Stability and Change in the Complexity of Senatorial Debate: Testing the Cognitive Versus Rhetorical Style Hypotheses

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Previous research indicates that United States senators with conservative voting records appear to interpret policy issues in less integratively complex ways than moderate or liberal senators. Two interpretations exist for this finding: (a) conservatives think in more simplistic terms than liberals or moderates, and (b) conservatives have more simplistic rhetorical, not cognitive, styles than liberals or moderates. Earlier work was based on Congresses in which conservatives were in an opposition role that may have given them the rhetorical freedom to present issues in stark, black-and-white terms. By contrast, being in a policy-making role may have placed pressure on liberals and moderates to present issues in more complex or multidimensional terms. This study tested the cognitive versus rhetorical style hypotheses by assessing the integrative complexity of senators in five Congresses, three dominated by liberals and moderates (the 82nd, 94th, and 96th Congresses) and two dominated by conservatives (the 83rd and 97th Congresses). The results indicated that liberals and moderates were more complex than conservatives in the 82nd, 94th, and 96th Congresses but that these differences among ideological groups were much less pronounced in the 83rd and 97th Congresses. This pattern was due to sharp declines in the complexity of liberals and, to a lesser extent, moderates in conservative-dominated sessions, not to an increase in the complexity in conservatives. Conservatives displayed more traitlike stability in integrative complexity both within and across Congressional sessions.

Psychologists and political scientists interested in studying government leaders must often rely on public statements for clues to the cognitive and motivational processes underlying important policy decisions (Hermann, 1977; Holsti, 1976; Winter & Stewart, 1977). In pursuit of these clues, researchers have subjected the public statements of leaders to detailed content and structural analyses designed to assess a wide range of variables: perceptions of threat and hostility (Holsti, Brody, & North, 1969); suspiciousness, ethnocentrism, and internal–external locus of control (Hermann, 1980); the needs for achievement, affiliation, and power (Winter & Stewart, 1977); polarization of in-group and out-group attitudes (Tetlock, 1979); and conceptual or integrative complexity (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977; Tetlock, 1979, 1981a, 1981b). The cumulative result has been the emergence of a large body of evidence on psychological correlates of high-level political behavior (see Tetlock, 1983d, for a review).

Skeptics have, however, pointed to the limitations of public policy statements for inferring psychological processes or states (Graber, 1976; Jervis, 1970). They note that leaders use public statements as means of achieving political objectives: reassuring some nations, firmly warning others, and projecting desired images or messages to various constituencies within their own countries. Public statements should be viewed as strategic political acts that offer little insight into the psychology of high-level policy making. Correlations between properties of such statements and important political decisions do not require psychological explanations; they reflect persuasion or propaganda tactics that policy makers in particular situations believe to be effective in protecting vital national or political interests.

The current study explores the validity of
competing psychological and strategic political explanations of Tetlock's (1981a, 1983b) work on the relationship between cognitive style and ideology in the United States Senate. The primary objective of Tetlock's work was to test two hypotheses linking cognitive style and ideology: the rigidity-of-the-right and ideologue hypotheses. According to the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis, people often develop extremely conservative political-economic opinions as a means of coping with deep-rooted psychodynamic conflicts that can be traced back to early childhood (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; McClosky, 1967; Sanford, 1973; Wilson, 1973). Conservative attitudes in this view often serve ego-defense functions. Individuals who identify with the sociopolitical right are more likely than persons who identify with the sociopolitical center and left to feel threatened by ambiguous or belief-challenging events. It is also argued that extreme conservatives, in their attempts to maintain psychological equilibrium, are especially prone to view issues in rigid, dichotomous (good vs. bad) terms (cf. Wilson, 1973).

Advocates of the ideologue hypothesis have, however, maintained that the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis is insensitive to "authoritarianism of the left." According to the ideologue hypothesis, differences in the content of left-wing and right-wing belief systems should not be allowed to obscure fundamental cognitive stylistic similarities in how ideologues of the left and right organize and process political information (Rokeach, 1956, 1960; Shils, 1956; Taylor, 1960). "True believers" (regardless of the specific cause) are held to be more dogmatic, more intolerant of ambiguity, and more prone to view issues in rigid, dichotomous terms than are moderates who take less extreme or polarized political positions.

