Understanding Responses to Political Conflict: Interactive Effects of the Need for Closure and Salient Conflict Schemas

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Two studies examined the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and preferences for conflict-resolution strategies in 2 different samples of elite political actors. Although research has suggested that high need for closure should be associated with competitiveness, the authors argue that this relationship should be strongest among political actors with a hostile conflict schema, or representation of what a conflict is and how it should be dealt with. The authors provide evidence for this hypothesis using archival survey data on American foreign-policy officials’ attitudes toward international conflict at the height of the Cold War (Study 1) and their own data on the relationship between the need for closure and conflict-strategy preferences among samples of activists from 2 political parties in Poland: a centrist party with a reputation for cooperativeness and an extremist party with a reputation for confrontation (Study 2). The broader implications of these findings are discussed.

The discord associated with many political conflicts often conceals the fact that such conflicts, if they are successfully resolved, may have positive outcomes and lead to needed social changes (Deutsch, 1973; Habermas, 1972). A variety of studies have suggested that the course and the outcome of political conflicts depend heavily on the strategies adopted by members of parties to the conflict, particularly political actors at the “elite” level, such as government officials, party activists, and negotiators. Constructive agreements with a potential for valuable social improvements are most likely to emerge when group representatives consider their opponents’ perspectives and take cooperative steps to achieve a peaceable solution. In contrast, socially disruptive confrontations are more likely when group representatives choose to single-mindedly pursue their own group’s goals at the expense of their opponents’ interests (Deutsch, 1973; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1982; Pruitt, Rubin, & Kim, 1994; Ross & Ward, 1995; Sherif, 1958).

Why do some political actors choose dialogue and cooperation whereas others prefer a more coercive approach? Although studies have indicated that a number of situational factors may influence conflict-strategy preferences, there also appear to be stable individual differences in people’s responses to conflict (Rahim, 1983; Rahim & Magner, 1995; Sternberg & Dobson, 1987; Sternberg & Soriano, 1984; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974, 1978; Tosi, Rizzo, & Carroll, 1990). In turn, these individual differences seem to be mediated by variance in decision makers’ understandings of a conflict situation (Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995; Ross, 1990; Rothbart, 1993; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977). Specifically, cooperation is more likely when a conflict is seen in a relatively complex way—that is, as a mixed-motive situation in which the parties’ respective goals are only partially incompatible. Conversely, confrontation and coercion are more likely in the context of simple, black-and-white perceptions of conflict, where the positions of one’s own party are seen as indisputable, and the opponent’s perspective is not acknowledged or appreciated (Deutsch, 1973; Golec, 2002a, 2002b; Reykowski, 2002; Wallbaum, 1993).

Why are some political actors able to form a complex understanding of conflict situations whereas others understand them in simplistic terms? In the studies reported here, we focus in particular on an explanation suggested by several recent studies: Namely, individual differences in the need for cognitive closure, or the degree to which one is motivated to seek out, possess, and rely on knowledge that is clear, unambiguous, and stable (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). In this vein, several studies have suggested that individuals high in the need for closure may tend to construe conflicts in a one-sided, black-and-white fashion. This suggests that a high need for closure should be associated with a more aggressive approach toward intergroup conflict (e.g., Shah, Kruglanski, & Thompson, 1998). However, we argue that a high need for closure may be associated with conflict-strategy preferences not only by virtue of its relationship with simplistic understandings of social reality but also by virtue of its tendency to produce increased reliance on salient beliefs about how conflict should be dealt with. On this basis, we suggest that the need for closure may be associated with a competitive approach to the resolution of conflicts primarily among actors who subscribe to a
competitive conflict schema, that is, a model of intergroup relations that suggests that aggression is the proper way of dealing with opponents (Bar-Tal, Kruglanski, & Klar, 1989; Kruglanski, Bar-Tal, & Klar, 1993). Conversely, adherence to conflict schemas emphasizing dialogue and cooperation may mitigate aggressive responses among political actors who would be otherwise motivated to respond to conflict in a coercive fashion. We begin our discussion with a more general look at the motivational antecedents of responses to social conflict.

The Need for Closure and Responses to Intergroup Conflict

A broader body of research on motivational influences on social perception highlights two tendencies that may lead political actors to prefer aggressive responses to conflict: directional and nondirectional motivations (cf. Kruglanski, 1996; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Although directional motivations are aimed specifically at producing a relatively favorable evaluation of the self or in-group in comparative situations (e.g., Pettigrew, 1979; Ross & Ward, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; see also Diekmann, Samuels, Ross & Bazerman, 1997; Loewenstein, Issacharoff, Cramer & Babcock, 1993), nondirectional motivations are not aimed at producing a specific view of social reality. Instead, they merely influence the manner in which social reality is constructed, without reference to the content of the perceptions that are eventually produced (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996).

One of the most significant of these motivations—both in general and specifically with regard to the formation of conflict-related preferences—is the aforementioned need for closure. Defined more precisely, the need for closure refers to the way in which individuals approach and reduce cognitive uncertainty. It consists of a desire to quickly formulate and firmly hold onto a clear opinion on an issue rather than accepting confusion and ambiguity. It manifests itself as a preference for order, stability, and predictability in one’s surroundings as well as a closed orientation to new experiences and a preference for decisiveness. Research has suggested that the need for closure has important effects on information processing when opinions about a new issue are being formulated and on the subsequent rigidity of these opinions (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). People characterized by a high need for closure are motivated to reduce the discomfort associated with uncertainty as fast as possible, usually by seizing on whatever cognitive cues are easily available in their social environment in an effort to achieve clarity. When an opinion has already been crystallized, they are motivated to protect the closure provided by this opinion. As a result, their thinking becomes rigid, and their opinions are resistant to change even in the presence of disconfirming information.

The penchant for clarity, certainty, and simplicity associated with a high need for closure may push political representatives and decision makers to favor a competitive approach to conflict. A refusal to compromise with or even acknowledge the prerogatives of opponents reinforces a simple view of the world in which the in-group is right and outsiders are wrong, and it allows avoidance of the tedious, closure-delaying process of having to adjudicate between competing interests and work out an integrative agreement (Bar-Tal, 1998; Golec, 2002a, 2002b; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Schaller, Boyd, Yohannes, & O’Brien, 1995; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977; Suedfeld, Tetlock & Ramirez, 1977). Moreover, the goal of competition—the defeat of one’s opponents—suggests a finality and certainty consistent with the desires of those high in the need for closure (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Jost, Kruglanski, & Simon, 1999; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Thus, although competition has the potential for destructive consequences, it may also provide decision makers with a kind of epistemic satisfaction. All other things being equal, this satisfaction may attract decision makers with a high need for closure to competition and aggression, particularly under the stressful conditions that characterize many conflicts (Golec, 2002b; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977). Consistent with these arguments, research on the role of the need for closure in bargaining situations suggests that negotiators high in need for closure are more influenced by stereotypes about the opposing party’s behavior and characteristics and less likely to use information that allows them to understand a given conflict from perspectives other than their own (de Dreu, Koole, & Oldersma, 1999; de Dreu, Koole, & Steinel, 2000; Golec, 2002a; Webster, Richter, & Kruglanski, 1996).

