

# HOW A LEADER'S PERSONALITY INFLUENCES SANCTION IMPLEMENTATION

A Case Study On U.S. Sanctions Against Venezuela

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## Abstract

Why are leaders still imposing sanctions when previous research has shown that sanctions are rarely effective in reaching their goals? This thesis will look at personality traits as one of the possible factors contributing to the decision to implement sanctions. In order to conduct an introductory research into the link between sanction imposition and personality traits, this thesis will contain a case study of U.S. sanctions against Venezuela between 2015 and 2023. Using the ProfilerPlus Tool for Leadership Trait Analysis, this thesis will study the personality traits of U.S. presidents Obama, Trump and Biden during their sanction imposition on Venezuela. Spontaneous interviews of these three presidents will be used in order to generate a profile of their personality traits, which will be analysed and linked to the sanctions they have implemented against Venezuela. This first look into personality traits as a factor in the decision-making process concludes that three personality traits might have an influence. These three traits are: distrust, in-group bias and the belief that one can control events.

Waarom leggen leiders nog steeds sancties op als eerder onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat sancties zelden effectief zijn in het bereiken van hun doelen? Deze thesis zal onderzoeken of persoonlijkheidskenmerken één van de mogelijke factoren zijn die bijdraagt aan de beslissing om sancties te implementeren. Deze thesis zal een casestudy van Amerikaanse sancties tegen Venezuela tussen 2015 en 2023 bevatten, om het verband tussen de keuze om sancties op te leggen en persoonlijkheidskenmerken te bestuderen. Met behulp van de ProfilerPlus Tool zal deze studie uitgevoerd worden volgens de Leadership Trait Analysis methode. Hierbij zal de ProfilerPlus Tool spontane interviews van Obama, Trump en Biden analyseren. Hierna worden deze analyses vergeleken met een steekproef van andere wereldleiders om zo een beeld te krijgen van zeven persoonlijkheidskenmerken die een rol spelen in leiderschap. Uit dit onderzoek blijkt dat drie karakteristieken een mogelijke invloed hebben op de beslissing om sancties te gaan implementeren. Deze drie kenmerken zijn: wantrouwen, het bevoordelen van de eigen groep en het geloof dat men gebeurtenissen zelf kan beheersen.

## Introduction

The use of sanctions in foreign policy has gained a lot of prominence in the past couple of decades. Economic sanctions have been an attractive option for countries in order to avoid the financial and human costs of using military force. This tool of foreign policy has become one of the most widely used in the world, but we still do not have a comprehensive grasp of the multifaceted nature of sanctions. Especially the United States has been at the forefront of implementing sanctions as a tool of statecraft, being responsible for a substantial majority of sanction regimes in the past century (Drury, 2001). This makes the U.S. the ideal candidate for research on sanction implementation. Because sanctions have been so widely used in foreign policy, it is important to know what conditions and factors lead leaders to make the decision to implement them.

Previous research on sanctions has mainly focused on aspects of sanctions *after* their implementation. One aspect of sanctions that has been widely researched is their effectiveness. These studies have shown that sanctions are rarely successful in reaching their objectives (Hufbauer et al., 1990; Pape, 1997; Elliott, 1998). Another aspect has been the effects of sanctions, with “effects” meaning the unintended consequences which were not the main objectives and goals of the sanction regime. Research surrounding these effects have concluded that sanctions often have negative effects on human rights (Parker, Foltz & Elsea, 2016), heighten corruption (Elliott, 2016) and have adverse effects on democratic freedoms (Peksen & Drury, 2010). However, there is still a gap in sanction research, namely, *when* leaders might initiate sanctions and the *conditions* that lead a leader to implement sanctions. Previous research has shown that sanctions are not very likely to reach their intended goals. So why are leaders still choosing to implement sanctions if they have been proven ineffective? What leads them to implement these sanctions and what factors may influence this decision-making process? These are questions that have not yet been clearly answered by research. Many factors can play a role in how a leader takes a decision, like the economic state of the country, personal and security interests, their personality, domestic pressures, et cetera. This thesis will focus on the influence of personality on sanction imposition and will try to answer the pertinent question: “*How do certain personality traits influence sanction implementation?*”. The goal of this research is to provide a first study on personality as one of the factors that can influence leaders into influencing sanctions.

This thesis will attempt to create an accurate analysis of the personality of President Obama, Trump and Biden. This analysis will be created by the method of *Foreign Policy Analysis*, using an automatic coding software called ProfilerPlus in order to get a full look into their personality traits and leadership styles. Since this thesis will try to link these personality traits to the presidents’ foreign policy decisions regarding sanctions against Venezuela, the scope of this study will be from the beginning of the sanction regime during Obama’s presidency in 2015 until the last interview used in this thesis during Biden’s presidency in November 2023. This scope ensures that the results of the personality analysis can be accurately linked to the interactions between the U.S. and Venezuela.

In order for this thesis to properly research which personality traits can have an effect on sanction implementation, it first must be made clear what sanctions are exactly and how they have historically been implemented. This will be discussed in the first section after this introduction. Afterwards, the effects, unintended consequences and effectiveness of sanctions will be laid out. This will give an idea of the negative effects sanctions can evoke. It will also show that sanctions are rarely effective in reaching their intended goals. The last part of the literature study will discuss research on U.S. presidents and which

national factors might play a role in sanction imposition. This part will mostly discuss research by Drury (2000, 2001, 2005), who has researched which conditions might influence a U.S. president into implementing sanctions. Their studies are mostly on domestic factors like employment and the job approval ratings of the presidents. This paragraph will show that there has not been a lot of research on the conditions and factors which lead to sanction imposition, which is why this thesis is an important addition to sanction research. After the literature study, there will be an overview of the sanction imposed, maintained or relaxed by Obama, Trump and Biden in order to gain full insight into the timeline of the sanction episode. After this, the methodology of *Foreign Policy Analysis* (FPA) will be explained. This thesis will use interviews taken of Obama, Trump and Biden in order to get a full look at their personality traits and leadership styles. Afterwards, the results will be discussed and conclusions will be drawn about certain personality traits being able to influence sanction imposition.

## Status Quaestionis

### What Are Sanctions?

In international politics, sanctions are a pivotal tool of statecraft used by a state to influence, coerce or punish other states or entities deemed to act against international or national norms or interests. These multifaceted measures will need to be explored in order to establish a solid base for this research study. This chapter will discuss the basics on sanctions and their historical context.

Political sanctions are a key tool in foreign policy which can be used by a certain state, also called a sender state, to signal that they want another state, the target state, to change their behaviour or certain policies with which the sender state disagrees (Baldwin & Pape, 1998). Sometimes, sanctions can be implemented to appease the domestic public when they demand intervention in a certain state (Davis & Engerman, 2003). There is a broad range of sanctions available for leaders to choose from. Trade sanctions, for instance, are often used to target entire countries. These trade sanctions can take the form of export restrictions, in which the sender state or a coalition of sender states will reduce their import from the targeted country. By doing this, the sender states reduce the targeted country's ability to purchase resources and supplies needed to protect themselves or keep their own economy running properly. Additionally, it has the added benefit of tariff protections for domestic businesses within the sender state. Another form of trade sanctions are import restrictions. Import restrictions entail banning certain goods from the sender state from getting exported to the targeted state. Especially military equipment and supplies relating to technology are often banned from being imported by the targeted state, since these are vital to support the military defensive of the state (Davis & Engerman, 2003). However, sanctions can also take on less harsh forms of punishment, like sport sanctions in which the sender states refuse athletes from the targeted country to participate in sporting events.

Individual sanctions, in particular, involve the sender states targeting specific individuals or non-state entities that have been linked to the disputed policy decisions of the targeted state. These individual sanctions can include measures like travel bans, asset freezes or arms embargoes. Ultimately, the range of individual sanctions can be extensive since the sender state needs to find a sanction regime which hits every individual as hard as possible. Every individual is different, so these individual sanctions need to be tailored to the person being targeted in the hopes that this will change their behaviour (Brooks, 2002).

Individual sanctions can serve many different purposes, for example to achieve democracy, to prevent war or to enforce human rights. The sender state can choose to enact sanctions when these purposes can not be achieved with diplomatic reasoning. The implementation of sanctions also costs a lot of money. Both the targeted state and the sender state bear the economic burdens and costs of enforcing sanctions. For instance, domestic businesses within the sender state may suffer financial losses when their trade with the targeted country is disrupted. As noted by Davis and Engerman (2003), sanctions are not an inexpensive way of trying to influence a certain state. This makes the implementation of sanctions a serious decision in which leaders might first want to explore other avenues of persuasion before settling on sanctions.

There has been a long history of sanctions being used by states to persuade other states to conform to their norms. The first time the use of sanctions was documented dates back to 432 BC., when the Athenian Empire blocked traders from another city-state from trading in its marketplace. Initially, in the late 1800s, economic sanctions were primarily used to block the export of strategic supplies to the targeted state during a war. The use of economic sanctions as a form of control short of starting a war has become more prevalent since the 20th century. The League of Nations especially has played a significant role in the growing use of economic sanctions. Notably, the League of Nations itself tried or threatened to impose multiple sanctions against, for example, Italy for invading Abyssinia in 1935 or against Japan for invading Manchuria in 1931. Yet, these attempts were not very fruitful because of a lack of political will within the League and because the United States was unwilling to provide meaningful support to the League (Alexander, 2009).

During World War II, both the United States and the United Kingdom targeted the Axis powers with sanctions which imposed strict export controls and asset freezes for certain individuals connected to or leading the Axis powers (Malloy, 2001). Post-World War II, the United Nations began overseeing the further development of sanctions. Throughout the Cold War period, the United States expanded its network of economic sanctions to countries adhering to communist ideologies, with expansive financial and economic restrictions against individuals and governments who were associated with communism. Subsequently, following the attacks on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent war on terrorism, the United States imposed significant economic sanctions against international terrorists and any organisations or governments who associated with them (Alexander, 2009).

The rise in globalisation has also caused a significant growth in the importance of international financial flows. This has increased the amount of international trade, which has made economic sanctions a very attractive option to control a countries' economy. However, this has also weakened the potential power of sanctions, as it is easier to get around the sanctions or to replace the lost economic connections with the sender state by connecting more with other states. Advancements in technology have also brought some pros and cons in terms of sanctions. On one hand, it has strengthened the power of sanctions by making it easier to track financial transactions and trade. But on the other hand it has also given targeted states more means to avoid or go around the imposed sanctions. It should also not be forgotten that target countries are rarely fully cut off from alternative markets. If the target countries are able to find a good alternative trade or financial partners, the effectiveness of economic sanctions declines (Davis & Engerman, 2003).