To test these hypotheses, Tetlock (1983b) used the integrative complexity coding system to analyze the speeches of senators who, on the basis of their voting records in the 94th Congress (1975–1976), had been classified as liberals, moderates, or conservatives. The coding system, originally developed for scoring responses to a semiprojective test designed to measure individual differences in integrative complexity (Schroeder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967), has been used extensively in a series of recent archival studies of political leaders. These archival studies have shown the coding system to be sensitive to situational determinants of integrational complexity (Porter & Suedfeld, 1981; Suedfeld & Rank, 1976; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977; Tetlock, 1979, 1981b, 1983a) as well as systematic individual differences in this characteristic (Tetlock, 1981a, 1984).

The actual coding rules define integrative complexity in terms of two cognitive structural variables: differentiation and integration (see Schroeder et al., 1967; Streufert & Streufert, 1978; Tetlock, 1979, 1981a, 1981b). Individuals who are functioning at the simple end of the complexity continuum tend to rely on fixed, one-dimensional evaluative rules in interpreting events and to base decisions on only a few salient items of information. Individuals who are functioning at the complex end tend to interpret issues in multidimensional terms and to integrate a variety of evidence in making decisions. (See Method section for more detail.)

Tetlock (1983b) found apparently strong support for the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis: Conservative senators make more complex than their liberal or moderate colleagues. Moreover, this finding remained significant after controlling for a number of potential confounding variables, including political party affiliation, education, age, and years in the Senate. It is tempting to interpret these results as strong evidence for the applicability of the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis to an elite policy-making body. The temptation is reinforced by the convergence of the results with the findings of most studies on nonelite samples such as college students and survey respondents. In his review of the literature, Stone (1980) notes that, across a variety of measurement instruments and subject populations, right-wing respondents appear to be more dogmatic, intolerant of ambiguity, and cognitively simple than moderate or left-wing respondents (e.g., Barker, 1963; Lipset & Raub, 1978; McClosky, 1967; Neuman, 1981; Sidanius, 1978; Wilson, 1973).

We cannot, however, rule out a strategic political explanation for the Tetlock results. The less complex statements of conservative senators may not so much reflect variation in cognitive style as in rhetorical style. Liberals and moderates (primarily Democrats) represented the majority of senators in the 94th Congress and may have perceived themselves in a responsible policy-making role that required presenting issues in fairly complex ways. By contrast, conservatives (primarily Republicans) may have perceived themselves in an opposition role that granted them the rhetorical license to present issues in simplistic terms. Work on pre-to postelection shifts in presidential rhetoric lends some plausibility to this interpretation. Tetlock (1981b) found that presidential candidates during election campaigns (an opposition role) made less integratively complex policy statements than they made immediately upon assuming office (a policy-making role). Moreover, work on public opinion and persuasion processes suggests that such rhetorical shifts are probably an effective political strategy. Integratively simple rhetoric may be extremely useful for rallying opposition to the party in power if we assume that the uncommitted electorate possesses little knowledge of major policy issues and little motivation to process political messages or to defend the government (Oskamp, 1977). Under these conditions one is well-advised to construct readily comprehensible and memorable attacks on the ruling party, reburdened with qualifications and abstract economic or geopolitical reasoning (cf. McGuire, 1969; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). On the other hand, integratively complex rhetoric may be more useful for defending policies that one has implemented or seriously expects to implement. The policy-making role ineptly requires more complex answers to four troubled choices (Thurrow, 1980), which must be justified to large, skeptical constituencies that are motivated to argue against one's positions (e.g., explaining to farmers why price supports for their crops had to be reduced). Under these conditions, one is well-advised to construct relatively complex, two-sided appeals that demonstrate one's awareness of both sides of the issues (cf. McGuire, 1969; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). In short, integratively simple rhetoric may be typical of opposition parties, and integratively complex rhetoric, typical of parties in power.1