Need for Closure and the Use of Salient Cues: The Role of Conflict Schemas

However, there is another tendency associated with the need for closure that may have an impact on conflict-resolution preferences among political representatives and decision makers. More precisely, a recent line of research has suggested that a high need for cognitive closure may induce a general group centrism—a syndrome of attitudes valuing the in-group and its norms, particularly when that in-group is highly homogeneous. According to this line of work, people motivated by a high need for closure favor homogeneous in-groups because their shared beliefs provide a firm, socially validated definition of “reality” that can be seized on amidst uncertainty (De Grada, Kruglanski, Mannetti, & Pierro, 1999; Kruglanski, Shah, Pierro, & Mannetti, 2002; Shah et al., 1998; see also Jost et al., 1999, 2003).

This suggests that individual differences in the need for closure may not only have a direct effect on political actors’ conflict-strategy preferences but also on the degree to which these preferences are influenced by salient beliefs about the appropriateness of various conflict-resolution strategies. Among other things, the need for closure may lead decision makers to seize on norms provided by the conflict schemas that are most accessible in their minds. Conflict schemas are learned social constructs that define (a) what kinds of social situations may be regarded as conflicts, (b) when and how a conflict starts and how it should end, and (c) the most desirable ways of dealing with such conflicts (Bar-Tal et al., 1989). These schemas are acquired through normal processes of cultural and political socialization. Their contents are imparted and reinforced by parents, educational and societal authorities, and the mass media, usually in ways that link them to broader ideologies, worldviews, and social identities. It is important to note that there are a variety of possible conflict schemas: Some worldviews and identities may be associated with schemas that suggest a distrust of outsiders and a need to rely on “tough,” aggressive strategies, whereas others may suggest schemas emphasizing a need for cooperation (see P. B. Brewer & Steenbergen, 2002; Golec, 2002b; Holsti, 1996; Jakubowska, 2003; Rokeach, 1956; see also Gelfand
et al., 2001; Pearson & Stephan, 1998; Tinsley, 1998, 2001). In turn, these schemas constrain the strategic preferences of the group representatives and decision makers, leading them to adopt the strategies defined as normative by their schemas (Bar-Tal et al., 1989). Because high need for closure individuals tend to adhere to whatever they perceive to be the normative response associated with salient cues, they may be more influenced by the conflict schema implied by an important worldview or political identity—whether competitive or cooperative—and adjust their preferences and actions accordingly in the midst of political conflict.

Thus, we argue that the relationship between epistemic motivation and conflict-strategy preferences of political actors may be somewhat complex. On the one hand, a great deal of existing research on the impact of epistemic motivation in intergroup situations posits a direct relationship between the need for closure and a preference for competition: High levels of need for closure should lead to a need for black-and-white responses to conflict among political decision makers, resulting in escalation. From this point of view, competition services the need for simplicity and finality associated with a high need for closure by pushing for the categorical defeat of parties thought to impede the realization of the in-group’s interests and values. On the other hand, research on epistemic motivation also raises the more complex possibility of an interactive process in which the relationship between the need for closure and competitiveness may be more pronounced for some political actors than for others. More precisely, this relationship may be stronger when the conflict schema associated with a relevant worldview or political identity defines competition as normative. In this case, the preference for simplicity and finality described above and the effects of adhering more strongly to a salient conflict schema push conflict-strategy preferences in the same direction, that is, toward competition. In contrast, if a salient conflict schema defines cooperation as normative, the two effects of the high need for closure may push in opposite directions. The need for simplicity may increase a tendency to compete, but it may be mitigated or even canceled out by a tendency to cooperate associated with the increased adherence to a cooperative conflict schema (see also Federico, Golec, & Dial, in press). As a result, the relationship between the need for closure and a preference for competition may be weaker among political actors with a less hostile conflict schema. This suggests that any main-effect relationship between the need for closure and aggressive responses to conflict may in fact be qualified by an important interaction between the need for closure and the content of decision makers’ working models of conflict.

To our knowledge, neither of these interrelated hypotheses about the antecedents of conflict-strategy preferences has been adequately explored in samples of real-world political representatives and decision makers. In the studies reported here, we examine these hypotheses in the context of two real-world conflicts, using two unique samples of elite political actors. In Study 1, we examined archival data on American foreign-policy officials’ attitudes toward international conflict during the Cold War. We looked at the relationship between a proxy measure of the need for closure and hawksiness among foreign-policy officials whose conflict schemas varied in hostility. In Study 2, we generalized our findings by looking at the relationship between the need for closure and conflict-strategy preferences among activists from two political parties in Poland: a centrist party with a reputation for tolerance and the use of conciliatory political strategies (i.e., the Union of Liberty) and an extremist party with a reputation for the use of confrontational strategies (i.e., the League of Polish Families).

**Study 1**

As noted above, Study 1 examined our hypotheses in a unique sample of American foreign-policy officials surveyed at the height of the Cold War. The data were originally collected by political scientist Bernard Mennis in 1966 as part of a larger project aimed at understanding the beliefs of the American foreign-policy elite (see Mennis, 1971). These individuals were all employees of either the U.S. Department of Defense or the U.S. Department of State at the time and can thus be considered elite political actors charged with the duties of representation and decision making on behalf of the United States in the international arena. Fortunately, the Mennis data set contains a number of “rigidity” items that closely match contemporary measures of the need for closure in terms of content as well as several items assessing the degree to which respondents saw the world as divided into warring groups of “friends” and “foes.” These two sets of items allowed us to construct satisfactory proxy measures of the need for closure and respondents’ conflict schemas, respectively.

