charismatic –**
 - **positive correlations with Intellectual brilliance, Machiavellianism, Achievement drive, Forcefulness**
 - **but**
 - **negative correlations with Moderation and Conservatism**

Personality and style

- **Deliberative –**
 - **positive correlations with Moderation, Poise and polish, Tidiness, and Pacificism**
 - **but**
 - **negative correlations with Forcefulness and Inflexibility**

Personality and style

- **Creative –**
 - **positive correlations with Intellectual brilliance, Machiavellianism, Achievement drive, Forcefulness, and Inflexibility**
 - **but**
 - **negative correlations with Moderation, Conservatism, and Pacificism**

Personality and style

- **Neurotic –**
 - **positive correlations with Machiavellianism and Pettiness**

Style and biography

- **Presidents from large families higher on Interpersonal and Deliberation dimensions, lower on Creativity**
- **Orphanhood positively associated with Charisma**

Style and performance

- **Charisma and Creativity both positively associated with legislative success but also with assassination attempts**
- **Charisma and Creativity positively associated with greatness**

President	Intellectual brilliance	Openness	IQ estimates			
			I-U	I-C	II-U	II-C
Washington	0.3	14.0	125.0	130.0	135.0	140.0
J. Adams	0.6	61.0	120.0	150.0	145.0	155.0
Jefferson	3.1	99.1	145.0	160.0	150.0	160.0
Madison	0.6	62.0	120.0	150.0	135.0	160.0
Monroe	-1.4	3.7	109.0	120.7	128.2	138.6
J. Q. Adams	1.2	98.0	165.0	170.0	165.0	175.0
Jackson	-0.6	0.5	110.0	120.0	130.0	145.0
Van Buren	-0.3	31.0	119.4	132.9	135.1	146.0
W. Harrison	-0.1	31.5	120.3	133.6	135.5	146.3
Tyler	0.2	37.9	122.9	136.6	137.2	148.1
Polk	-0.6	21.0	116.0	128.7	132.7	143.4
Taylor	-1.2	9.0	110.8	122.7	129.3	139.8
Fillmore	-0.7	46.0	120.8	136.7	137.4	149.0
Pierce	-0.3	37.0	120.6	134.8	136.3	147.4
Buchanan	-0.8	5.0	111.9	122.8	129.4	139.6
Lincoln	0.8	95.0	125.0	145.0	140.0	150.0
A. Johnson	-1.2	8.0	110.8	122.7	129.3	139.8
Grant	-1.4	2.3	110.0	115.0	125.0	130.0
Hayes	-0.1	31.5	120.3	133.6	135.5	146.3
Garfield	0.9	52.9	129.0	143.5	141.2	152.3
Arthur	0.9	52.9	129.0	143.5	141.2	152.3

President	Intellectual brilliance	Openness	IQ estimates			
			I-U	I-C	II-U	II-C
B. Harrison	-0.7	30.0	117.5	131.4	134.3	145.4
McKinley	-0.6	20.8	116.0	128.6	132.7	143.4
T. Roosevelt	0.9	56.0	129.7	144.6	141.8	153.0
Taft	0.0	1.0	114.5	123.8	129.8	139.5
Wilson	1.3	64.0	133.0	148.3	143.9	155.2
Harding	-2.0	10.0	107.8	121.1	128.4	139.9
Coolidge	-1.5	17.0	111.4	124.8	130.6	141.6
Hoover	0.5	8.0	118.0	127.5	132.0	141.6
F. Roosevelt	0.9	45.0	127.4	140.9	139.7	150.5
Truman	0.2	1.7	115.5	124.6	130.3	139.8
Eisenhower	-0.7	29.0	117.3	131.1	134.1	145.1
Kennedy	1.8	82.0	138.9	155.7	148.2	159.8
L. Johnson	-0.2	7.0	114.8	125.2	130.7	140.6
Nixon	0.4	14.0	118.9	129.2	133.0	142.9
Ford	-0.6	8.0	113.3	124.4	130.2	140.4
Carter	0.0	77.0	130.2	149.0	144.4	156.8
Reagan	0.4	10.0	118.0	127.9	132.2	141.9
G. H. W. Bush	-0.3	18.0	116.5	128.4	132.6	143.0
Clinton	1.0	82.0	135.6	153.6	147.0	159.0
G. W. Bush	-0.7	0.0	111.1	121.4	128.5	138.5

Historical greatness predictors

- **Intellectual brilliance**
- **Administration scandal**
- **War hero**
- **Years in office**
- **Years of war**
- **Assassination**

Conclusion

- **Context > personality**
- **but many contextual factors have a partial personality basis, especially**
 - Administration scandal
 - Assassination
- **and some personality traits interact with contextual factors: e.g., Inflexibility**
- **Upshot: Personality is relevant to performance**