The study reported here attempts to test the cognitive-style and rhetorical-style interpretations of the Tetlock (1983b) findings. It does so by comparing the integrative complexity of liberal, moderate, and conservative senators in five Congresses drawn from two political eras during which significant shifts occurred in the political balance of power: the early to middle 1950s and the late 1970s to early 1980s. The five Congresses studied include three dominated by liberals and moderates (the Democratic-controlled 82nd, 94th, and 96th Congresses) and two dominated by conservatives (the Republican-controlled 83rd and 97th Congresses). If the rhetorical-style hypothesis is correct, differences in integrative complexity among ideological groups will be contingent on the political balance of power. Senators in an opposition or minority role will find it more useful to make integratively simple policy statements than will senators in a policy-making or majority role. Thus it is reasonable to expect that (a) liberals and moderates will be more integratively complex than conservatives in the Democratic-controlled 82nd, 94th, and 96th Congresses; (b) the opposite pattern of differences will emerge when major shifts occur in the political balance of power in favor of conservatives (in 1953, with the establishment of Republican control of the Senate and the election of President Eisenhower, and in 1981, with the establishment of Republican control of the Senate and the election of President Reagan). By contrast, if a cognitive-style interpretation is correct, differences in integrative complexity among ideological groups will be much more stable and resistant to fluctuations in the electoral fortunes of the two major parties. For instance, the rigid-rigidity hypothesis implies that conservatives will make less integratively complex policy statements than their liberal or moderate colleagues, regardless of the political balance of power. The ideologue hypothesis implies that senators with very consistent liberal or conservative voting records will make less integratively complex policy statements than their moderate colleagues, again regardless of the political balance of power.

1 The early American politicalician Fisher Ames seems to have had a similar idea in 1800 when he wrote on the rear of his Federalist party campaign leaflet: "We should, I am sanguine enough to believe, throw upon our antagonists the burdens of supporting and vindicating government and enjoy their late advantages of finding fault, which popular prejudice is ever prone to listen to." (cited in Ryan, 1971, p. 542).
In addition to testing hypotheses on the relationships between political ideology and integrative complexity, the present study provides an excellent opportunity to explore the stability of individual differences in integrative complexity over a period of several years. Such data can shed important light on an unresolved issue in the integrative complexity literature: the extent to which integrative complexity is a relatively enduring personality trait or disposition as opposed to a situation- and issue-specific construct (Streufert & Streufert, 1978). The study also provides an opportunity to explore individual differences in the stability of integrative complexity scores. Are certain types of individuals more or less likely to have stable integrative complexity over time?

Method

The raw data consisted of the records of Congressional speeches given by senators who held office in the Five Congresses under study: the 82nd (1951–1952), the 83rd (1953–1954), the 94th (1975–1976), the 96th (1979–1980), and the 97th. A total of 36 senators was randomly selected for inclusion in the study of the 82nd and 83rd Congresses. The major constraint on the selection process was that each senator had to have served in both the 82nd and 83rd Congresses (thus a random sample was not possible for each senator). We randomly selected for each senator (excluding textual materials such as editorials and other individual speeches submitted for the record), (b) dividing the material into paragraph-sized scoring units, and (c) randomly selecting units to be scored for integrative complexity. There were two significant differences in the length of statements sampled from conservative, liberal, and moderate senators. First, conservative senators averaged a length of 95 words per paragraph-sized unit, whereas liberal and moderate senators averaged 95 and 105 words per unit, respectively. Second, the number of paragraphs per statement was greater for liberal and moderate senators than for conservative senators.

Results

Integrative complexity coding was performed by three trained raters, two of whom were unaware of the hypotheses being tested and the sources of the material being analyzed (mean r = .87). It should be emphasized that the complexity coding system focuses on the cognitive structure, not the content, of expressed beliefs and is not biased for or against political philosophical positions (cf. Schröder et al., 1967). It is possible to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. For instance, Karl Marx and Adam Smith developed highly integratively complex positions to support polar opposite positions on fundamental issues of economic policy (communism versus capitalism). It should also be emphasized that there is no mathematical formula or index, nor is there a single test that can be applied to assess the consistency of these positions taken by an individual (Tetlock, 1983b, 1983c, 1984).