Using these data, we explored our hypotheses in the context of the Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). According to the simplicity hypothesis described above, one might expect the need for closure to be associated with a hawkish approach to relations with the USSR, because vigorously opposing the enemy reinforces the validity of the national cause and promises closure in the form of eventual victory. However, research on attitudes toward international conflict at both the elite and mass levels suggests considerable variance in the conflict schemas people bring to bear on judgments about foreign affairs (see Holsti, 1996). In this vein, studies have found reliable individual differences in the degree to which political actors rigidly divide the social world into friends and foes, with any cooperative overtures toward the latter being seen as betrayal and weakness. Studies of this sort also find differences in the degree to which political and social life is generally viewed as a competitive, anomic struggle between self-interested agents (Holsti, 1996; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1990; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Wittkopf, 1990). In particular, those who gravitate toward the hostile end of this worldview spectrum tend to favor more aggressive ways of dealing with foreign powers, particularly those seen as immediate threats (P. B. Brewer & Steenbergen, 2002; Holsti, 1996; Wittkopf, 1990). Accordingly, consistent with the qualification suggested by the conflict schema hypothesis, we expected that the relationship between the need for closure and a hawkish approach to the USSR would be most pronounced among officials whose worldviews make sharp friend–foe distinctions and depict compromise as dangerous.

**Method**

**Data**

As noted above, the data for this study were taken from Bernard Mennis’s 1966 survey of American foreign-policy officials (see Mennis, 1971). Individuals from both civilian and military backgrounds were con-
MEASURES

In this study, two independent variables—a proxy measure of the need for closure and respondents’ conflict schema—and one dependent variable—hawkishness in the Cold War context—were considered. All of these variables were recoded to run from 0 to 1 prior to the analyses. For all variables other than the demographics, descriptive statistics and intercorrelations are provided in Table 1.

Need for closure proxy. As noted above, the Mennis (1971) data included a number of “rigidity” items. They were fairly similar in content to contemporary individual-difference measures of the need for closure and served as an adequate proxy. Although there were 22 rigidity items in all, only those that mapped onto the content domain of the contemporary Need for Closure Scale (NFCS; Webster & Kruglanski, 1994) were used to create the actual measure. Each of these items was answered on a 1–7 scale ranging from disagree very much to agree very much. Together, they formed a reliable scale (α = .76), with higher scores indicating a high need for closure. In order to validate our use of this scale as a proxy for the need for closure, we had a sample of college students (N = 520) respond to both the proxy items and the 42 items from the actual NFC. LISREL’s full-information maximum-likelihood procedure (Joreskog, Sorbom, du Toit, & du Toit, 2001) was then used to obtain the correlation between latent factors corresponding to the proxy items and the actual NFC items. This allowed us to estimate the disattenuated correlation between the two measures while correcting for missing values on the scale items. In this sample, the factors corresponding to each scale were indeed highly related (φ = .82, p < .01), supporting our proposed use of the proxy items.

Conflict schema measure. In order to test our model, we also needed an index of the degree to which members of our elite sample possessed a general worldview indicative of a competitive conflict schema. In particular, we were interested in measuring the extent to which respondents generally made sharp friend–foe distinctions and regarded compromise with foes as dangerous. For this purpose, we chose seven survey items included in the original data set, which were averaged to form a scale (α = .54). These items focused specifically on the degree to which respondents perceived social life in terms of black-and-white conflicts between those who were right and those who were wrong, viewed compromise with moral suspicion, and saw human relations as competitive and anomic. We believe that the scale formed by these items comes close to measuring the conflict schema dimension we were interested in. Consistent with our interpretation of the measure, it was correlated with our dependent measure of hawkishness (i.e., p < .01; see Table 1). Moreover, it was reliably correlated with a single-item measure of political conservatism (see below; r = .25, p < .01), a dimension that has also been linked to hostile perceptions in the international domain (Holsti, 1996; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1990). Higher scores indicate a more competitive conflict schema.

Hawkishness. Four items were used to measure the hawkishness of respondents’ attitudes toward how to deal with the USSR: (a) “Do you think arms control and disarmament are questions worth discussing?” (answered on a 1–5 scale ranging from definitely worth discussing to not worth discussing); (b) “Relative to other foreign-policy concerns, how much attention should these proposals get?” (answered on a 1–3 scale, with the response categories much, some, and little); (c) “What is your feeling about further arms control agreements between the United States and Russia?” (answered on a 1–7 scale ranging from strongly approve to strongly disapprove, with neutral as the midpoint); and (d) an item asking

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for Key Variables (Study 1; 1966 American Foreign-Policy Officials Data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Descriptives</th>
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<th>Intercorrelations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Need for closure proxy</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Conflict schema</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ideology</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Party identification</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Religiosity</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Hawkishness</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.47**</td>
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</table>

Note. All descriptive statistics are for 0–1 variable codings.
* p < .05. ** p < .01.

1 The fit of this model was acceptable, with a chi-square–degrees of freedom ratio of 2.92 (df = 1,946) and root-mean-square error of approximation of 0.06 (Kline, 1998).
2 These items were similar to some of the items originally used by Rokeach (1956) to measure dogmatism. Because Webster and Kruglanski (1994) noted similarities between the need for closure and certain aspects of the construct assessed by the full dogmatism measure, this raises the possibility that the items corresponding to each of the two independent variable measures are indistinct. Therefore, we took several steps to ensure that our independent measures tap different constructs. First of all, we have excluded those items that tap mainly into rigidity in the abstract. It was not our intention here to measure dogmatism as Rokeach defined it, that is, as a politically “content-free” form of authoritarianism. Moreover, in our interpretation of the included items, we do not go beyond their manifest social content to make inferences about the degree to which they tap into a latent personality dimension. In a second step, we performed confirmatory factor analyses using both sets of scale items. Although the final need for closure and conflict schema scales were correlated (r = .41, p < .01)—as we expected—the confirmatory factor analyses indicated that a correlated two-factor model fit the full set of items better than a single-factor model, Δχ²(1) = 11.28, p < .01. This suggests that the two sets of items are indeed measuring different constructs. Finally, to provide one additional check on the validity of our results, we reestimated all of our analyses using only the most directly “political” item (“The US and Russia have just about nothing in common”) as the sole indicator of respondents’ conflict schemas. In this analysis, the key interaction between need for closure and the conflict schema index remained significant (p < .01).
about support for the 1963 Test Ban Treaty between the United States and the USSR; that is, “The United States and Russia recently concluded a bilateral agreement banning nuclear testing in the atmosphere. Do you approve or disapprove of this East/West agreement?” (answered on the same 1–7 scale as Item 3). All items were coded such that higher responses indicated greater hawkishness. Together, the items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .86$).