After many studies highlighted the enormous adverse effects of broad sanctions on the general public, the United States started using targeted sanctions in order to reduce the collateral damage of sanctions (Alexander, 2009). Targeted sanctions, also referred to as smart sanctions, are designed to target certain individuals or companies who are known to have pursued activities which the sender state is opposed to. This often pertains to individuals who are connected with or are part of the government in which the sender state wants to evoke change. The goal is to achieve policy change in the receiving state without devastating the broader population (Grossman et al., 2018). During the signing of the Iran Sanctions Act, President Obama (2015) noted: *“even as we increase pressure on the Iranian government, we’re sending an unmistakable message that the United States stands with the Iranian people as they seek to exercise their universal rights.”* This quote is a prime example of the use of targeted sanctions as a way to enact policy change, while also trying not to damage society in general.

### How Do Sanctions Work?

Sanctions are a form of foreign policy as, by implementing sanctions, the leader of the sender state signals what they want to the targeted state. By being a foreign policy decision, sanctions will always differ. There can be a difference in the timing of the sanction, their aim, goals, the type of sanction, who sanctions and who is being sanctioned, and so forth. Consequently, this makes it useful to look at every implementation of a sanction regime individually, in order to get a clear understanding of the how and why of the sanctions. In order to facilitate this type of research, the Targeted Sanctions Consortium (TSC) has introduced the concept of ‘sanction episodes’. Sanctions episodes are ways of recognising different phases in the implementation process of sanctions regimes. These sanction episodes make it easier to distinguish when the situation changes, for example when the leader of a sender state decides to alter the sanctions or to change the purpose of the sanctions. Each episode can be analysed to get a full view of the effectiveness of the sanctions and the effect on the targeted state. The TSC states that when doing a case-study on sanctions, a sanction episode should last until there are significant changes in the sanction regime, like tightening, expanding or relaxing sanctions. This makes it so that the differences in sanction episodes can be studied wholly (Biersteker et al., 2016).

The position of sanctions within tools of statecraft has been a subject of contention among researchers, notably addressed by Baldwin (1985) and Drury (2001). Baldwin (1985) categorises sanctions as one of three primary tools which follow a rank order. This order goes from diplomacy to economic sanctions to military forces. Every rank contains a stronger form of statecraft than the one before. This characterisation is heavily disputed by Drury (2001) who posits that sanctions are not just a step between diplomacy and military force. He argues that sanctions can serve as a crucial strategy, especially in instances where the sender country wants to confront severe issues in the target state, such as human rights violations. These violations might not necessitate direct military force. Instead, sanctions could be a preferred means to incentivise behavioural changes in the target state.

Sanctions encompass various dimensions, with different purposes, intentions and objectives, all contributing to different outcomes and reactions from the target state. Those involved in formulating and implementing sanctions need to be acutely aware of these multifaceted factors in order to make sure the sanctions have their intended reactions and effects. Next will follow a rundown of the most important theories on sanctions.

One of the first theories on sanctions is the naïve theory. This theory postulates that there is a limit to how much value can be deprived from a political system. When this limit is reached, there will be a rapid political disintegration, which will inevitably lead to surrender or negotiation. The problem with this theory is that it disregards adaptation. When a state is being sanctioned, it can simply adapt to the situation without reaching that limit leading to political disintegration. Galtung (1967) states that there still remains an upper-limit, but this limit can only be reached just short of total destruction. This upper-limit cannot morally be reached, since it would create collateral damage. It would also pose problems for future partnerships or even just coexisting with the new leadership of the country. This could also cause the public of the target state to become vengeful towards the sender state, which could lead to dangerous revanchist groups (Galtung, 1967).

Another early theory on states sanctioning others, called the ‘punishment theory’, argues that if sanctions cause economic harm, it will directly lead to domestic political pressure in the targeted country. This domestic pressure forces the leaders to comply with the demands made by the sender state (Lektzian & Souva, 2007). Research by Morgan et al. (2009) has confirmed the significance of economic damage in determining the success of sanction episodes. Their study supports the notion that sanctions which inflict substantial economic harm on the target state tend to be more effective in achieving their intended objectives. This study underscores an important relationship between the severity of economic sanctions and the likelihood of concessions being made by the leaders in the targeted state.

When establishing certain sanctions, leaders have to make sure they have a clear idea of what the goal is behind their implementation. Well-defined objectives and ends in foreign policy decisions allows for better control over the ways and means of achieving those ends (Biscop, 2021). In 1986, James Lindsay put forth five possible aims for implementing sanctions. The first aim is compliance, wherein the sender state tries to get the target state to comply with their norms and policies. The objective of the compliance-sanctions is to force the target into changing their behaviour in a way that suits the sender states preferences. The next aim is subversion, in which the sender state tries to remove the current leaders or to overthrow the whole regime of the target state. Another aim is deterrence, where sanctions are utilised in order to deter the target state from actions or policies which the sender state has disputed in the past. The fourth aim is international symbolism, which is to use the sanctions to send a message communicating boundaries and disapproval of certain policies or regimes. The last aim described by Lindsay is domestic symbolism. By using sanctions containing this aim, the sender state tries to get public support for its foreign policies or it tries to curb internal criticism. It is important for leaders to keep these aims in mind when preparing sanctions for implementation. Leaders must be aware which aims their sanctions target in order to correctly evaluate the effectiveness of the sanctions in the future. Sanctions can have multiple aims at the same time, based on what the leaders of the sender state want to achieve. All of the objectives that can be posited to start implementing sanctions, whether it's forestalling war; achieving human right, freedom or democracy; or freeing captured citizens, can be aligned with at least one of these aims (Davis & Engerman, 2003).

During the preparation process of sanctions, it must be known how the sender state wants to influence their target. Biersteker, Eckert and Tourinho (2016) have put forth three ways in which sanctions can intend to influence their targets. Firstly, there is coercion, which is the attempt to change the target's behaviour. Secondly, there is constraint, this is restricting the target's capability to achieve their objectives. This could for example be by blocking the target's access to certain resources. Lastly, there is signalisation, in which the sender state tries to use their sanctions to signal the importance of international norms to the target state.

The imposition of sanctions can trigger various reactions among the general populace of the targeted state, this generates a spectrum of sentiments which can lead to different levels of effectiveness for sanctions. In a 2018 research paper by Grossman, Manekin and Margalit, different sorts of reactions by the general populace of a targeted state were categorised into three distinct groups. These different reactions can have a different effect on how the sanction episode plays out and how effective the sanctions can be. The first is termed the deprivation effect, which causes the public to turn away from the government and the policies which have been the target of the sanctions. Sanctions can cause great economic costs to the targeted nation. These costs can become an instigator for the public to protest against their government. This is especially the case for democracies, since their leaders are closer to the public and its opinion (Bolks & Al-Sowayel, 2000). The second effect Grossman et al. put forth is the backlash effect. This effect causes the public to support their government and leaders. This could be caused by nationalism and patriotism, which increases in-group solidarity (Pape, 1998). The leaders can brand the sanctions as foreign states meddling in their domestic politics. This effect causes the sanctions to be counterproductive.

Research of Peksen and Drury (2010) has also reiterated this possible effect sanctions can have. They state that economic coercion can create new incentives for the target state to restrict the democratic freedom of their citizens. They do this to undermine any attempt to challenge the leader's or government's authority. Their research also showed that the longer these sanctions are applied to a country, the greater the negative effect on democracy in the targeted country. The third effect is the distributional effect, which describes a situation in which the effects of the sanctions vary depending on different factors. Different groups throughout the sanctioned state might differentially be affected by the sanctions and their response may not be homogenous. Before implementing sanctions, leaders have to think about how the general public of the targeted state might react. The deprivation effect is the most desired effect, since the public will be more likely to force the government into changing the policies which the sanctions have targeted. Getting the backlash effect would be very unfortunate, since this will turn the citizens of the targeted country against the sender state, which makes it very hard to influence them.

Understanding the conditions under which sanctions are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes is essential in comprehending their effectiveness as a foreign policy tool. Grossman et al. (2018) highlight three conditions that increase the likelihood of targeted sanctions to produce their desired effect. When (1) the cost of a change in policy is lower than the cost of the sanction, (2) when the contested policy is less recognised by the general public as important and (3) when it is more difficult to push the costs of the sanctions from the targeted group to the rest of society, the sanctions are likelier to reach their intended effects. Furthermore, Kaempfer and Lowenberg (1999) posit that sanctions can help in emboldening the opposition by sending a signal of foreign support, this could mobilise the opposition's followers to react against the government and policies for which they are being sanctioned.

These possible aims, effects and conditions are important to consider when implementing sanctions to be agile in bringing changes to the sanctions when needed and to make sure that the intended goals of the sanctions are successfully reached. These dimensions also show that every sanction episode can be different and that each of these sanction episodes should be studied, since there are always differences between them that can be researched to uncover new insights on sanctions.

Sanctions have been proven to be dynamic foreign policy decisions. No sanctions episode looks exactly the same as episodes that have come before it. Sanction episodes can be one-off cases in which a country implements one type of sanction, without changing it until the sanction episode comes to an end by repealing the sanctions. But sanctions can also be long lasting, with the sender state adding or subtracting sanctions to convince the targeted state to change their behaviour. All the different dimensions and factors to sanctions, as well as the timing when implementing or changing them, can all have an impact on the effects the sanctions bring with them and their effectiveness. In the next section, the effectiveness of sanctions will be discussed.

## The (Unintended) Consequences of Sanctions

As the literature in the sections above suggests, leaders and states have different goals when they implement sanctions. Whether these goals are often or not reached will be discussed in a section below. What leaders implementing sanctions also need to be acutely aware of are the (unintended) consequences of their decision to start a sanction episode. In the last decades, there has been an uprising in research into the effects and unintended consequences of sanctions. As mentioned above, the United States switched from general sanctions to targeted sanctions after research showed that general sanctions had enormous adverse effects on the populations of targeted nations (Alexander, 2009). This chapter will delve deeper into some of the possible effects and unintended consequences that (targeted) sanctions can have.