Additional Data

The following background information was collected on each senator: political party, education, age, and length of service in the Senate. Political party was coded as a dichotomous variable that equaled 0 if the senator was a Republican and 1 if the senator was a Democrat. Education was coded on a 3-point scale (1 = high school graduate, 2 = college graduate, 3 = postgraduate degree). Age and length of service in the Senate were simply coded in number of years.

Conclusions

The present study is the first to systematically assess the long-term stability of integrative complexity in the Senate. The major results are as follows: (1) Integrative complexity scores of senators are stable over time. (2) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. (3) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. (4) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. (5) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. (6) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. (7) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. (8) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. (9) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions. (10) Those senators who tend to be simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions are likely to remain simple or complex in the advocacy of a wide range of political positions.

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Figure 1 presents the mean integrative complexity scores of senatorsial political positions in the 94th, 96th, and 97th Congresses. We

Assessing Ideological Consistency

We used the ratings of senatorial voting records by Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), a liberal political organization that categorizes senators into ideological groups. Senators in the 82nd and 83rd Congresses were classified as liberal if they fell in the upper third of mean ADA ratings of senators in the two Congresses, as conservative if they fell in the bottom third of the mean ADA ratings of senators in the two Congresses, and as moderate if they fell in the middle third of the distribution. We used the same criteria for classifying senators in the 94th, 96th, and 97th Congresses.

Considerable evidence reflects a broad political consensus on the ideological stands of senators. ADA ratings are highly correlated with those of other organizational groups (e.g., the correlations between ADA ratings and those of Americans for Constitutional Action, a conservative organization, ranged from r = .80 to r = .94). ADA ratings are also extremely stable over time. The correlations between ratings in the different Congresses ranged from r = .89 to r = .95.

Integrative Complexity Coding

All material was coded for integrative complexity on a 7-point scale (Schröder et al., 1967; Tetlock & Hannum, 1983). The scale defines integrative complexity in terms of two variables: differentiation and integration. Differentiation refers to the number of dimensions or characteristics of a problem that are taken into account in decision making. For instance, a person might analyze policy issues in an unifferentiated manner by placing policy options into one of two value-laden categories: the good (patriotic) policies and the bad (defective) policies. A more differentiated approach would recognize that different policies can have many, sometimes contradictory, effects that cannot be easily categorized on a single evaluation scale. Finally, for example, in relation to the development of complex connections among differentiated characteristics. (Differentiation is thus a prerequisite for integration.) The complexity index approaches 1, indicating maximum fluidity, whereas a score of 1 indicates little interconnectedness or even fluidity as a score of 1 indicates little interconnectedness or even fluidity. Scores of 1 in the integrative complexity coding system reflect low differentiation and low integration. For instance:

Stiff trade tariffs must be introduced to stop the flood of Japanese steel and cars into our country. Millions of American workers are in danger of losing their jobs.

Failure to introduce tough tariffs will amount to an economic surrender to the unfair trade practices of Japan.

Scores of 3 reflect moderate or high differentiation and low integration. For instance:

The Vietnam war badly divided the American public.

Supporters warn that it is necessary to prevent communist aggression from succeeding. Opponents saw the war as a hopeless attempt to prop up a corrupt and unpopular dictatorship.

Scores of 5 reflect moderate or high differentiation and high integration. For instance:

Inflation contributed, of course, to rapidly rising hospital costs, but the lack of competition among hospitals allowed them to pass on cost increases with impunity.

There were incentives to hold down equipment or labor expenses. The government or the insurance companies automatically picked up most of the tab. The combined impact of these forces caused costs to spiral out of control.

Scores of 7 reflect high differentiation and high integration. For instance:

Saudia Arabia seeks to maximize the benefits it can gain from its massive oil reserves. It attempts to keep prices high but not so high that demand for oil drops off steeply, or the Western economies are badly damaged, or alternative sources of energy become competitive.