**Controls.** Recent research has suggested that the need for closure may be bound up with a number of other predispositions—such as political conservatism—that allow individuals to manage fear and uncertainty through support for the status quo and conventional ideas (e.g., Jost et al., 1999, 2003). Moreover, research on foreign-policy attitudes has suggested that these predispositions may also overlap with the conflict schema dimension, whose effects we are primarily interested in (Holsti, 1996; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1993). This raises the possibility that the explanatory power of our primary independent variables may actually be attributable to these other worldview factors. As such, three measures of constructs related to the management of fear and uncertainty were also included in the analyses. Two of these tapped general conservatism. The first item measured ideology: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as liberal, conservative, or independent?” Respondents answered this item on a 7-point scale ranging from conservative, to moderate, to liberal. The second item measured party identification: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what?” Respondents answered this item on a 7-point scale ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican. Both of these items were coded so that higher scores indicated a stronger tilt to the right. Finally, a third measure assessed religiosity, another conventional worldview dimension that has been linked to the management of anxiety (Jost et al., 2003). Two items were included: (a) “Would you say you go to church regularly, often, seldom, or never?” and (b) “How religious would you say you are?” Both of these items were answered on a 3-point scale, and responses were coded so that higher scores indicated greater religiosity. The two items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .85$).

**Demographics.** Four demographics were also included: (a) education (1 = high school degree or less; 2 = bachelor’s degree; 3 = master’s degree; 4 = doctoral degree), (b) age (in years), (c) number of years in foreign service, and (d) a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent was in the military or not (−1 = civilian, 1 = military).

### Results

In order to examine our hypotheses, we estimated a series of hierarchical ordinary least-squares regression models. The hawkishness index was used as the dependent variable in these analyses. In addition to looking at the main and interactive effects of the need for closure proxy and respondents’ conflict schemas, these models also included the three controls and the four demographics. The inclusion of these measures allowed us to adjust the estimates for the influence of conflated factors related to the management of fear and uncertainty and respondents’ background characteristics. All independent variables were centered, and Huber–White robust standard errors were used in order to protect against the possible effects of heteroscedasticity (Long & Ervin, 2000).

The results of these analyses are summarized in Table 2. Model 1 examined the first-order effects of the need for closure and the conflict schema variable as well as the effects of the controls and demographics. This model reveals a positive relationship between a hostile worldview and the conflict schema variable ($b = 0.40, p < .05$). Moreover, it also indicates a weak but marginally significant effect of being in the military ($b = 0.04, p < .10$), such that foreign-policy officials with a military background were more likely to express hawkish views. Moreover, as the simplicity hypothesis would suggest, a high need for closure was indeed associated with hawkishness ($b = 0.61, p < .01$). None of the other coefficients were significant (all $p > .10$).

However, the conflict schema hypothesis suggests that this relationship should be moderated by the endorsement of a hostile conflict schema. Model 2 examined this effect by adding the two-way interaction between these two variables. The coefficient for this interaction was significant and in the right direction ($b = 3.01, p < .01$). In order to probe this interaction, simple slopes for the relationship between the need for closure proxy and hawkishness were computed at 1 standard deviation below (for a less hostile worldview) and 1 standard deviation above (for a more hostile worldview) the mean for the conflict schema variable. The relationship between the need for closure proxy and the dependent measure failed to reach significance among those with a less hostile worldview on the conflict schema variable ($b = 0.24, SE = 0.24, p > .30$). However, the need for closure was positively and significantly associated with hawkishness among those with a more hostile worldview on the conflict schema measure ($b = 1.02, SE = 0.23, p < .01$). Thus, our results suggest that the interactive conflict schema model may provide a more detailed description of the relationship between the need for closure and aggressive responses to conflict in the Cold War context.³

³ We assume that respondents’ conflict schemas are causally prior to their level of hawkishness, but the correlational design of the study makes other interpretations plausible. For example, respondents may adopt different conflict schemas in order to retrospectively justify their policy

### Table 2

**Interactive Effects of Need for Closure (NFC) and Conflict Schema on Hawkishness (Study 1; 1966 American Foreign-Policy Officials Data)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
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<th>Model 2</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years in the service</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>0.04†</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>Party identification</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
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<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.08†</td>
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<tr>
<td>Need for closure proxy</td>
<td>0.61**</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td>0.19†</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict schema</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.19†</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFC × Conflict Schema</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>0.02†</td>
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<tr>
<td>$R^2$ (degrees of freedom)</td>
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<td>.328</td>
<td>7.28(10, 79)**</td>
<td>.363</td>
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</table>

**Note.** Entries are unstandardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients and Huber–White robust standard errors, $N = 90$ for both Model 1 and Model 2. **$p < .01$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. **$p < .01$. **$p < .01$.
Study 2

Sample and Procedure

Method

The political parties. As noted above, we surveyed young representatives from two different Polish political parties: the centrist UW and the nationalist LPR. On the one hand, the UW is a moderate political party that emerged after the demise of the communist regime in 1989. Its leaders had previously formed the intellectual core of the democratic opposition during the communist period. It has a broadly liberal–democratic orientation (Golec, 2001, 2002c), and its members favor a free market economy, a secular state, and European integration. In its approach to political problems—and in its rhetoric—the UW favors dialogue with all political groups and tends to adopt a conciliatory stance toward its opponents. Consistent with this description, the UW’s manifesto characterizes itself as “a party of reason and moderation; a party . . . open to all social organizations and social groups” (Unia Wolności: Serwis informacyjny—O Unii Wolności [Union of Liberty: Information service—About Union of Liberty], para. 1).

On the other hand, the LPR consists of individuals who had previously formed the core of the more nationalistic, right-wing element of the communist-era opposition. In its program, rhetoric, and actions, the LPR takes a confrontational, right-wing stance toward most issues currently faced by Polish society. Members of the LPR favor a rigid, sometimes exclusionary defense of Polish national traditions and the role of the Catholic Church in public life, and they oppose Poland’s application to join the European Union. The party’s orientation is somewhat hostile to democracy in its classical liberal form (Golec, 2001, 2002c), and it is often regarded as an extremist party, both at home and abroad. Accordingly, the party’s manifesto firmly asserts that “obviously, we can cooperate only with those groups and organizations which share our political program” (Deklaracja ideowa Młodzieży Wszechpolskiej [Ideological declaration of the youth of the Whole Poland], para. 3).