One of the unintended effects of sanctions that has been researched are the negative effects on human rights in the target state. One of these studies was conducted by Parker, Foltz and Elsea (2016). It focused on U.S. sanctions that discouraged companies from sourcing “conflict minerals” from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The study’s conclusion revealed that the impact of these sanctions extended beyond the villages financially tied to mines controlled by armed groups. Even villages economically relying on “conflict-free” minerals faced unintended consequences due to the sanctions. It is more costly for companies to check if the supply chain is conflict-free, than to move to another source of materials. This has resulted in a rise in infancy mortality rates for both the villages relying on “conflict minerals” as for villages relying on “conflict-free minerals”. This is one example of how good-meaning sanction regimes can also have unintended consequences for citizens which have not been targeted. Parker, Foltz and Elsea (2016) advise policy makers to be aware of the possible detrimental effects on human rights when deciding to implement sanctions.

While sanctions are often issued with the intention of combating corruption and bringing democracy to the target countries, this can have the opposite reaction. For example, Elliott (2016) researched the impacts of targeted sanctions issued by the United Nations. One of their findings was that among the fifty-three sanction episodes researched, thirty-one cases showed an increase in corruption or other criminal activities. This result holds particular significance for this research paper, since one of the primary objectives stated for the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela was to combat corruption within the Maduro government.

Additionally, Peksen and Drury (2010) conducted an extensive study using a time-series cross-national data study spanning a 28-year period. The aim was to identify and examine negative impacts of economic sanctions. Their findings concluded that the presence of economic sanctions is likely to have an adverse effect on the political liberties within targeted countries. Targeted leaders perceive the economic sanctions as an external threat to their authority. This prompts them to restrict democratic freedoms even more in order to undermine this perceived threat. Furthermore, their research also revealed that the longer the economic sanctions are in place, the more pronounced negative effects are on democratic levels within the

targeted countries. Moreover, this study also demonstrated that as the sanction regime becomes more extensive, cutting off the economic ties between the sender and the targeted state, it increasingly harms the targeted country's democratic levels.

These results are interesting since they reveal a paradox: while sender state's often implement sanctions with the intention of promoting democratisation in other states, they tend to have the opposite effect, reducing the democratic levels in the targeted state. Peksen and Drury (2010) also highlight that the leaders of the targeted country can use the economic turmoil resulting from sanctions as a tool to control the access to and subsequently redistribute resources made scarce by sanctions. This enhances their authority and weakens the opposition. Because the regime is in control of the market and goods entering the country, they can determine how to distribute wealth. This means that they can limit resources to the opposition, while redirecting wealth to themselves. These examples underscore how sanctions can have negative effects and unintended consequences in the countries they target. The paragraphs above highlight the need for leaders to carefully consider ethical and moral considerations alongside their intended political or economic objectives when deciding to implement sanctions. Because sanctions, while intended to bring about change or compliance, can inadvertently harm civilians, impact human rights, and worsen living conditions for the affected communities. These effects can be stronger or milder depending on different factors including how the targeted state reacts, the type of sanctions being issued and the length of the sanction episode. These elements must be considered and taken into account during the decision-making process regarding sanctions.

### The Effectiveness of Sanctions

As shown in the preceding sections, sanctions can have different goals, aims, implementations, effects and unintended consequences. However, the question that remains is whether the deployment of sanctions has historically been effective. This question has been widely debated throughout the scientific community, with different opinions as a result. It is important to note that even the question of what counts as 'effective' has been a controversial matter. Pape (1997), for example, supported a high threshold. What counted for them as an effective sanction episode was if the targeted state totally submitted to the external pressure put on them by the sender state. Going by this threshold to measure the effectiveness of sanctions, Pape (1997) concluded that only 10% of all imposed sanctions at the time could be considered successful. Other scientists debated for a lower threshold in order to label a sanction episode as effective (Baldwin, 1986; Hufbauer et al., 1990; Elliott 1998). They argue that sanctions could still be seen as effective, even though they did not result in the total submission of the targeted country. They accept sanctions as effective when the target state partially concedes with the policy objectives of the sender state or even when they accept to negotiate with the sender state. According to research using this view on the effectiveness of sanctions, about 35% of all sanctions at the time were deemed successful (Hufbauer et al., 1990).

Certain studies have concluded that sanctions are more effective when they are being issued by international institutions than when they have been implemented by single states or ad hoc coalitions of states (Miers & Morgan, 2002; Bapat and Morgan, 2009; Early & Spice, 2015). Another factor which makes sanctions more effective is the amount of other countries supporting the sanction imposition. The support of other states reduces the chance of private actors and third-party states interjecting and helping the targeted state to bypass the sanctions. This makes it more difficult for the targeted state to shift its trade to alternative markets in order to lessen the impact of the sanctions (Early & Spice, 2015).

The goal of the sanction episode is also important when looking for the effectiveness of sanctions. The evidence shows that sanctions with less ambitious objectives, like releasing political prisoners, are more likely to be achieved. Broader sanction objectives like a political regime change or to reduce military engagement of the target state are harder to achieve using sanctions (Hufbauer et al., 1990; Ang & Peksen, 2007). The use of sanctions to achieve these broader goals could even have the opposite effect, reducing political freedoms in the target state (Peksen & Drury, 2010; Adam & Tsarsitalidou, 2019). This phenomenon, which has already been discussed in the section on sanction effects, could drastically reduce the effectiveness of sanctions.

Scholars also note that democratic states are more likely to concede to sanctions than dictatorships (Kaempfer, Lowenberg & Mertens, 2004; Allen, 2008; Major 2012). This phenomenon can be explained by multiple factors. According to some of these scholars, autocratic leaders are more likely to defy the sanctions by avoiding the intended costs to themselves and their supporters. As a leader of the targeted country, they can diverge the scarce wealth and resources back to themselves and their supporters. As a result, the citizens and their rivals will have less of these resources. This means that the brunt of the sanctions falls on the average population and the opposition, which negates the implemented sanctions. Another explanation is that democratic leaders rely on the support of their citizens in order to gain power. They cannot bear to shift the costs of the sanctions to the general population because they still need support from their constituents. Democratic regimes also have strong traditions regarding the rule of law and checks and balances, which results in less repression of the opposition in economic recessions. This gives the democratic leaders more incentives to agree to the demands of the sender state in order to avoid the effects of sanctions on their economy.

The effectiveness of the sanctions also depends on the type of sanctions. Conventional sanctions were popular in the 20th century, however, targeted sanctions have since mostly replaced conventional sanctions in the last two decades. This shift was the result of a thought process in which targeted sanctions were thought to be more effective than their conventional counterparts. The theory at the time was that these sanctions were aimed at specific individuals and sectors, which would put direct pressure on the key actors being targeted and their supporters. Another theory was that they were thought to cause less humanitarian crises and other negative effects on the general population of the targeted country. However, there has been no strong evidence that targeted sanctions are more successful than conventional ones (Eriksson, 2011; Drezner, 2011; Biersteker, Eckert & Tourinho, 2016).

In 2016, Biersteker, Eckert and Tourinho studied a sanction database which comprised 23 UN targeted sanctions episodes. This study revealed that only 22% of the examined cases were successful in reaching their primary objective. This is lower than the previously mentioned rate of effectiveness reported in Hufbauer et al.'s study, which was a success-rate of 34%. In the same study, Biersteker, Eckert and Tourinho also studied if sanctions were more successful in coercion into a change in behaviour or in signalling international norms. The results showed that targeted sanctions were effective 27% of the time when trying to signal international norms and only 10% of the time when trying to coerce the targeted country into changing their behaviour.

The only exception to this low success-rate of targeted sanctions are financial sanctions. Financial sanctions are restrictions on access to global trade and banking activities, and to financial assets held by the targets outside of their state. Rosenberg et al. (2016) analysed 22 cases of U.S. financial sanctions in order to determine their effectiveness. This study concluded that financial sanctions are successful in obtaining their goal about 40% of the time. This makes the success-rate of U.S. financial sanctions higher than the previously mentioned 34% success-rate of Hufbauer et al. and of Biersteker, Eckert and Tourinho. However, this study was only conducted on *U.S.* financial sanctions. The United States is dominant in the modern day global financial system, which makes it considerably harder for the sanction targets to avoid or shift the negative effects to others. Engaging in finance with these targets would result in reputational costs and potentially penalties from the U.S. government for banks and other financial entities (Peksen, 2019).

Conventional sanctions also suffer from their own negative effects. It has been well-researched that traditional modes of sanctioning might negatively affect humanitarian conditions (Peksen, 2011; Neuenkirch & Neumeier, 2016), income equality (Afesorgbor & Mahadevan, 2016), press freedom (Peksen, 2010), ethnic minority groups (Peksen, 2016) and, as mentioned above, political freedom (Peksen & Drury, 2009; 2010; Adam & Tsarsitalidou, 2019). However, targeted sanctions have also been found to have some pretty major negative effects. These adverse effects and unintended consequences have already been widely explored in the section above on *the Effects of Sanctions*. When we compare the adverse effects and the effectiveness of conventional and targeted sanctions, it shows that targeted sanctions are not only lower in their effectiveness, they might also result in major adverse effects on civilians in the targeted country.

The big question now remains why leaders are still inclined to implement sanctions, which motives they have for implementing sanctions and what factors can have an effect on this decision. There have been some suggestions on why leaders might resort to implementing sanctions. These range from domestic concerns, public opinion and image protection to the leaders wanting to talk the talk and subsequently walk the walk. These factors all need to be studied in order for us to get a full view on what might push a leader towards implementing sanctions.

## U.S. Presidents and Sanction Implementation

As mentioned in one of the first sections in this research paper, sanctions are a reaction to the unwanted actions or behaviour of another country. However, Drury (2001) posits that sanctions are not only implemented because of direct pressure, which are the goals the president wants to pursue. He also states that sanction implementation partly comes to fruition after indirect pressure. Indirect pressure is the result of the leaders' competing goals, such as growing the economy, reelections, maintaining their political strength, etc. He states that sanctions are not only a way of punishing the targeted country, but that they are also a way of growing the leader's international reputation, defending the state's economic interests and security and of settling domestic unrest. So even if sanctions might not be very effective in changing the behaviour and actions of the targeted country, there can still be reasons for implementing future sanctions.