The Saudis also recognize the destabilizing effects that massive inflows of capital can have on their own economy and political stability. They are performing a delicate political balancing act in which they must weigh many competing economic, domestic and geopolitical objectives against each other.

Scores of 2, 4, and 6 represent transition points between adjacent levels. Coders were instructed to assign scores to enact policies when there was evidence of implicit differentiation (e.g., information seeking, qualification to an absolute rule) or implicit integration (e.g., limits of recognition of interactive causality or of value trade-offs).

Approximately 10% of the statements sampled were uncodable because they simply involved procedural motions (e.g., claims to time in the floor), introduction for consideration) or statements of fact (e.g., citations of budget statistics of particular departments or programs, biographical facts about the lives of government officials whose appointments required Congressional approval). We omitted such statements from the analysis and replaced them with other randomly selected statements. This is standard practice in complex coding because some degree of active interpretation and manipulation of information is necessary for inferring conceptions of conceptual structure (cf. Portes & Bale, 1981; Streufert & Streufert, 1977; Tetlock, 1979, 1981a, 1981b, 1983b, 1984).

Integrative complexity scores tend to be negatively skewed. It is not unusual for the scores assigned to be at the lowest level of integrative complexity. People often seem unable or unmotivated to generate integratively complex interpretations of political events. The developers of the Paragraph Comprehension Test—a semipractical measure for assessing individual differences in integrative complexity—attempted to increase the sensitivity of the test by using as a summary index the mean of the two highest scores assigned to the 6 paragraphs that subjects wrote...
subjected these data to a $3 \times 3$ (ideological group × session of Congress) repeated measures analysis of variance. This analysis revealed a significant interaction between ideological classification and Congressional session, $F(4, 84) = 6.80, p < .01$. To explore the meaning of the interaction, we performed a series of planned contrasts (Winer, 1971). These contrasts revealed an interesting pattern of stability and instability in the relationship between political ideology and integrative complexity. In the Democratic-controlled 94th Congress, support was found for rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis. Both liberals ($M = 2.72$) and moderates ($M = 2.60$) were more integratively complex than conservatives ($M = 1.72$), $F(1, 84) = 16.39, p < .0001$, and $F(1, 84) = 12.70, p < .001$, respectively. Liberals and moderates did not differ significantly from each other, $F < 1$. In the Democratic-controlled 96th Congress, an identical pattern emerged. Again, both liberals ($M = 2.68$) and moderates ($M = 2.73$) were more integratively complex than conservatives ($M = 1.53$), $F(1, 84) = 21.68, p < .01$, and $F(1, 84) = 23.61, p < .01$, respectively. The differences between liberals and moderates did not even approach significance, $F < 1$. However, this pattern broke down in the Republican-controlled 97th Congress. No significant differences existed among ideological groups in this Congress.

Planned contrasts involving the repeated measures factor (session of Congress) helped to clarify why the relationship between political ideology and integrative complexity observed in the 94th and 96th Congresses disappeared in the 97th Congress. These contrasts indicated that the mean levels of integrative complexity of each of the three ideological groups—liberals, moderates, and conservatives—were very stable between the 94th and 96th Congresses, all $F < 1$. This pattern of stability abruptly ended with the 97th Congress. Planned contrasts including the 97th Congress revealed considerable support for the rhetorical-style hypothesis. As predicted, there were significant declines in the integrative complexity of the policy statements that liberal and moderate senators made in the Democratic-controlled 94th and 96th Congresses as compared to the Republican-controlled 97th Congress. Liberals made markedly more complex policy statements in the 94th and 96th Congresses ($M = 2.70$) than in the 97th Congress ($M = 1.90$), $F(1, 84) = 11.70, p < .001$. A similar, less pronounced, downward trend was observed for moderates ($Ms = 2.67$ and $2.15$), $F(1, 84) = 4.94, p < .05$. However, there was very little support for the rhetorical-style prediction of an upward shift in the integrative complexity scores of conservatives. The modest increase observed in the integrative complexity of conservatives between the 94th and 96th Congresses ($M = 1.62$) and the 97th Congress ($M = 1.97$) fell far short of conventional standards of statistical significance, $F(1, 84) = 2.24, p < .25$.