In accordance with these characterizations, the UW can be regarded as having a relatively cooperative conflict schema, whereas the LPR can be thought of as having a relatively competitive conflict schema (Golec, 2001, 2002c). Below, we report analyses confirming this distinction. According to our conflict schema hypothesis, a high need for closure may result in support for conflict-escalating strategies among members of the LPR, whose conflict schema pushes them in the direction of confrontation, but not among members of the UW, whose conflict schema places less emphasis on the aggressive confrontation.

The conflict. On December 13, 1997, Poland was invited to join the European Union, and official negotiations over conditions of the accession started in March 1998. Thereafter, the Polish political scene (and the broader society) became divided with regard to the issue of integration, although a majority of Poles supported the move. Supporters argued that European integration would have a positive economic and social impact: Accession to the European Union would invigorate commerce, attract foreign investors, facilitate access to European aid programs, improve national security, stabilize democracy, reduce unemployment, and improve educational opportunity and ecological conditions. Opponents of European integration argued that accession was problematic and endangered Polish national sovereignty: It would be too costly in economic and social terms; it would destroy Polish agriculture, industry, and commerce, allowing foreign domination in these domains; and it would endanger Poland’s traditional value system and national identity. The referendum was carried on June 7–8, 2003. With 59% turnout, 77% of the nation’s eligible voters supported integration. Nevertheless, prior to the vote, Polish accession to European Union was still a live, divisive issue; it was at this time that our study was conducted. In particular, the two parties described above took vastly different positions on this issue: The UW strongly supported integration, whereas the LPR strongly opposed it.
Data collection. The data for the study were collected in April 2003, prior to the referendum on European Union integration. As noted above, the issue of accession was still a live one at this point. The data were provided by activists and functionaries representing the two political parties described above. Data collection was carried out in the local headquarters of the parties’ youth organizations in Krakow, a major urban center. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from party leaders by Agnieszka Golec, and both the respondents and party leaders were assured that the data would be kept confidential and used for scientific purposes only. The respondents themselves were contacted through leaders of the youth organizations within the parties of interest, and they were recruited for actual participation during weekly party meetings. Respondents were recruited on a volunteer basis and paid the equivalent of US$10 for their participation (i.e., 40 Polish zloty). They were then asked to fill out a questionnaire containing the measures described below. Respondents were fully debriefed after the study. The final sample contained 100 respondents: 50 representing the UW and another 50 representing the LPR. The UW sample ranged in age from 15 to 34 years (M = 21.82). Thirty-one of them were men and 19 were women (1 person did not report gender). Nine of them had a primary education, 15 had a high school education, 19 were students, and 5 had university degrees (2 subjects did not report their education). The LPR sample ranged in age from 16 to 29 years (M = 22.23) and included 44 men and 6 women. The UW sample included 44 men and 6 women. In this party, 3 respondents had a primary education, 17 had a high school education, 17 were students, and 10 had university degrees (3 subjects failed to provide educational information).

Measures

The measures used in this study are described below. Descriptive statistics for members of each party and intercorrelations for the entire sample can be found in Table 3.

Need for closure. In this study, we used a Polish version of Webster and Kruglanski’s (1994) NFCS (Golec, 2001; 2002c). This scale consists of 42 items assessing the five aspects of the construct: a desire for predictability, a preference for order and structure, discomfort with ambiguity, decisiveness, and closed mindedness. Higher scores indicate a higher need for closure (α = .86).

Party identification. Respondents were also asked to indicate their party identification in the questionnaire. A centered dummy variable corresponding to respondents’ party membership was created for the actual analysis (−1 = UW; 1 = LPR).

Social dominance orientation. The Social Dominance Orientation scale (SDO; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), an individual difference measure of the degree to which one accepts social hierarchy and is willing to use dominance-oriented strategies in the pursuit of group interests, was included as a measure of whether the conflict schemas shared by the parties in our study were different. Prior work on this construct has defined it in terms of a Darwinistic view of intergroup relations, where some groups dominate and others must necessarily be subordinate (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Moreover, other studies have empirically linked social dominance orientation to various logical correlates of a hostile conflict schema, including Machiavellianism and “meanness” (Altemeyer, 1998); “tough-mindedness,” a tendency to see the world as a “competitive jungle” (Duckitt, Wagner, du Plessis, & Birum, 2002); and the negative end of the Agreeableness dimension of the Big Five (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). On the basis of these findings, we assumed that greater social dominance orientation would indicate a preference for competition and dominance—rather than dialogue and understanding—as the basis for intergroup relations. A 14-item version of the scale was used in this study (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The higher the score on this scale, the higher the social dominance orientation level (α = .88).

Preference for competition over cooperation. In this study, we used a shortened version of the Strategies of Political Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (Golec, 2003). After asking subjects to indicate their positions in the conflict over European integration (100% in favor in UW and 100% against in LPR), we then asked them to indicate on a series of 7-point Likert scales how likely it was that they would choose each of 19 strategies for dealing with their opponents in this conflict if they were their party’s representatives; responses were given on a scale ranging from 1 (highly unlikely) to 7 (highly likely). The 19 items included in the questionnaire were based on clusters of conflict strategies that emerged during content-analytic validation studies (Golec, 2003). Briefly, the strategy items were selected on the basis of content analyses of 10 international and 10 domestic political conflicts. The conflicts were analyzed by four expert judges, who described the strategies adopted by parties to these conflicts and then sorted them into related clusters. Two independent judges (different from the first four) were then given a description of these clusters and asked to classify five new real-world political conflicts using them. The agreement rate between these two judges was 79.23%. The clusters were then adapted into the survey items used in the questionnaire, with

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### Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations for Key Variables (Study 2; Polish Party Activists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Descriptives for each party</th>
<th>Intercorrelations (full sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UW</td>
<td>LPR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Need for cognitive closure</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social dominance orientation</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Preference for competitive versus cooperative strategies</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All descriptive statistics are for 0–1 variable codings. UW = Unia Wolnosć [Union of Liberty]; LPR = Liga Polskich Rodzin [League of Polish Families]. **p < .01.

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4 The study also involved an experimental manipulation, which was not analyzed here. Half of the respondents in each party were randomly assigned to an experimental group, where their party identification was made salient by asking them to write down their party name in the top of each page of the questionnaire. In the control group, respondents were merely asked to fill out the questionnaire. This manipulation had no effect on respondents’ need for closure scores, their social dominance orientation levels, or their preference for competition over cooperation (F<sub>S</sub> < 1). Moreover, additional interactive models indicated that the main effect of the need for closure and the key interaction between need for closure and party identification were invariant across conditions (both p > .20).
one item for each cluster. The text of these items can be found in Appendix.