Foreign policy decisions can be influenced by many factors, like increasing the states' economic and security interests, while also being conditioned by the actions and reactions of other state's to the leaders' goals and actions. The leader will consider both international and the national when making foreign policy decisions. One theory on this is the diversionary theory of war, which states that leaders will be more likely to engage in foreign policy when there are more domestic disputes (Jung, 2019). Drury (2001), also posits that domestic politics affect foreign policy decisions by putting indirect pressure on the president. These



theories show that not only the international is important in considering why sanctions are being implemented, national interests and pressure must also be taken into account.

There has not been a lot of research done on the motivations and conditions for sanction implementation. The only study that revolves around this subject is by Cooper Drury (2000; 2001; 2005), who studied large databases of U.S. sanctions. He concluded that there is a modest effect of job approval ratings influencing the imposition of sanctions. This means that when a U.S. president has a higher job approval rating, they will be more likely to impose economic sanctions. Drury also concluded that a high rate of unemployment had an effect on sanction imposition, with U.S. presidents being more likely to implement sanctions when there was a high rate of unemployment. Drury's studies (2000; 2001; 2005) show that domestic factors do indeed play a role in the decision to implement sanctions.

Sadly, since Drury's research on U.S. sanction implementation in the early 2000's there has barely been any research done on the motives and conditions of sanction implementation. Especially with the previous literature clearly stating that most sanction regimes are not (very) successful and potentially carry many adversarial effects, this research paper is an important addition in research on the motives for the decision to implement sanctions.

## Research

### U.S. Sanctions on Venezuela

Obtaining an overview of the sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Venezuela is essential for this research study. This overview will paint a picture on the acceleration and relaxation in sanction imposition during specific presidential administrations. Since this research will be focussing on Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden, this overview will exclusively include the sanctions imposed on Venezuela during their respective presidencies. The overview of Joe Biden's sanctions on Venezuela will extend until November 2023 for the sake of a clear delineation of the period being researched.

The overview below will also primarily focus on Executive Orders (E.O.), which are implemented by the presidents themselves, rather than other institutions in the U.S. system. An executive order is an order by the U.S. president or a governor. It has the force of law, which means it does not require any action by the U.S. Congress, it also cannot be overturned by Congress. However, the U.S. Congress may pass legislation that can impede the execution of the executive order by, for example, defunding it (ABA, 2021). This makes executive orders significant for this study since it is a decision made by the president, which reflects what their goals are in terms of foreign policy. This is why the overview below will mostly focus on the executive decisions made by Obama, Trump and Biden. It will offer a comprehensive depiction of the evolution regarding presidential decisions on sanctions imposed on Venezuela.

During President Obama's tenure, the initial sanctions on Venezuela were instituted in 2014 by the U.S. Congress in response to what they deemed as anti-democratic actions, human rights violations and corruption. These sanctions were a direct response to the repression of student-led protests and the involvement in human rights violations by the Maduro government and Venezuelan officials. This act was called the *Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014*. The act mandated President Obama to impose sanctions against the people whom he identified as the perpetrators of these violations. This was the first legislative act targeting the Venezuelan government following sanctions relating to drug trafficking and terrorism in 2005 and 2006 (Congress.gov, 2014).



President Obama played a significant role in this Congressional Act by identifying the perpetrators of human rights violations. Originally, these sanctions were set to be imposed until the end of 2016, but they were later extended until 2019 (Congress.gov, 2014). In 2015, President Obama issued an executive order specifically targeting people involved in anti-democratic actions and human rights violations within Venezuela. This executive order led to asset freezes and visa revocations for seven Venezuelan officials (Congressional Research Service, 2023). Thus, President Obama was instrumental in the implementation of two sets of sanctions on Venezuela, one of which was through an executive order issued by himself.

President Trump introduced his first sanctions on Venezuela in August of 2017. This executive order prohibited the access of the Venezuelan government to U.S. financial markets. This also included the access of the *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PdVSA)*, the state-owned oil and gas company. Subsequently, Trump also introduced a second executive order in March 2018. This executive order prohibited any transactions involving currency given out by the Venezuelan government. This essentially means that any trade transactions using Venezuelan coins, banknotes, digital currency or tokens were strictly prohibited within the U.S. or by U.S. citizens or companies (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

In May 2018, Donald Trump issued another executive order with additional financial sanctions. This executive order specifically targeted any transactions pertaining to the Venezuelan debt or debt owed to Venezuela which was pledged as collateral (Davis, 2018). Following this, Trump issued another executive order in November 2018 which put forth a framework intended to seize assets and prevent transactions with any individual whom the Secretary of Treasury determined to engage in certain crucial sectors of the economy or transactions with the Maduro government. According to the Congressional Research Service (2023), approximately 24 people in Venezuela have been pursued by this executive order after assisting key actors in the Maduro government and PdVSA in bypassing the sanctions on oil. Consequently, the Secretary of Treasury determined that the PdVSA was also a subject to the U.S. sanctions due to their operations in the oil sector of the Venezuelan economy. This resulted in all the property of the PdVSA and interests which were the property of the PdVSA that were subject to the U.S. jurisdiction to be blocked from trading. This ultimately prohibited any U.S. citizens or companies to engage in transactions with the PdVSA. Additionally, the state-owned gold company *Minerven* also faced sanctions due to the executive order of November 2018, as it was determined that they were utilising illicit gold in order to support Maduro and his government.

President Trump's final executive order was issued in August of 2019. This order prohibited any U.S. citizens or companies from engaging in trade with the Maduro government unless the transaction was authorised by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). This executive order also made it possible to restrict the visas and to financially sanction any non-U.S. persons who tried to assist the Maduro government (Congressional Research Service, 2023). In total, Donald Trump issued five executive orders in order to sanction Venezuela. This is a notable acceleration in the amount of sanctions which his predecessor President Obama had issued.

Another significant difference between the executive orders during the administrations of President Obama and President Trump lies not only in their numbers, but also in the nature of the sanctions.. Obama's sanctions were very much targeted, focusing on specific individuals or companies by freezing their assets or blocking their visas. These targets were assisting the actors responsible for the crimes against human rights and/or helped the corrupt government. President Trump's sanctions were more general than Obama's. They targeted *any* U.S. person with a financial connection to the Venezuelan government or the state-owned oil and gold companies. Even going as far as in 2019 to target non-U.S. citizens who assisted Maduro's government, subsequently cutting the government off from important international transactions. Consequently, this not only cut the government off, but it also slowed down the Venezuelan economy as a whole. The state-owned mining company and especially the PdVSA played a big role in the Venezuelan economy. By implementing financial sanctions on these two companies, the U.S. government effectively cut off Venezuela from a major part of U.S. markets.

Oil is Venezuela's biggest export, representing a whopping 85% of their total exports (Lloyds Bank, 2023). By targeting the country's ability to export oil, the U.S. managed to restrict one of their biggest sources of income. Since the U.S. is an influential geopolitical power in the region, they are able to have enormous effects on Venezuela's biggest sector. However, this not only cut off a financial flow to Maduro's government and other actors in the corruption and human rights cases. It also affected the Venezuelan population. Corruption often entails corrupt elites controlling cash flows, keeping it at their level and blocking it from trickling down to their citizens. By targeting the Venezuelan elites with these sanctions, the U.S. might have caused the poverty levels in Venezuela to rise. Weisbrot and Sachs (2019) and Brown (2020) have posed in their papers that the U.S. sanctions might have been the catalyst for the current humanitarian crisis and the refugee movement towards Venezuela's neighbouring countries. However, after these all-encompassing sanctions during Trump's presidency, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) did try to aid the Venezuelan citizens. The OFAC started to issue licences authorising transactions pertaining to the delivery of life-saving materials like food, medicine and agricultural commodities. It also permitted international organisations and communications services to help the Venezuelan population (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

After assuming office in 2021, Joe Biden has largely upheld the pre-existing sanctions. However, in November 2022, the Department of Treasury did permit Chevron, a U.S. oil company, to partly resume their operations in Venezuela. This slight relaxation in the sanctions was a result of the Maduro government returning to negotiations with the opposition (Congressional Research Service, 2023). Subsequently, in October 2023, the Biden Administration announced that the sanctions on the Venezuelan oil sector would significantly be eased. The U.S. Department of Treasury will allow the resumption of the production and export of oil by the PdVSA to the United States without any limitations for a period of six months. This decision was the result of a deal between the Venezuelan government and opposition parties. This deal is an important step in the democratisation of Venezuela as they will be accepting international monitoring during the upcoming 2024 elections (Spetalnick & Parraga, 2023).

Simultaneously, the Biden Administration also issued a licence for the state-owned gold company Minerven, once again authorising transactions with the company in an attempt to reduce any illicit gold trading that might further support the Maduro government. Additionally, the Treasury Department also decided to remove bans on any transactions involving Venezuelan bonds, and PdVSA debt and equity trading. However, it was also announced that these relaxations could always be reversed should the Maduro government not comply with the terms set up for the 2024 Venezuelan elections (Congressional Research

Service, 2023). This relaxation in sanctions signifies that the U.S. is willing to reward Venezuela for setting up democratic institutions. This study will only cover Biden's presidency until November 2023. Up until this point, President Biden has not issued any executive orders to impose sanctions on Venezuela. The Biden Administration has largely upheld most of the sanctions issued by President Trump, with exception to easing certain sanctions in response to the upcoming Venezuelan elections in 2024.

The overview presented above clearly delineates the evolution in the implementation and relaxation of U.S. sanctions against Venezuela. President Obama was the first person to issue an executive order in response to human rights violations and corruption by the Maduro government. After which, President Trump notably accelerated both the quantity and the severity of the sanctions being implemented. Subsequently, President Biden chose to not implement more sanctions on Venezuela. Instead, the administration opted for the maintenance of Trump's sanctions and while also selectively relaxing these sanctions where needed in response to internal events of democratisation and negotiations with the Maduro government. This evolution is very intriguing, highlighting how different U.S. presidents possess the authority to make different decisions in response to international relations. But what prompts different presidents to make these differing decisions? Which factors have an influence on these decisions? This study will posit that the personality traits of these three U.S. presidents could have an influence on their decision to implement, maintain or ease sanctions towards Venezuela. The next section will lay out the theoretical framework used in this study. It will also explain how Leadership Trait Analysis will be used in this study and why it is a suitable method for assessing the personality traits of leaders from a distance.