Figure 2 presents the mean integrative complexity of senatorial policy statements in the Democratic-controlled 82nd and Republican-controlled 83rd Congresses. We subjected these data to a $3 \times 2$ (ideological group × session of Congress) repeated measures analysis of variance. The analysis revealed an interaction between ideology and political balance of power similar to the one observed in the Congresses in the late 1970s and early 1980s, $F(2, 32) = 6.31, p < .01$. Once again, planned contrasts showed that liberals ($M = 2.48$) and moderates ($M = 2.30$) were more integratively complex than conservatives ($M = 1.52$) in the Democratic-controlled Congress, $F(1, 32) = 23.37, p < .001$, and $F(1, 32) = 15.21, p < .001$, respectively. No differences existed in the integrative complexity of liberals and moderates, $F < 1$. Support for the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis did not, however, generalize to the Republican-controlled 83rd Congress. The only comparison to reach significance here was the tendency for moderates ($M = 2.25$) to be more integratively complex than conservatives ($M = 1.60$), $F(1, 32) = 10.70, p < .01$. Nonsignificant trends existed for moderates ($M = 2.25$) to be more integratively complex than liberals ($M = 1.89$), $F(1, 32) = 3.28, p < .10$, and for liberals to be more integratively complex than conservatives ($M = 1.60$), $F(1, 32) = 2.13, p < .25$.

Planned contrasts involving the repeated measures factor (session of Congress) revealed partial support for the rhetorical-style hypothesis. There was a steep decline in the integrative complexity of liberal senators between the Democratic-controlled 82nd Congress ($M = 2.48$) and the Republican-controlled 83rd Congress ($M = 1.90$), $F(1, 32) = 16.57, p < .001$. Unlike the transition in the political balance of power between the 96th and 97th Congresses, there was no significant downward shift in the integrative complexity between the 82nd and 83rd Congresses ($Ms = 2.30$ and $2.25$), $F < 1$. There was no support for the rhetorical-style prediction of an increase in the integrative complexity of conservatives between the 82nd and 83rd Congresses ($Ms = 1.52$ and $1.60$), $F < 1$.

We performed a series of analyses of covariance to determine whether the observed relationships between political ideology and integrative complexity remained significant after controlling for a number of background variables, including political party affiliation, age, education, and length of service in the Senate. None of these covariates explained a significant amount of the ideology–complexity relationship or substantially altered any of the findings reported in the analyses of variance.

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Footnote:

7 We also performed a series of multiple regressions to explore in more detail the interrelationships among political ideology (treated as a continuous rather than a dichotomous variable), background characteristics, and integrative complexity. These analyses yielded results completely compatible with the analyses of variance. Political ideology was a significant predictor of integrative complexity in the 82nd, 94th, and 96th Congresses but not in the 83rd and 97th Congresses. The other variables were very weak or inconsistent predictors of integrative complexity.
All of the analyses reported up to this point have focused on testing hypotheses concerning the mean levels of integrative complexity that different ideological groups displayed in different Congresses. We were also interested in exploring the consistency and stability of individual differences among senators in integrative complexity. Some noteworthy findings emerged from these analyses. First, with one exception, there was fairly impressive temporal consistency in the mean integrative complexity of individual senators across Congresses: \( r(33) = .48, p < .005 \), between the 82nd and 83rd Congresses, and \( r(43) = .49, p < .001 \), between the 94th and 96th Congresses. The exception was the 97th Congress. The relationships between individual senatorial complexity in the 94th and 96th Congresses on the one hand and the 97th Congress on the other were quite weak, \( r(43) = .12, ns \), and \( r(43) = .26, p < .05 \), respectively. Second, there were marked differences among ideological groups in the amount of variability in individual senators’ complexity scores within Congresses (trends that the earlier analyses could not detect because the mean integrative complexity of individual senators within Congresses always served as the dependent variable). A series of \( t \) tests—using the variances of individual senators’ integrative complexity scores within Congresses as the dependent variable—revealed a number of interesting effects. There was, for example, significantly greater variability in the integrative complexity scores of moderates than in the scores of conservatives in all five of the Congresses studied. We also observed significantly greater variability in the integrative complexity scores of liberals than in the scores of conservatives in the Democratic-controlled 82nd, 94th, and 96th Congresses. However, no differences in the variability of liberal and conservative scores emerged in the Republican-controlled 83rd and 97th Congresses. Finally, the \( t \) tests detected no differences in the variability of the integrative complexity scores of liberals and moderates in any of the five Congresses studied. These findings, taken in conjunction with the previously reported results on the more pronounced variability across Congresses in the integrative complexity of liberals and moderates, lend indirect support to the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis. A general trait interpretation of integrative complexity appears to apply more readily to conservatives than to liberals and moderates. The integrative complexity of conservatives is much less responsive to shifts in the policy issues under consideration within a given Congress and to shifts in the political balance of power across Congresses.