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses conducted on these items in other samples have consistently produced a three-factor solution, with factors corresponding to competitive, cooperative, and mediation-oriented strategies (for details, see Golec, 2003). However, in this study we were primarily interested in the distinction between the use of competitive and cooperative strategies, so only the competitive and cooperative items identified by prior analyses were used. These items were used to generate scales for competitive strategies ($\alpha = .83$) and cooperative strategies ($\alpha = .67$) for each subject.7 Finally, an overall measure of each respondent’s preference for competitive versus cooperative strategies was computed by subtracting their scores on the cooperative index from their scores on the competitive index.

Demographics. Three demographics were also included in the analysis: (a) education ($-1 = \text{no university degree}, 1 = \text{university degree}$), (b) age (in years), and (c) gender ($-1 = \text{female}, 1 = \text{male}$). Because a number of respondents failed to respond to these items (in relation to the small sample size), all missing values on the demographics were imputed using a maximum-likelihood, expectation-maximization procedure prior to the analyses.5

Results

To verify that respondents from the LPR were generally more competitive and hostile than members of the UW, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance using party identification as the independent variable and SDO scores—a well-established measure of the degree to which people generally perceive intergroup relations to be competitive and dominance-oriented—as the dependent measure. SDO scores were recoded to run from 0 to 1 for this purpose. The results of this analysis indicated that activists from the LPR ($M = .48, SD = .18$) were indeed more dominance-oriented than activists from the UW ($M = .32, SD = .13$), $F(1, 98) = 26.47, p < .01$. This finding provides support for our assumptions about each party’s conflict schema.

Having established this, we estimated a series of hierarchical ordinary least-squares regression models in order to test the main hypotheses. The difference score for respondents’ preference for competitiveness over cooperation served as the dependent variable with direct effects on both competition and cooperation. The separate competition and cooperation indices among members of each party were used to examine the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and the European Union conflict. However, we also thought it might be useful to examine the relationship between need for closure and support for destructive conflict-resolution strategies was nonsignificant among members of the UW ($b = 0.03, SE = 0.27, p > .10$) but positive and highly significant among members of the LPR ($b = 1.23, SE = 0.27, p < .01$).7

Note. Entries are unstandardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients and Huber–White robust standard errors. $N = 100$ for Model 1 and Model 2.

† $p < .10$. ** $p < .01$. 7

Consistent with this operationalization and prior work, a series of LISREL confirmatory factor analyses indicated that a two-factor model fit these items better than a single-factor model, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 11.57, p < .01$. Moreover, in the two-factor solution, the correlation between the competition and cooperation factors was strongly negative ($\varphi = -.79, p < .01$). In general, this suggests that our respondents understood competition and cooperation not just as different responses but as mutually exclusive ones.

Unfortunately, we were not able to include measures of general epistemic conservatism and other variables clearly related to the management of fear and uncertainty in our survey of Polish political activists. Therefore, in contrast to the Study 1 analyses, the regressions reported here control for respondents’ demographic characteristics only.

For summary purposes, we relied primarily on the competition–cooperation difference score as an overall index of aggressive responses to the European Union conflict. However, we also thought it might be useful to examine the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and the separate competition and cooperation indices among members of each party. Because competitive and cooperative responses were reciprocally related in our data (see Footnote 5), we expected the need for cognitive closure to be positively related to competition and negatively related to cooperation among members of the LPR but essentially unrelated to either response among UW members. To examine these relationships simultaneously, we estimated a LISREL multitrait path-analytic model. Within each party, need for cognitive closure was specified as an exogenous variable with direct effects on both competition and cooperation. The disturbance terms for competition and cooperation were allowed to correlate. Among UW members, need for cognitive closure was unrelated to competition and cooperation ($\beta = .17$ and $\beta = .17$, respectively; both $p$s were .20). However, among members of the LPR, need for cognitive closure was positively related to competition ($\beta = .99, p < .01$) and negatively related to cooperation ($\beta = -.89, p < .01$). Constraining these effects to equality of 0 in each analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). As expected, the results of these analyses indicate that the relationship between need for closure and support for destructive conflict-resolution strategies was nonsignificant among members of the UW ($b = 0.03, SE = 0.27, p > .10$) but positive and highly significant among members of the LPR ($b = 1.23, SE = 0.27, p < .01$).

Table 4

Interactive Effects of Need for Closure and Party Identification on Support for Destructive Conflict-Resolution Strategies (Study 2: Polish Party Activists)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04†</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for closure</td>
<td>0.57**</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party identification</td>
<td>0.08**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.07**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFC × Party Identification</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.60**</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>13.39(5, 94)**</td>
<td>15.09(6, 93)**</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 For summary purposes, we relied primarily on the competition–cooperation difference score as an overall index of aggressive responses to the European Union conflict. However, we also thought it might be useful to examine the relationship between the need for cognitive closure and the separate competition and cooperation indices among members of each party. Because competitive and cooperative responses were reciprocally related in our data (see Footnote 5), we expected the need for cognitive closure to be positively related to competition and negatively related to cooperation among members of the LPR but essentially unrelated to either response among UW members. To examine these relationships simultaneously, we estimated a LISREL multitrait path-analytic model. Within each party, need for cognitive closure was specified as an exogenous variable with direct effects on both competition and cooperation. The disturbance terms for competition and cooperation were allowed to correlate. Among UW members, need for cognitive closure was unrelated to competition and cooperation ($\beta = .17$ and $\beta = .17$, respectively; both $p$s were .20). However, among members of the LPR, need for cognitive closure was positively related to competition ($\beta = .99, p < .01$) and negatively related to cooperation ($\beta = -.89, p < .01$). Constraining these effects to equality of 0 in each analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). As expected, the results of these analyses indicate that the relationship between need for closure and support for destructive conflict-resolution strategies was nonsignificant among members of the UW ($b = 0.03, SE = 0.27, p > .10$) but positive and highly significant among members of the LPR ($b = 1.23, SE = 0.27, p < .01$).
Thus, in our elite sample of Polish political activists, the data again suggest that the conflict schema model may provide a better description of the relationship between the need for closure and aggressive responses to conflict: A high need for closure was associated with competitive attitudes toward political conflict only among members of a party with a hostile conflict schema.\(^8\)

**Discussion**

In Study 2, we tested our hypotheses in a sample of activists from two Polish political parties, that is, the LPR, which possesses a relatively competitive conflict schema, and the UW, which possesses a relatively cooperative conflict schema. In addition to allowing us to conceptually replicate the findings of Study 1 in a different social, political, and temporal context, this study also allowed us to test our hypotheses with a measure explicitly developed to assess individual differences in need for closure and to make a clearer distinction between groups of political actors with different conflict schemas. In this data set, we again found support for the basic simplicity hypothesis: Higher need for closure levels were associated with a stronger tendency to favor competitive strategies (such as attack, threat, and slander) over conciliatory ones (such as mutual concessions and cooperation). Moreover, consistent with the assumption that members of the extremist LPR would be more prone to conflict, we found that activists from this group were more likely to prefer competitive strategies over conciliatory ones. However, consistent with our conflict schema hypothesis, we also found the expected interaction between need for closure and party identification: The relationship between need for closure and relative competitiveness was found only among functionaries from the LPR. As such, the results of this second study suggest that our findings from Study 1 generalize to a sample of political actors from a different society and time who were dealing with a very different political conflict.