## Methodology

### Theoretical framework

Because this study aims to research the foreign policy decisions of the three most recent U.S. presidents regarding their decisions on sanction implementation towards Venezuela, it falls into the study of *Foreign Policy Analysis* (FPA). The study of Foreign Policy Analysis attempts to explain and predict how states, institutions and leaders make certain foreign policy decisions, the effect these decisions could have and why these decisions were made. Foreign policy decisions are a complex and layered topic, with many sources influencing the decisions being made. There are many actors that have an effect on foreign policy decisions, like NGOs, leaders, lobbies and citizens to name a few (Alden & Aran, 2017; Hudson & Vore, 1995; Smith et al., 2016).

FPA attempts to delve into the "*black-box*" of the decision-making process in foreign policy, examining its inner workings. This theoretical framework does not view nation-states as monolithic actors, but emphasises on the individuals within these states who wield influence and make critical decisions. It studies the leaders, bureaucratic institutes, ministers and citizens that have an impact on the decision-making of a certain country. FPA acknowledges that not every actor will react in the same way to a situation and considers that reactions or decisions may not always be entirely rational. Researchers using FPA believe that actors might not react truly rationally due to perfect information not being available. Numerous factors can influence the way someone reacts to a situation. Situations might be interpreted differently, there might be hidden agendas in play or the person might have ideological or emotional motivations which influence them (Smith et al., 2016). This makes FPA a suitable framework for this study, as it examines the decision-making process of actors in foreign policy. This study will concentrate on the foreign policy decisions of Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden. It will take a closer look into why they made certain policy decisions in the implementation or relaxation of sanctions towards Venezuela. This study is

particularly relevant as prior research has indicated the limited effectiveness of sanctions (for example: Hufbauer et al., 1990; Pape, 1997; Biersteker, Eckert & Tourinho, 2016).

Since this study will be focussing on personality as an explanation for why certain leaders continue to choose to implement sanctions, it will also be situated within the theoretical framework of political psychology. This framework uses techniques that have originated from psychology as a way of understanding politics and political decisions. Researchers within this framework start from the idea that political decisions are not made inside a vacuum. These decisions are made by real individuals and groups of decision-makers. These decision-makers are shaped by their previous experiences, beliefs, personalities and connections to other people. These traits collectively shape how they will react in and to the world, consequently influencing how and why they make certain (political) decisions. Therefore, studying key decision-makers and their personal attributes can thus be valuable for gathering information in understanding the motivations behind a leader's decisions and their potential future reactions (Cottam, 2004; Huddy, 2013).

The literature that has been written on sanctions has proved that sanctions are not very likely to be successful, so why are some leaders still making the decision to implement sanctions? Is there a link in a person's personality and their decision to implement sanctions even though they might have no effect or when they could result in negative, unintended consequences? This thesis will endeavour to address this question by using the political psychology framework, looking at the personalities of Obama, Trump and Biden and their proclivity to implement, maintain or relax sanctions against Venezuela. This can be done by using Leadership Trait Analysis, a research method which will be explained below.

### Leadership Trait Analysis

This thesis will be using the research method of Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), a methodology popularised by Hermann (2005). LTA aims to analyse the personality traits and characteristics of certain leaders at a distance. Often, it is not possible to go in direct interview with the leaders being analysed in research, for example due to inaccessibility to the leader or because they are unwilling to cooperate in participating in interviews for research purposes. This makes methods that can positively measure at a distance very important in the research of leaders and policymakers. Previous research has linked the personality of leaders with their political behaviour (Byars, 1973; Snyder, 1987; Suedfeld, 1992). The LTA-method is a way of analysing a leader's personality and comparing it to their political behaviour. Hermann (2005) developed the Leadership Trait Analysis method as a way to study a leader's personality traits by looking at their verbal communication. This methodology operates on the assumption that individuals express a part of their personality through the way they phrase their sentences and which words they choose. The more the leader uses a certain word or phrase, the more important this content is to them. Consequently, LTA looks at the way the leaders use certain words, since certain words can carry an underlying meaning. These word choices can be linked to certain leadership traits and styles. For instance, excessive use of words like "we" and "our", might indicate a leaders' proclivity towards in-group bias (Hermann, 2005). More examples of how the presidents' responses will be analysed will be shown below when the seven different traits will be introduced.. This method of analysing leaders at a distance will be used in this research paper since it is not possible to get in contact with all three of these U.S. presidents.

In this papers' Leadership Trait Analysis, the Profiler Plus-tool will be used. This is an automatic text analyser that was developed by Social Science Automation Inc (Levine & Young, 2014). This tool will

automatically analyse the given text for the usage of certain keywords that can be indicative of a certain personality type or an emotion. This automatic process eliminates the mistakes that might occur during manual coding. This analysis will then be compared to other world leaders that have already been researched by the tool's creators. The Profiler Plus-tool draws from a database of 130 samples of world leaders that have been tested. By comparing the results of the researched leader to the samples, it can be determined if the researched leader scores higher, lower or at the average level in comparison to other world leaders on certain traits. Furthermore, it is also possible to check how significant the difference is between them (Hermann, 2005).

The Profiler Plus tool examines the given texts for seven personality traits. These traits are all analysed by looking at different types of words used. The ultimate scores for the traits will be determined by calculating a percentage of how many times certain words are used. These percentages will then be compared to a sample of scores of different world leaders on the same trait. The seven traits are based on research by Hermann (2005) and Brummer (2022) and are as follows:

1. **Belief in One's Control of Events (BACE):** This trait analyses the level in which the leader thinks that they themselves can control situations. Leaders with a high score in this trait will be more interested and will actively involve themselves in the decision-making process. The score on this trait is calculated by looking at the usage of certain verbs and action words. It is based on the analysis of interview responses in which the leader uses words which indicate that he or someone in his group has taken responsibility for the initiation or the planning of an action.
2. **Need for Power (PWR):** this describes how high the need for the leader is to gain and maintain power. The coding for the PWR trait also focuses on verbs. It is based on verbs used when the leader (a) proposes a forceful or strong action, (b) gives unsolicited advice, (c) attempts to steer another's behaviour, (d) tries to argue, persuade or bribe someone, (e) tries to impress or gain fame, and (f) is preoccupied with regulating their own status or position.
3. **Conceptual Complexity (CC):** this trait measures the degree to which a leader is aware of the multiple dimensions to a situation or topic. Leaders with a high score on this trait are more able to see differing reasons for taking a certain stance on a topic. In analysing this trait, the software focuses on particular words that might suggest that the leader is able to see different dimensions to a situation. A few examples of these words are: *possibility, trend, for example, approximately*, etc. Words that indicate a lower level of conceptual complexity are: *certainly, irreversible, absolutely, without a doubt*, etc.
4. **Self-Confidence (SC):** this describes how important the leader thinks that they are and how confident they are in their own skills and abilities. The focus for coding for self-confidence is on pronouns like *me, myself, I, mine* and *my*. These pronouns often point to an inflated sense of self-worth and self-confidence.

5. **Task Focus (TASK):** here the tool analyses what the leader focuses most on. If they score a high score on this trait, they are more likely to focus on problem-solving and completing tasks. These types of leaders want to move their group or government towards a certain goal. If they score a low score, they are more likely to focus on building and maintaining relationships. The emphasis for these leaders is on keeping the loyalty of their constituents. Previous research has shown that leaders who have an average score on the TASK trait are often highly charismatic leaders. These leaders will focus on what seems relevant at the moment (Byars, 1973; Bass, 1981). To analyse this trait, the software will look for task-oriented words and for words that are group-oriented. Some examples for the task-oriented words are: *plan, proposal, tactic, achievement, position, recommendation*, etc. Examples of words being analysed for group-oriented leaders are: *suffering, harm, liberation, collaboration, amnesty, disappointment, forgiveness, appreciation*, etc. The score on this trait is determined by calculating the percentage of task-oriented words relative to the total of task-oriented and group-maintenance words being used in the leader's responses.
  
6. **Distrust (DIS):** the coding for this trait measures how much the leader distrusts others and is suspicious of their motives. The focus on analysing distrust is on nouns and noun phrases which refer to people other than the leader and to groups which identify differently than the leader's own group. The leader's score is based on a percentage of how many times they express distrust in others.
  
7. **In-Group Bias (IGB):** This trait measures how much the leader values their own group above others. Leaders with a high score on this trait have a strong emotional bond with their own group and perceive their own group as the best. The coding for this trait focuses on words or phrases relating to the leader's own group. The software focuses on the modifiers used to describe the leader's own group favourably (e.g. *peace-loving, successful, prosperous, great*), to suggest the strength of their group (e.g. *endless resources, capable, powerful, has advanced greatly*) or to indicate a need to maintain the group's honour or identity (e.g. *defend our borders, decide our own policies, protect ourselves*)

Using these traits, Hermann (2005) also outlines three questions in order to get a deeper look into the leadership styles of the analysed leader. Leadership styles refer to the way a leader deals with problems and their decision-making process. The first question combines the BACE and PWR trait, which states: "*How does the leader react to constraints?*". This questions how the leader reacts to constraints put in their way and whether they challenge these constraints. Leaders with a high BACE and PWR score are in charge and tend to assert control, they will always strive to obtain their goal. Conversely, leaders with a low score on both of these traits are more likely to accommodate or respect possible constraints in their environments, they will try to get to their goal while also being mindful of the constraints. Leaders with an average score on these traits will be mindful of the constraints or move towards challenging them depending on the situation they are dealing with. If a leader scores a high score on BACE, but has a low to average score on PWR, they tend to challenge the constraints, but they may not be very adept at reading or manipulating their opponent as well as leaders with a higher score on PWR. Similarly, leaders that get a high score on PWR, but only a low to average score on BACE will also challenge constraints, but they will do so in a more indirect manner. They will be more likely to do so behind the scenes, subtly influencing their state's actions while being less accountable for the result (Hermann, 2005).

The second question posed is: “*How open is the leader to incoming information?*”. This question can be answered by looking at the SC and CC traits. Leaders who score higher on CC than SC are more likely to be open to input from others. They will also be more likely to care about the wants and needs of others. Their responses to situations are guided by situational cues, others’ input, and on what they feel is acceptable behaviour. Conversely, leaders who score higher on SC than on CC are driven by their ideology and principles to reach certain goals. They may be insensitive or unresponsive to situational cues and others’ opinions. They will pursue the option they believe will succeed. When the SC and CC scores are in the same range, then the behaviour of the leader will depend on whether both are high scores or low scores. If both scores are high, then the analysed leader will be more open and strategic. Their attention will be on means and ends which are feasible to achieve. Because of their high self-confidence, these leaders will have a high capacity of patience and they will often take their time to make the best choice available. Conversely, when a leader has a low score on both SC and CC, they will be more likely to closed off. They will often easily fixate on choices that seem to be the most likely to be successful (Hermann, 2005).