**Discussion**

The results do not unequivocally support either the cognitive-style or rhetorical-style interpretations of the relationship between integrative complexity and political ideology in the United States Senate. Advocates of each position can point to aspects of the results that are consistent with their preferred theoretical position; however, each perspective has difficulty explaining certain important findings.

In accord with the rhetorical-style hypothesis, there were pronounced downward shifts in the integrative complexity of liberal senators whenever the political balance of power (control of the Senate and the executive branch of government) tilted in favor of conservatives: between the 82nd and 83rd Congresses and between the 96th and 97th Congresses. Being in an opposition role led liberal senators to present policy issues in a more integrative, black-and-white terms. But, contrary to the rhetorical-style hypothesis, upward shifts in the integrative complexity of conservative senators did not accompany these transitions in the political balance of power. Conservatives showed relatively low and stable levels of integrative complexity across Congresses.

Why did conservatives not become more integratively complex upon gaining majority control of the Senate as well as the executive branch of government? This finding is embarrassing to the rhetorical-style hypothesis, particularly in view of previous work indicating rapid upward shifts in the complexity of politicians upon their ascension to power (Tetlock, 1981b). One can, however, construct a plausible, albeit post hoc, explanation that renders the finding less troublesome. For instance, one can argue that conservatives in the 83rd and 97th Congresses were on the political offensive and primarily concerned with rallying support for the new policies they were implementing. They did not yet perceive a need to shift to a more complex rhetorical style that involved explaining unpleasant trade-offs to important constituencies; much of the blame for current predicaments could simply be assigned to earlier administrations. This line of reasoning suggests an important qualification to the original rhetorical-style hypothesis: The party in power (in this case, conservative Republicans) will become more integratively complex only when it feels politically accountable for major national problems. Integratively complex rhetoric is, in other words, defensive rhetoric (e.g., “I know there are arguments against our approach, but these considerations weigh in our favor”). Unfortunately, this qualified hypothesis is more difficult to test than the original. We need to develop independent criteria for determining when the party in power feels politically accountable for major national problems. One approach future research might take to this problem is to employ survey data on which party the electorate views...
as primarily responsible for what is wrong with the country today. Assuming that politicians adjust their rhetorical or persuasion styles to changing public perceptions, politicians should become increasingly complex as the tide of public opinion turns against them.

The results are also mixed news to advocates of the most viable cognitive-style interpretation: the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis. This hypothesis fared well in three of the five Congresses studied: Whenever Democrats had majority control of the Senate, liberals and moderates were more integratively complex than conservatives. In the remaining two Congresses, no relationship existed between political ideology and integrative complexity. We suspect it would be premature to rule out the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis on the basis of this latter evidence (a hypothesis that, as noted earlier, has a good deal of support in previous research on nonelite samples). A defender of the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis could argue in the present context that the failure to observe the predicted ideology–complexity relationships in the two Republican-dominated Congresses merely reflects the fact that legislators’ cognitive processing of public affairs is a complex process. However, we point out that this argument is too simplistic. In such situations, we would expect to see a more complex relationship between ideology and effectiveness, one that reflects the interaction of political and cognitive processes.


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