

1-28-2019

# The US Government Shutdown: When Is Personality Shut Out?

Editor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>

 Part of the [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), [Other Psychology Commons](#), and the [Philosophy of Science Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Editor (2019) "The US Government Shutdown: When Is Personality Shut Out?," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 19 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol19/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [commons@erau.edu](mailto:commons@erau.edu), [wolfe309@erau.edu](mailto:wolfe309@erau.edu).

**Title:** The US Government Shutdown: When Is Personality Shut Out?

**Author:** Editor

As of this writing (January 26, 2019), the partial shutdown of the US Government is shut down. Without taking a stance on political sides, close readings of mass media quickly yield a common motif. The US President, more specifically his personality, has been the driver of the shutdown and the shutdown of the shutdown. The motif includes many personality descriptors, mostly unflattering—e. g., narcissism, grandiosity, disagreeableness, extroversion, immaturity, volatility, cravenness, arrogance, introspective opaqueness, being closed to disconfirming information and analysis, inauthentic. As well, there has been speculation on unconscious psychodynamic conflicts—e. g., fear of losing control, fear of being contaminated—driving behavior which, in turn, elicit the above personality descriptors. In a non-partisan manner, how might one contemplate the significance of the President’s personality—correctly outlined or not—in the political world including that surrounding the shutdown? When might it matter, and when not?

In writings on political psychology, the Holy Grail might be the late Fred Greenstein’s *Personality and Politics: Problems of Evidence, Inference, and Conceptualization* and its parsing through Jerrold Post’s *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior*. As to the shutdown, personality rises in its import to the degree that (1) the situation is ambiguous with incomplete, contradictory information, even too much undifferentiated information; (2) one has no preconceived and normative thought matrix to handle information and possible options; (3) there appear to be few and also less significant sanctions for one’s preferred options; (4) personality proclivities and predispositions lead one to a very different perspective than one what most other people think; (5) one is less bound within a group decisionmaking process; (6) one feels less bound or obligate to follow the lead of others; (7) one is more emotionally involved in the political issue; (8) one puts more effort into resolving the political issue; (9) one acts more on impulse as opposed to contemplation; and (10) one feels more free of obligations to act in a specific manner. More specifically to the elements of unconscious psychodynamic conflict, personality becomes more significant to the degree that (1) aspects of the political situation in some way mirror aspects of the unconscious conflict; (2) the conflict(s) are more intense; and (3) there’s a congruence of certain behavioral options with satisfaction of unconscious needs related to conflict.

Yet, in the aftermath of the shutdown of the shutdown, analyses of what happened largely address rational and logical calculations as to what is actually required for border security; how various kinds of a “wall” meet these requirements; what suffices to be a “wall”; what should serve as legal and illegal immigration policies; implications for the success of the Trump Presidency, a Trump re-election campaign; even the “political chops” of US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Too often, however, one’s irrational and illogical elements of personality—irrational and illogical in that the elements do not

directly conform to the objective requirements of the political issue—serve as a smoking gun for victory, defeat, and the yet-to-be-determined.

**References:** Axelrod, E. (Ed.). (1976). *Structure of Decision: The Cognitive Maps of Political Elites*. Princeton University Press; Barber, J. D. (1972). *Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; Frances, A. (2017). *Twilight of American Sanity: A Psychiatrist Analyzes the Age of Trump*. NY: William Morrow; Frank, J. A. (2018). *Trump on the Couch: Inside the Mind of the President*. NY: Avery; Greenstein, F. (1975). *Personality and Politics: Problems of Evidence, Inference, and Conceptualization*. Norton; Hermann, M. (1976). When leader personality will affect foreign policy. In J. N. Rosenau (Ed.). *In Search of Global Patterns*. NY: Free Press; Lasswell, H. (1930). *Psychopathology and Politics*. University of Chicago Press; Lee, B. X. (2017). *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess the President*. NY: Thomas Dunne Books; McAdams, D. (June 2016). The Mind of Donald Trump. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/the-mind-of-donald-trump/480771>. Post, J. (2004). *Leaders and Their Followers in a Dangerous World: The Psychology of Political Behavior*. Cornell University Press; Volkan, V. D. (1980). Narcissistic personality organization and reparative leadership. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 30, 131-152.

**Keywords:** Conflict. Personality. Political. Psychology. Trump. Unconscious.

**Abstract/Description:** This article identifies factors influencing how significant a leader's personality affects political decision making and behavior.

**Disciplines:** Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

To comment on this article, please go online to <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol19/iss1/4>