**General Discussion**

In a pair of studies using samples of elite political actors, we found evidence for two hypotheses about the relationship between the need for closure and conflict-strategy preferences. On one hand, research on epistemic motivation has suggested that competition should help meet the need for simplicity and finality asso-

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\(^8\) One problem presented by this analysis has to do with the possibility of variance among party members in adherence to each party’s conflict schema. If within-group variance in schema adherence is high, this may mask an interaction in which the relationship between the need for closure and competitiveness is more pronounced among (or even restricted to) political actors whose worldviews or identities suggest coercive approaches to conflict. In accordance with this conflict schema hypothesis, our results indicate that a high need for closure was more strongly associated with a preference for hawkish or competitive conflict resolution strategies among American foreign-service officers whose worldviews made sharp friend–foe distinctions and depicted compromise as dangerous (Study 1) and Polish political activists who belonged to a political party with an aggressive orientation toward the resolution of conflicts (Study 2).

More broadly, our studies draw a complex picture of the connection between variables related to cognitive style and political actors’ conflict-resolution preferences. As noted above, these studies relate a simple cognitive style to a preference for coercion in conflict and a complex cognitive style to a preference for dialogue and cooperation (Golec, 2002b; Wallbaum, 1993). In particular, individuals with a high need for closure may be especially prone to intergroup bias and competitiveness as a result of their need to understand social reality in ways that reinforce black-and-white certainties and promise decisive outcomes (Shah et al., 1998; Kruglanski et al., 2002). As we have seen, however, motivational variables related to these differences in cognitive style—such as the need for closure—may do more than push conflict-related information processing in the direction of greater simplicity: They may also be associated with a greater reliance on whatever cognitive content is salient for decision makers. In turn, this content may have important moderating effects on the way in which the need for closure actually relates to conflict-strategy preferences.

If this is the case, then the tendency for the need for closure to be associated with a preference for conflict-escalating strategies may be stronger among political actors whose worldviews and

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\(\Delta \chi^2(1) = 5.02\) for the effect of competition and \(\Delta \chi^2(1) = 7.00\) for the effect of cooperation (both \(p < .01\)). Moreover, although the negative correlation between the disturbances was significant among UW members (\(\Psi = -.24, p < .05\)), it failed to reach significance among LPR members (\(\Psi = -.13, p > .10\)). This suggests that need for cognitive closure was able to completely account for the reciprocal relationship between competition and cooperation among members of the LPR but not among members of the UW. Thus, when the competition and cooperation indices were considered separately, need for cognitive closure was associated with responses consistent with a hostile conflict schema only among members of the LPR. **coercion and confrontation in political conflict in the samples we considered. However, our results also suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding of this general relationship. Our results—and our broader argument—suggest that this apparent main effect may mask an interaction in which the relationship between the need for closure and competitiveness is more pronounced among (or even restricted to) political actors whose worldviews or identities suggest coercive approaches to conflict. In accordance with this conflict schema hypothesis, our results indicate that a high need for closure was more strongly associated with a preference for hawkish or competitive conflict resolution strategies among American foreign-service officers whose worldviews made sharp friend–foe distinctions and depicted compromise as dangerous (Study 1) and Polish political activists who belonged to a political party with an aggressive orientation toward the resolution of conflicts (Study 2). Moreover, our studies draw a complex picture of the connection between variables related to cognitive style and political actors’ conflict-resolution preferences. As noted above, these studies relate a simple cognitive style to a preference for coercion in conflict and a complex cognitive style to a preference for dialogue and cooperation (Golec, 2002b; Wallbaum, 1993). In particular, individuals with a high need for closure may be especially prone to intergroup bias and competitiveness as a result of their need to understand social reality in ways that reinforce black-and-white certainties and promise decisive outcomes (Shah et al., 1998; Kruglanski et al., 2002). As we have seen, however, motivational variables related to these differences in cognitive style—such as the need for closure—may do more than push conflict-related information processing in the direction of greater simplicity: They may also be associated with a greater reliance on whatever cognitive content is salient for decision makers. In turn, this content may have important moderating effects on the way in which the need for closure actually relates to conflict-strategy preferences.

If this is the case, then the tendency for the need for closure to be associated with a preference for conflict-escalating strategies may be stronger among political actors whose worldviews and
identities incorporate conflict schemas that define a confrontational approach to political conflict as both normative and effective. In this case, a preference for simplicity and finality and stronger adherence to salient schemas both push conflict-strategy preferences in a competitive direction. Conversely, among those with cooperative schemas, the tendency to adhere to salient cues neutralizes the tendency to compete associated with the need for simplicity. What this suggests is that political actors with a high need for closure—whose need for simplicity and finality may normally predispose them to choose more aggressive strategies—may put aside this predisposition in certain contexts. As such, there may be conditions in which a preference for cognitive simplicity may not be associated with competitiveness and aggression (see Suedfeld et al., 1977; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977).