The last question pertains to the IGB, DIS and TASK traits and is formulated as follows: “*Why does the leader want to be the head of the country?*”. This question delves into the combination of the three traits in order to unravel the motivations as to why the leader is seeking authority. According to Bennis and Nanus (1997), and Heifetz (1994), leaders have certain reasons in their pursuit for a position of authority. Hermann (2005) states that leaders can be driven by either an internal, problem-solving drive or by the desire to get positive feedback from their environment. This question assesses both why the leader wanted to become the head of the country and their need to safeguard their position and the group they are leading.

The score on the TASK trait will give us a better view of why the leader wanted to become head of office. The IGB and DIS traits will explain their identification within the group. A high score on the TASK trait implies that the leader is focused more on tasks and problem-solving. They see their group as an instrument to solve problems. The focus is more on the substance of the problem and how to solve it than on the people involved. Conversely, leaders with a low score on the TASK trait will be more focused on maintaining the group and their relationships. They want to keep up the group morale and are more sensitive to the wants and needs of the people in their group.

A high score on the IGB trait implies that the leader is more interested in the maintenance of the distinct identity of their group. They do not want other groups, governments or states to interfere with the internal affairs of their group. They will be more likely to see the world in “*us versus them*”-terms. The higher the score on IGB, the more the leader will become aligned with their group. Contrarily, leaders with a low score on IGB are still interested in the maintenance of their group, but they are less likely to see the world in “*us versus them*”-terms. They will be more likely to use the “*us versus them*” categorisation if it suits the situation or problem at hand, but they are also willing to use positive interactions in conferences and diplomatic gestures as a way of tempering domestic grievances.

Leaders with a high score on the DIS trait are suspicious about other’s motives and actions, especially of those who are seen as enemies or competitor’s. This high level of distrust makes the leaders think that other people could be unreliable, which makes them want to accomplish things on their own in order to prevent any attempts of sabotage. Leaders with a low score on distrust tend to put things more into perspective and are less likely to be suspicious of every move a competitor makes. They believe that competitors are not always trying to sabotage them (Hermann, 2005).

Ultimately, the answers to these three questions can be used to categorise the leader into one of the eight leadership styles, which are displayed in table 1 below (Hermann, 2005).

Table 1: The eight leadership styles

Responsiveness to constraints (BACE + PWR traits)	Openness to information (SC + CC traits)	Motivation (TASK + IGB + DIS traits)	
		Problem focus	Relationship focus
Challenges constraints	Closed to information	<i>Expansionistic</i> : focus on expanding the leaders' and state's span of control	<i>Evangelistic</i> : focus on persuading others to join their mission in mobilising others around their ideology or message
Challenges constraints	Open to information	<i>Actively Independent</i> : focus on maintaining the manoeuvrability of themselves and their government in a world that is actively trying to limit them	<i>Directive</i> : focus on maintaining their and their government's status and being accepted by others by engaging in actions on the world stage that enhances the reputation of their state
Respects constraints	Closed to information	<i>Incremental</i> : focus on improving the security and/or economy of their state in incremental steps while avoiding inevitable obstacles along the way	<i>Influential</i> : focus on building cooperative relationships with other states and governments; by working with other's one can gain more than by working alone
Respects constraints	Open to information	<i>Opportunistic</i> : focus on assessing what is currently possible given what one wants to achieve and considering what their constituencies will allow	<i>Collegial</i> : focus on reconciling differences, building consensus, and gaining prestige and status through empowering others and sharing responsibility

Table 1: Leadership styles as a function of responsiveness to constraints, openness to information and motivation (Hermann, 2005)



## Hypotheses

Hypotheses will be employed to establish this study. There will be three hypotheses presented in order to study if personality traits have an influence on presidential decisions regarding U.S. sanctions on Venezuela. It has been established above that Obama, Trump and Biden had different reactions to the Maduro government in terms of sanctions. This makes it possible for this study to research certain personality traits in order to see if any of these could have an effect on these decisions. The hypotheses will be discussed in the paragraphs below.

### **Hypothesis 1: Barack Obama and Donald Trump will score higher on distrust (DIS) than Joe Biden.**

The distrust trait (DIS) measures how much the leader seems to be weary and doubt the motives of others. Leaders who score above average on distrust tend to be suspicious of others' actions and motives. This is especially the case for people or groups who are viewed as their competitors or for people who reject the leader's ideology (Hermann, 2005). This hypothesis is based on the assumption that Obama and Trump trust Maduro less to adhere to human rights, to democratise his country and to lessen the amount of corruption present in Venezuela. In the past, Maduro and his government have rejected the democratisation and westernisation of their country. This has been the catalyst for Obama to implement the first sanctions against Venezuela and it has been the reason as to why Trump built forth upon Obama's sanctions. A higher score on distrust would partly explain their choice to implement sanctions on Venezuela. Contrary to this, Biden would score a lower score on distrust than Obama and Trump. He has not implemented extra executive orders sanctioning Venezuela and during his presidency there has been more leniency towards Venezuela. This more accommodating stance could mean that he puts more trust in that Maduro and his government are able to steer towards democratisation in the future.

### **Hypothesis 2: Obama and Trump will score high on in-group bias (IGB), while Biden will score lower on in-group bias.**

The in-group bias trait is high in leaders with a strong emotional attachment to their in-group. This in-group encompasses the social, political or ethnic groups the leader belongs to. Leaders with a higher in-group bias feel that their in-group should hold the centre in the world stage. They have the view that their group is better than others and they will try to make decisions that favour their in-group, potentially disregarding possible severe adverse effects on groups outside the in-group. Leaders with a high in-group bias will tend to see the world with a "*us versus them*"-lens (Hermann, 2005). This hypothesis posits that Obama and Trump will have a higher in-group bias score than Biden, because they will do anything to spread their ideology of westernisation and democratisation. The imposition of sanctions is an attempt to punish the Venezuelan government and elites into submitting to human rights and democratisation. Obama and Trump implement these sanctions, even if it means that these sanctions could have severe adverse effects on the Venezuelan economy and the population in general. Conversely, the Biden Administration has been easing on these sanctions lately. This could potentially show he has a lower score on in-group bias. The Congressional Research Service (2023) pointed to the fact that this easing in sanction is not only because of the negotiations with Maduro and to advance the U.S. interests. They pointed out that this was also to improve the Venezuelan economy and to reduce the emigration flow from Venezuela.

### **Hypothesis 3: Obama and Trump will score higher on the belief that one can control events (BACE) than Biden**

The BACE trait is high in leaders who strongly believe that they as a person and leader of their country or organisation are capable to control and steer events in favour of their beliefs or goals as a leader. Literature on this trait suggests that politicians who score highly on this trait are more likely to make decisive decisions and take assertive political actions (Rohrer, 2014). This hypothesis states that Obama and Trump would score higher on the BACE trait because they were more decisive in making the decision to implement executive orders and to make the sanctions on Venezuela more strict. This hypothesis was also made from the assumption that Obama and Trump will believe that they are more able to control events, that is, that they would think they are able to control Maduro and his government into submission to the ideologies which the United States find more suitable. Conversely, Biden might score lower on this personality trait because he did not implement more sanctions on Venezuela. This might indicate that President Biden feels less inclined to believe he can control events and in this case Venezuela's and Maduro's behaviour. It could explain why the Biden Administration is looking into relaxing the sanctions in order for free elections to take place in 2024.

### **Data and Results**

In order to properly conduct a Leadership Trait Analysis, Hermann (2005) has set up some general rules. Spontaneous interviews have been deemed as the best source to do an analysis on the personality characteristics of leaders. Other forms of communication from leaders, like press releases, their social media presence or speeches, might not have been formulated by the leaders themselves. The contents of these forms of communication could have been written, pre-determined or checked by the leader's staff before being sent out to the world. They are not a correct representation of the personality or word choices of the leader. Hermann (2005) also suggests that the interview answers of the leader should amount to more than 5.000 words. The individual interview answers should amount to 100 words or more in length. The interviews chosen for this study all surrounded the topic of foreign policy. This was done in order to create a profile of the U.S. presidents that was context-specific to their foreign policies. The interviews were checked to see if they were consistent with the rules laid out by Hermann (2005) and quotes from other speakers were subsequently removed as these quotes represent the words of other people and not of the U.S. presidents being analysed. The questions of the interviewers were also removed for the same purpose. This way, the analysis will only include the personality of the presidents being analysed.

For Barack Obama's interviews 10.913 words were collected. These interviews were conducted by ABC News (2015), BBC News (2015), The Straits Times (2016) and Vox (2015). To get the most accurate portrayal of Obama's personality when he implemented the sanctions on Venezuela, the choice was made to gather interviews from 2015 and 2016. The choice to collect interviews from 2015 onward was made because this was when the sanction episode against Venezuela was started. The interview answers of Donald Trump spanned 10.716 words. His interviews were conducted by ABC News (2017), CBS News (2017) and NBC News (2019). These interviews occurred between 2017 and 2019. In order to get the same amount of words in the interview answers of Joe Biden, seven interviews had to be analysed. These seven interviews amounted to 10.046 words in total. The analysed interviews originated from ABC News (ABC News, 2021; Factba.se, 2023), The Associated Press (Factba.se, 2022a), CBS News (2023), Channel 12 (Factba.se, 2022b), CNN (2022a, 2022b, 2023) and PBS NewsHour (2023). These interviews were conducted between 2021 and November 2023. Several of the interviews on Joe Biden were transcribed by

the website Factbase (2022a, 2022b, 2023), these transcriptions were checked for possible errors and corrected where needed.

