

Candidacy Examination for the Minor in Political Psychology

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Instructions. Answer one question from Section A, one question from Section B, and two questions from Section C, for a total of four questions.

Section A: Theory in Political Psychology

1. The words fad, fantasy, and field have been used to describe political psychology. Defend the position that political psychology has contributed to both its parent disciplines, psychology and political science. Choose one concept from each discipline and show how it is better elaborated and understood by information from the other discipline.
2. Researchers from a personality psychology perspective tend to stress the importance of individual differences in explaining behavioral variation, while researchers from a social psychology perspective stress the importance of situational factors. Drawing on the literatures in both mass and elite political psychology, provide examples of research that reflects these different perspectives, as well as examples of research that takes into account the joint impact of both personality and situational factors. Which perspective – the personality, the situational, or the joint impact – holds the most promise for understanding political outcomes?

Section B: Research Methods in Political Psychology

1. Most of the empirical evidence on public opinion was obtained through survey research. Recently, many psychologists and survey researchers have begun to examine in-depth the psychological processes involved in the answering of survey questions. What have we learned about these processes? How might we adjust our research techniques to take advantage of the latest thinking about the psychology of the survey response? Can these studies tell us anything useful about political thinking outside the survey setting?
2. The most frequent criticism of experimental research in political science is its "artificiality." What are the forms that this criticism takes? Discuss the artificiality critique with respect to the fundamental scientific goal of generalization, and with respect to the specific experimental concerns of external validity and realism (both kinds). Is this criticism fair? How have various experimentalists attempted to cope with this problem? Discuss some specific examples, and evaluate the relative success of these efforts in dealing with the problem of artificiality.

Section C: Topics in Political Psychology

1. In some versions of democratic theory, the citizen's political beliefs and behaviors are said to be guided by an abstract political ideology. Much of contemporary empirical research has not been kind to this theory. Review the evidence for and against the assertion of "ideological innocence". How do you resolve the conflicting claims? What are some of the major alternatives to the theory of an ideologically sophisticated public?

2. Scholars have identified a number of threats to the promise and practice of American democratic life, including allegations that Americans lacks sufficient levels of political knowledge and sophistication to participate wisely or even sensibly in political affairs. Recently, scholars have challenged the notion that citizens that need to be politically informed, by arguing that citizens can reach sensible decisions through the use of heuristics. Alternatively, some scholars have argued that through on-line processing of information, citizens are responsive to information even if they cannot remember much of the information they receive. Discuss the literatures on citizens' use of heuristics, and on-line processing, in turn. Evaluate the success, or failure, of these two approaches as solutions to the problems of democratic citizenship.
3. Scientists attempting to understand racial and ethnic politics in the US often draw on the psychological literature concerning intergroup relations, including research on stereotyping and prejudice. Describe two general theories of intergroup relations that have been applied in the study of racial and ethnic politics. Evaluate the success or failure of these applications. Conclude by discussing how a consideration of the political context could broaden or modify psychological theory.
4. At times, a good bit of importance is attached to the personality of leaders or to common personal styles extant in a culture. What is personality? How has it been conceptualized and measured? Is it different than a value system or a cognitive style? Do personalities vary systematically across national or cultural boundaries? If they do, what are the implications of this for international relations and political psychology?
5. It is commonplace in contemporary analyses of international relations to argue that perceptions matter. Perceived threat is at the heart of neorealism. Many argue that mental constructions of the situation or the representation of the problem shape choice and the application of norms. Perceived power has become as widely recognized explanatory variable as any notion of objective power. At the same time, how to conceptualize cognition, identify it, and measure it in ways that links it to appraisal has evolved considerably. What is the best way to think about and measure mindsets and perception in the foreign policy realm?
6. What are the essential differences between the conception of attitudes as "implicit" versus "temporary constructions"? Are these fundamentally opposed views of the attitude construct? How well do they describe political attitudes?
7. Identity has become a popular concept in international relations. What does it mean and how should we conceptualize it? What do we know about its relationship with intergroup conflict and cooperation? What additional insight do we gain in our understanding of international relations by employing the psychological notion of social identity?
8. One concern with pacific settlement is that it divides the protagonists and lays the seeds of future war. The creation of some sort of supranational identity has been suggested as a possible strategy to mitigate this problem. To do this, however, we need to know how to create this new supranational identity and understand what its relationship will be to the existing national and ethnic identities. What do we know about this and what would work to promote peaceful relations along these lines?