An implication of this perspective is that increasing the salience of worldviews, identities, or situational norms associated with a cooperative conflict schema may cancel out or at least significantly reduce the likelihood of aggressive choices that might otherwise be associated with a high need for closure. Naturally, however, this raises questions about the conditions under which the tendency to adhere to conflict schemas associated with a constructive, cooperative approach toward political conflict not only suppresses but actually prevails over a tendency to choose destructive, confrontational strategies. In this regard, a key moderating factor may be the form taken by disagreements about the appropriateness of various conflict schemas in a given political context. Within most political communities, multiple conflict schemas are available. As a result, they can only provide what McClosky and Zaller (1984) referred to as “contested” behavioral norms, that is, guidelines that are accepted by one portion of the political community but not others. This—for example—was clearly the case in the population of Cold War era American foreign-policy officials sampled in Study 1: Although they were largely in agreement with regard to how conflict with the USSR should be managed (Mennis, 1971). Nevertheless, even in the midst of disagreements like this, the set of norms associated with one conflict schema is typically regarded as a more “obvious” way of responding, all other things being equal. In some of the contexts examined here—like many others—the norms associated with the competitive schema may have been regarded as the obvious, dominant response (i.e., it was the most intuitive response; cf. M. B. Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Tajfel, 1970). Because decision makers under a high need for closure may have trouble giving nondominant responses (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996), the normality of competition in these contexts may have worked together with the tendency highlighted by our simplicity hypothesis to further interfere with the expression of cooperative responses, even among those who might have accepted a cooperative schema.

However, the situation might be somewhat different in contexts where cooperation—rather than competition—is the “obvious,” dominant response. In this case, the “normality” of cooperation may work in the same direction as the need for closure’s tendency to produce greater reliance on cooperative schemas among those who adhere to them. In other words, when personal commitments and contextual tendencies are united in their support for cooperation, the cue-taking tendency associated with a high need for closure may actually overpower the simplicity tendency, producing greater cooperation. In practical terms, this suggests the value of promoting a broader cultural preference for cooperation in political communities embroiled in conflict in an effort to make competition less of a dominant response (Bar-Tal, 1998). Although we realize that this is no easy task, our results nevertheless imply that it is an important one.

Conclusion

In sum, our results suggest that the relationship between epistemic motivation and elite political actors’ conflict strategy preferences is moderated by conflict schemas associated with various worldviews and political identities. Nevertheless, although we find these results compelling, we recognize their limitations as well. It is important to note that our studies were conducted using data provided by unique samples of public officials and political activists dealing with specific, real-life conflicts. The uniqueness and specificity of these samples naturally raises generalizability issues. At the same time, the two fairly different real-life settings of these studies helps our analysis go beyond existing work on the relationship between motivational aspects of cognitive functioning and conflict-related attitudes. Above all, we believe our choice of settings contributes greatly to the ecological validity of our analyses. Although there have been many internally valid studies of how the need for closure may play itself out in intergroup situations (e.g., Shah et al., 1998), the findings of these studies—obtained in laboratory settings using college students—may be difficult to generalize to the real-life settings they are intended to explicate (see Sears, 1986). In contrast, the moderated relationships we focus on here were replicated in two different political contexts, among real-world actors of varying nationalities, ages, and formal political roles. Moreover, they were observed in the context of both domestic and international conflicts. This suggests that the interactive effect of the need for closure and conflict schemas is reasonably generalizable, at least among those intimately involved in conflict-related decision making in politics.

In addition, we must acknowledge the correlational nature of our data. Given the real-world contexts we focused on, we were unable to manipulate our key independent variables, and we cannot draw firm conclusions about the causal mechanisms involved in the relationships we describe. However, given that the dependent measures were highly specific, it is highly unlikely that they might have had a reverse causal effect on the general motivational tendencies associated with the high need for closure—that is, the need for simplicity and the need to adhere to salient norms or beliefs. Another limitation of our data—also somewhat related to the unique nature of our samples—has to do with the content of our dependent measures. Although there have been many internally valid studies of how the need for closure may play itself out in intergroup situations (e.g., Shah et al., 1998), the findings of these studies—obtained in laboratory settings using college students—may be difficult to generalize to the real-life settings they are intended to explicate (see Sears, 1986). In contrast, the moderated relationships we focus on here were replicated in two different political contexts, among real-world actors of varying nationalities, ages, and formal political roles. Moreover, they were observed in the context of both domestic and international conflicts. This suggests that the interactive effect of the need for closure and conflict schemas is reasonably generalizable, at least among those intimately involved in conflict-related decision making in politics.

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In sum, our results suggest that the relationship between epistemic motivation and elite political actors’ conflict strategy preferences is moderated by conflict schemas associated with various worldviews and political identities. Nevertheless, although we find these results compelling, we recognize their limitations as well. It is important to note that our studies were conducted using data provided by unique samples of public officials and political activists dealing with specific, real-life conflicts. The uniqueness and specificity of these samples naturally raises generalizability issues. At the same time, the two fairly different real-life settings of these studies helps our analysis go beyond existing work on the relationship between motivational aspects of cognitive functioning and conflict-related attitudes. Above all, we believe our choice of settings contributes greatly to the ecological validity of our analyses. Although there have been many internally valid studies of how the need for closure may play itself out in intergroup situations (e.g., Shah et al., 1998), the findings of these studies—obtained in laboratory settings using college students—may be difficult to generalize to the real-life settings they are intended to explicate (see Sears, 1986). In contrast, the moderated relationships we focus on here were replicated in two different political contexts, among real-world actors of varying nationalities, ages, and formal political roles. Moreover, they were observed in the context of both domestic and international conflicts. This suggests that the interactive effect of the need for closure and conflict schemas is reasonably generalizable, at least among those intimately involved in conflict-related decision making in politics.

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References


(Appendix follows)
Appendix

Items From the Strategies of Political Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (Golec, 2003)

Now imagine that you are an important and powerful representative of your party. You can decide about its actions in this conflict. Take a while to think over what sort of actions would you undertake. Below you will find examples of various actions parties can assume in conflicts. Please indicate how likely it is that you would choose a given action as the representative of your party.

Escalatory Strategies

1. You will use fraud and deception in order to weaken your opponent’s position
2. You will spread negative information about your opponent
3. You will oppose all of your opponent’s proposals and pressures
4. You will act as if you are never giving in, in order to discourage your opponent
5. You will criticize all of your opponent’s actions
6. You will attack your opponent
7. You will demonstrate your strength in order to intimidate your opponent
8. You will humiliate and disregard your opponent

Cooperative Strategies

9. You will explain your position and listen to your opponent: you will search for a “middle-of-the road” solution
10. You will propose concessions and indicate what you want the other side to concede
11. You will calm your opponent down and convince them that the situation is not as bad as it seems
12. Together with your opponent, you will define your problem and search the best solution

Remaining Strategies, Not Included in Analysis

13. You will act offended and break off all relations with your opponent
14. You will find allies and rely on their support in order to convince your opponent of your position
15. You will try to convince your opponent to give in
16. You will ask an independent third party to adjudicate this conflict
17. You will ask an independent third party to mediate in talks between you and your opponent
18. You will avoid any action
19. You will do what your opponent wants you to do

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