These interview answers were subsequently put into the Profiler Plus-tool, which performed an analysis of the answers based on the seven traits discussed above. The results of this analysis were then compared to a sample of world leaders in order to categorise the scores of the U.S. presidents. The most recent sample of leaders was published by Joshua E. Lambert in 2021, this sample can be seen in Table 1 below. In order to know how the analysed leader scored in comparison to the sample of world leaders, the score of the world leaders' sample must be subtracted from the analysed leader's score. The score gained from this subtraction must then be divided by the standard deviation. This process is summarised in this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Analysed leader's score} - \text{World leaders' mean score}}{\text{Standard deviation}}$$

The result of this formula, also called the Z-score, can thus be analysed in order to see how the analysed leader scores on the seven traits. This result can range from a low to an average to a high score according to the test results. When the Z-score deviates more than one standard deviation point from the norming group, then the leader is considered to fall into the "High" category. If the Z-score is lower than one standard deviation point from the norming group, then the leader is considered to have a "Low" score. The Z-score can also fall into the intermediate categories of "Lean low" or "Lean high", this is the case when the Z-score is between -0,6 and -0,9 for the "Lean low" score or between 0.6 and 0.9 for the "Lean high" score. If the Z-score is between 0,5 and -0,5 the leader scores an "Average" score on that personality trait. First, the test results for the three U.S. presidents will be shown and explored separately in the paragraphs below. After the deep dive into these test results, the results will be compared to each other, in order to see if the previously mentioned hypotheses will hold up to the actual test results.

Table 2: world leader's mean score and standard deviation

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
DIS	130	0,185638448	0,070680686
TASK	130	0,636175684	0,073399104
BACE	130	0,325103185	0,066508356
IGB	130	0,14405735	0,038786559
SC	130	0,339404616	0,098222743
CC	130	0,569509526	0,049775614
PWR	130	0,281546779	0,043693124

Table 2: World leader's mean scores and standard deviation (Lambert, 2021)

## President Barack Obama's Leadership Traits

Table 2 below shows how Barack Obama scores on the personality traits being analysed in LTA. Below this table, the profile of his personality traits will be analysed.

Table 3: Barack Obama's Leadership Trait Analysis

	Initial score	Score compared to sample (Z-score)	Category
DIS	0.2520	0,94	Lean high
TASK	0,5913	-0,61	Lean low
BACE	0,4354	1,66	High
IGB	0,1412	-0,07	Average
SC	0,4740	1,37	High
CC	0,6411	1,44	High
PWR	0,3044	0,52	Average

The question of: *“How does President Obama react to constraints?”* can be answered by looking at his score on the BACE and PWR traits. Obama scored a higher than average score on the BACE trait and an average score on the PWR trait. This implies that he will challenge constraints if they block him from reaching certain goals, but that he is not able to manipulate or read his opponents as well as leaders with a higher score on PWR. The high score on the BACE trait means that Obama thinks he can control events. In the context of the Venezuela sanctions, this could mean he thinks he is able to change the situation in Venezuela and democratise the state by implementing sanctions. The lower score on PWR implies that he is not more likely to make grabs for power than other world leaders.

By looking at the SC and CC traits, it can be determined if Obama is open to incoming information. President Obama has scored a high score on both the SC and the CC traits. This means that he is very open to incoming information and input from others. He is likely to care about the wants and needs of others and he will react to situations in a way that feels appropriate based on other's opinions and situational cues.

The combination of the TASK, IGB and DIS traits will answer the question: *“Why does Obama want to be the head of the country?”*. Obama has scored a lean low score on the TASK trait. This implies that he is more likely to focus on his relationships and maintaining the balance inside his group. It also means that he is sensitive to the wants and needs of his group's members, which coincides with the high score on the SC and CC traits. President Obama has scored a lean high score on DIS and an average score on IGB. The lean high score on DIS implies that Obama distrusts other people's intentions, especially those of his competitor's or enemies. The average score on IGB implies that he is interested in the maintenance of his group and the wants and needs of his group's members. This also coincides with Obama's results on the SC and CC traits.

The results of Obama’s leadership trait analysis imply that he is likely to challenge constraints, that he is open to incoming information and that he focuses more on relationships than on problem-solving. This puts him into the *Directive* leadership style. This means that Obama focuses on maintaining his own status and the status of his government and country. He will be more likely to engage in foreign policy decisions that amplify his status and the status of the U.S.A. on the world stage.

### President Donald Trump’s Leadership Traits

Table 3 below shows the results of President Trump’s personality analysis. These results also correspond to previous research done by Thiers and Wehner (2022), which shows the validity of this methodology since they used different interviews of Trump and they gained the same results.

Table 4: Trump’s Leadership Trait Analysis

	Initial score	Score compared to sample (Z-score)	Category
DIS	0,2717	1,22	High
TASK	0,4830	-2,09	Low
BACE	0,4292	1,57	High
IGB	0,1271	-0,44	Average
SC	0,4438	1,06	High
CC	0,6456	1,53	High
PWR	0,2480	-0,77	Lean low

President Trump has scored a high score on the BACE trait and a lean low score on the PWR trait. This means that Trump challenges the constraints that are blocking the way for reaching his goals. As with President Obama, the scores on these traits imply that Trump is able to challenge constraints, but that he is less able to manipulate or to read opponents very well. The high score on BACE implies that Trump believes he is able to control events to turn out the way he wants. This could imply that Trump accelerated the amount of sanctions implemented on Venezuela in the belief that this would bring Maduro to lower the level of corruption in his government and to further democratise the Venezuelan elections.

To answer if Trump is open to incoming information, the SC and CC traits need to be analysed. Donald Trump scored a high score on both of these traits. Which means that he is very open to incoming information. Trump is likely to care about what others in his group tell him and he will use the information gained from group members to further his causes.

“*Why does Trump want to be the president of the U.S.?*” is the last question that needs to be answered in order to categorise Trump into a leadership style. On the TASK trait Trump scores a low score. This means that he is more interested in building and maintaining relationships than in solving problems and completing tasks. Trump scored a high score on the DIS trait, which implies that he is slow to trust his

opponents, thinking that they might have motives other than what they might present. The average score on in-group bias (IGB) suggests that Trump is interested in his own group and the wants and needs which they express. But he does not really see the world in “*us versus them*” as leaders with a higher score on the IGB trait tend to do.

The results of Trump’s leadership trait analysis point to him being able to challenge constraints, to him being open to receiving incoming information and to him having more of a relational focus than a task focus. These traits lead to Trump also being categorised into the *Directive* leadership style. This leadership style revolves around the leader trying to gain a good status for himself and his country on the world stage. Leaders with a *Directive* leadership style are likely to implement foreign policy decisions which strengthens their reputation.

### President Joe Biden’s Leadership Traits

The leadership trait analysis of Joe Biden was conducted using interviews from the beginning of his presidency until November of 2023. Because this time range does not include his full presidency, as this is still ongoing, it is not possible to put forth a full analysis on his personality during his time as a U.S. president. This could mean that the results can slightly change if his leadership traits would be analysed after his presidency has ended. In the table below the results of his leadership trait analysis until the end of November 2023 are shown.

Table 5: Biden’s Leadership Trait Analysis

	Initial score	Score compared to sample (Z-score)	Category
DIS	0,1494	-0,51	Average
TASK	0,5602	-1,04	Low
BACE	0,3845	0,89	Lean high
IGB	0,0993	-1,15	Low
SC	0,5691	2,34	High
CC	0,6240	1,09	High
PWR	0,248	0,06	Average

President Biden has scored a lean high score on the BACE trait and an average score on the PWR trait. These scores signify that Biden is willing to challenge constraints that come his way when making decisions on foreign policy. The lean high score on the BACE trait means that Biden thinks he is able to control events slightly more than the average leader. The average score on the PWR trait suggests that Biden is not more likely than the average leader to make grabs for power.

To see if Joe Biden is open to incoming information, we need to look at the SC and CC traits. Joe Biden scores high on both of these traits, leading to the conclusion that he is open to incoming information. The high score on the SC trait signifies that Biden has a high level of self-confidence and the high score on the CC trait signifies that he is able to look at a situation from different perspectives. This makes him open to receive information from other members of his group.

The last question that needs to be answered to know what type of leader Biden is is: “*Why does Joe Biden want to be the leader of the United States?*”. Biden scored a low score on the TASK trait, which signifies that he is more likely to focus on his relationships with group members and political opponents, than on solving problems and completing tasks. Biden also scored an average score on the DIS trait. This implies that he does not distrust the motives and actions of his enemies and competitors more than the average leader from the sample. President Biden scored a low score on IGB. A low score means that he is still interested in the maintenance of his group and their interests, but he is less likely to see the world in “*us versus them*” terms. Biden is able to temper domestic grievances by using positive interaction with competitors and enemies on the global stage.

The combination of the answers to the three questions posed by Hermann (2005) also leads to the conclusion that Biden falls into the *Directive* leadership style. Which means that he is likely to interact with the global stage in order to enhance the status of himself and of the United States.

### Comparing the leaders’ data results

The three hypotheses that were previously set up in this paper focused on three traits, these were the DIS, IGB and BACE traits. All the hypotheses stated that Obama and Trump would score higher than Biden on these traits. In this part, the scores of the presidents on these three traits will be compared and possible explanations for these results will be given. For simplicity, the scores displayed will be the Z-scores, which is the score of the analysed president compared to the sample of world leaders, or the category in which the president falls compared to the sample, this category can range from low to average to high.

The first hypothesis concerned the distrust (DIS) trait and stated that Obama and Trump would score higher on it than Biden. Obama scored a Z-score of 0.94, which places him in the lean high category. It should be noted however that Obama’s score leans very closely to the high category, with only a 0,06 difference. Trump scored 1,22 on the distrust trait, placing him in the high category. Biden ultimately scored -0,51 on distrust, which lands him in the average category. The Z-scores of Obama and Trump are a lot higher than Biden’s Z-score, this proves that the first hypothesis is correct. The high score of distrust for Obama and Trump could have been a factor in their implementation of sanctions on Venezuela. They could have distrusted Maduro’s intentions and actions. Obama’s executive orders mostly concerned individuals who had been proven to have played a role in the violent repression of anti-Maduro protests. This executive order could have been a result of Obama distrusting the officials involved in these undemocratic actions to stop. He froze the assets and revoked the visas of these officials in order to try and dissuade them from committing these types of actions. It could have been the case that Obama did not trust them to stop it by just using diplomatic actions or congresses. This distrust could have led him to implementing the targeted sanctions. The same applies to Trump’s level of distrust. Trump effectively cut off a big part of the money supply to the Venezuelan government by sanctioning trade with the PdVSA and the national mine company, Minerven. These financial sanctions could have been the result of Trump’s distrust in the Venezuelan government to use the money the state-owned companies gained from international trade for the



development of his country. He could be suspicious of Maduro trying to line his own pockets and the pockets of the Venezuelan elites. The stagnation and relaxation in sanction implementation during Biden's presidency could also be explained by his lower levels in distrust (DIS). Because Biden is more likely to trust others motives and actions, he can put his trust into Maduro to discuss possible solutions to the anti-democratic issues in Venezuela. These talks with Maduro and subsequent agreements on how to conduct the 2024 elections have resulted in the relaxation of the sanctions. However, this does not mean he blindly trusts every one of his opponents. This is made clear by statements made in the article by the Congressional Research Service (2023), which states that the Biden administration will be prepared to reinforce the sanctions again if Maduro does not follow the terms of their agreements.

The second hypothesis stated that Barack Obama and Donald Trump would score higher on the in-group bias (IGB) trait than Joe Biden. On IGB, Obama scored a Z-score of -0.07 which leads to him being categorised as average in comparison to the sample. Trump scored -0,44 on IGB, which is also an average score. Biden, however, scored -1.15 on IGB, which means that he scored lower on this trait than the sample. This significant difference between the scores of Obama and Trump, and Biden means that the second hypothesis can be confirmed. There are some possible explanations as to why this hypothesis is correct. The higher the score on the IGB trait, the more likely a leader is to see the world in "*us versus them*" terms. Biden scored a lower score than Obama and Trump, this means that he is less likely to see the world in these black and white terms. In the context of the U.S. sanctions on Venezuela, this could mean that Obama and Trump were more likely to see Venezuela and the Maduro government as their enemies, especially since they do not have the same westernised ideologies that the U.S. deems to be important. This way, the "*us versus them*" concept could have been democratisation versus the Maduro autocracy. Whereas Biden is less likely to use the "*us versus them*" concept and he might have been more willing to work together with the Maduro government to achieve his goals. Hermann (2005) also states the leaders who score a low score on the IGB trait are more likely to point to the positive effects of diplomacy and conferences. The Congressional Research Service (2023) stated that the Biden administration and the Maduro government have been in contact. As a result, Biden's low score on the IGB trait could have been one of the factors that has contributed to the relaxation of the sanctions after the bilateral conferences.

The last hypothesis concerned the "*belief that one can control events*"-trait (BACE). The hypothesis stated that Obama and Trump would score higher than Biden on this trait. The Z-score of Obama on the BACE trait is 1,66, which is a very high score compared to the sample of world leaders. Trump scored a Z-score of 1,57, which is also a very high score. Biden scored 0,89 on the BACE trait, which amounts to a lean high category in comparison with the sample. The score difference between Obama and Trump, and Biden on the BACE trait is less significant than for the other two traits of the two previous hypotheses, but there is still a noticeable difference. The higher scores for Obama and Trump on the BACE trait could be explained by the assumption that Obama and Trump believe that they can control events, and therefore that they can control what Maduro does by sanctioning important economic sectors and Venezuelan officials. As mentioned in the hypothesis-section of this paper, Rohrer (2014) stated that leaders with a higher BACE score are more likely to take decisive political action and decisions. This ties in with the lower score of Biden and the stagnation in sanction implementation during his presidency. It also ties in with the higher scores of Obama and Trump, who have been more proactive in implementing sanctions on Venezuela in order to enact change within its government. However, since the scores of the three presidents are not that far apart from each other, the BACE trait is less likely to have had an effect on the process of sanction implementation of these presidents.



All three of the established hypotheses have been deemed to be correct after looking at the results of the leadership analysis of the three presidents. As mentioned in previous sections of this paper, there has been a precedent in earlier research papers for the use of personality trait analysis to try to understand the actions and decisions made by leaders. However, it must not be forgotten that there are many factors in play during the decision-making process for sanctions. The actions of Maduro and the way in which he conducts Venezuelan international politics and relationships with the United States could also play a big role in the U.S. sanctioning of Venezuela. The role of other politicians, lobbyists and U.S. citizens can also have a role in this decision-making process and must therefore not be overlooked. This paper also concluded that Obama, Trump and Biden all have the same *Directive* leadership style, which means that they are not that different in the way in which they lead the country. They all have the same focus when conducting foreign policy, which is to enhance their and the United States' status on the world stage. This implies that Obama, Trump and Biden are not that different in the way that they conduct foreign policy, even though their individual traits may show a difference. Further research into this topic should be conducted to reach a more conclusive result on why these decisions were made and which factors were at play when these presidents implemented or relaxed sanctions on Venezuela in the way they did.

### Research Limitations

There have been some factors which have formed challenges and limitations for this thesis. One notable challenge was regarding the interviews themselves. It is very hard to assess whether an interview has been rehearsed or even scripted. This makes a Leadership Trait Analysis using the ProfilerPlus tool not foolproof. Influences by staff members of the presidents might have slipped into the interviews without notice, which could have had an influence on the data and results in this research. More interviews could have been gathered to get an even more accurate picture of the leadership traits of the three presidents. However, this was not feasible due to time constraints and transcripts of certain interviews not being available. This research was conducted using the ProfilerPlus tool, it must be noted that different results might be gained when using other methodologies, like manual coding.

It must also be noted that this research is a case study. The topic of this study is very limited in time and subject, which means that there was a relatively small database. Further and broader research should be conducted in order to get a comprehensive understanding of how personality traits and leadership styles could influence the decision to implement, maintain or relax sanctions. Additionally, other factors, which might influence leaders to implement sanctions or to make foreign policy decisions in general, should be explored in order to get a full understanding of decision-making processes.

Another factor is that there could be subjectivity present in the analysis of the data. There could be an interpretation bias in the outcomes of the Leadership Trait Analysis were interpreted based on my own perspectives and preconceived notions on the subject. The context in which the data was analysed might also have had an impact on the conclusions. In the future, President Biden might opt to implement sanctions that are contradictory to the conclusions of this research. It must be noted that this research is based on current events and does not attempt to predict future decisions of these (ex-) presidents.

This research only analysed data up until November 2023, after this date the situation in Venezuela might turn. Consequently, this could cause President Biden to react differently than how he has reacted up until this point. He could implement more sanctions, relax them or retract them all together. However, this research does not attempt to look into the future and is based on the events leading up to November 2023. This must be considered when reading this research paper.

## Conclusions

Previous literature on the subject of sanction implementation has shown that international factors like the behaviour of the targeted country and international norms have the biggest influence on the decision to implement sanctions (Nossal, 1989; Mansfield, 1995; Peksen, 2019). Despite this, national factors in the sender state, like who the country's leadership is, economic stability, and unemployment, can also contribute to the process of sanction implementation. In previous research on U.S. sanction implementation, Drury (2000, 2001, 2005) has concluded that job approval ratings for the president and unemployment can affect the decision to implement sanctions. However, one factor that has not been researched before is how personality can have an effect on sanction implementation. This thesis tried to answer this question by doing a case study on the U.S. sanction regime against Venezuela from 2015 until November 2023. This study has found that three leadership traits could possibly have an impact on sanction imposition.

The first trait that could have an influence on sanction imposition is the distrust trait (DIS), with more distrust resulting in a (faster) imposition or acceleration of sanctions. This can be explained by the president distrusting others and wanting to get ahead of the leaders of the targeted state. The president does not trust the targeted country enough to change their behaviour, so in order to push them towards preferred behaviour, they implement sanctions. This can explain why Obama and Trump score a (lean) high score on distrust, as they are not likely to trust Maduro's intention and implement sanctions on Venezuela as a reaction. On the contrary, leaders with a lower level of sanction imposition might be able to trust the leader of the targeted state enough to try and solve the tensions by diplomatic reasoning. This could explain why Biden's administration has relaxed the sanctions imposed by President Obama and Trump.

The second hypothesis which has been proven correct in this study concerned the in-group bias trait (IGB). This hypothesis stated that Obama and Trump would score higher on in-group bias than Biden. This result can be explained by Obama and Trump implementing their sanction regimes because they deemed their ideologies on democracy to be important. Maduro does not have the same democratic values and this can threaten Obama's and Trump's in-group. By scoring higher on the IGB trait than Biden, Obama and Trump are more likely to see the world in black and white (Hermann, 2005). Biden scored a lower score on this trait. This can signify that he is willing to work together with Maduro's government in order to convince it to change its behaviour.

The last trait which can have an influence on sanction imposition was the BACE trait. This trait signifies how much a leader believes that they can control certain events. Both Obama and Trump's results showed a high score on this trait. This means that they believe that they can control Maduro's behaviour by sanctioning the Venezuelan economy and important officials. Leaders with a higher score are also more likely to take resolute political actions, which can explain the imposition and acceleration of the sanctions (Rohrer, 2014). However, the difference between Obama's and Trump's score in comparison with Biden's was not as great as with the previous two traits. So this trait could have a lesser effect in sanction imposition in comparison to the distrust and in-group bias traits.

It is important to highlight that these results can be circumstantial and can only be applied to this specific case study. The results between Obama and Trump, and Biden showed a difference, but this difference is sometimes minor. These three presidents all had the same leadership style, this being the *Directive* style. Leaders with a directive style of leadership are more likely to focus on enhancing their status and gaining or maintaining acceptance by others. Obama, Trump and Biden all challenge constraints, are open to information and focus on relationships. This means that there might not be a big difference in how they make decisions, even though the scores on individual traits show a difference.

It must be remembered that leaders are human beings. Humans rarely have one goal that they want to reach or only one way of reaching that goal. People are complex, which also makes the decisions that they make multifaceted and difficult to fully comprehend. This makes the study of trying to understand why politicians choose to make certain decisions very difficult. There are always multiple factors at play: the leader's life experiences, their beliefs, their personality, the political system in which they make decisions, etc. Leadership trait analysis is only one of many ways in which the decision-making processes of leaders can be researched. The results of this study must be viewed together with other studies in order to get a full view of the decision-making process revolving sanctions.

This research paper was a much needed contribution to the study of the decision-making process for sanctions. Especially since there has been a lot of research into the effectiveness and effects of sanctions, but less into the cause of sanction implementation. Whenever a research was conducted on the "*why*", this was mostly focused on international factors, like the target's actions and reactions. After Drury's research (2000, 2001, 2005) on internal factors of U.S. sanction imposition, there has been little to no research on the internal influences to sanction implementation. This shows that this research paper was needed in order to delve deeper into this topic. Although this research was quite small in its scope, it is still a good starting point in the quest for answers as to why leaders make certain decisions regarding sanctions. Further research expanding on this research would be welcome in order to determine how strong the effect of these three personality traits is on sanction implementation.

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