

## General 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. Political scientists have long debated the applicability of rational choice theory for understanding political decision-making. Many political psychologists, not surprisingly, believe that various psychological theories are more appropriate for explaining political decisions. Briefly summarize the key points in this debate, and describe your own position. Take an example of a specific political decision, and describe how rational choice theory and a specific psychological model (in turn) have been used to explain this decision. Compare the effectiveness of the two models in this particular case. Do you believe it is possible, or even desirable, to combine the insights from rational choice and psychological models? Defend your response.
2. Several general models of social and political cognition use a "dual-mode" information processing paradigm. What are the two modes that allegedly guide our thinking, and is such a characterization useful for political analysis? First, give a general description of the two modes of thinking. Next, describe two different areas of social or political psychology where this conceptualization has been applied. Be sure to describe specific political applications for both of your examples, even if the original theory was developed in a nonpolitical domain. Evaluate the dual-mode approach. What are its strengths and weaknesses for political analysis?

### Section B: Research Methods in Political Psychology

1. Discuss some of the key differences between a survey and an experiment. For each, explain if it is a defining difference, or if it is a difference merely in common practice. Be sure to isolate and explain what TRULY distinguishes these two methods. How might they be combined? Finish with a discussion of some question, problem, or phenomenon in political psychology that has been investigated with both methods. What are the characteristic strengths that each method presents?
2. Political psychologists who focus on the behavior of elites tend to use different research methods than those who study mass political behavior. Is this methodological gulf a natural outgrowth of the differing subject matter, or does it merely reflect the backgrounds and tastes of the researchers? Develop an argument either for or against the assertion that the methodological differentiation is inherent in the topics that the two fields address. Discuss also one research topic of your own choosing where the separate methods might converge and jointly contribute to our understanding of this problem.

## Section C: Topics in Political Psychology

1. 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?
2. 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 inter-group conflict and cooperation? What additional insight do we gain in our understanding of international relations by employing the psychological notion of social identity?
3. Many theories of international relations at their core rely on a rational cost-benefit model. Can these incorporate the most important findings in psychological studies of decision-making? If yes, then how? If no, what alternative approach do you suggest? Be sure to specify the findings that warrant adjustment in the standard micro-economic model and how they translate to foreign policy.
4. There is debate among specialists on international relations about the importance of norms. Sometimes norms are connected to notions of justice and even conceptions of honor and fairness. What do we know about the effect conceptions of fairness and honor have on decision-making? Do these sorts of considerations matter much when material interests are on the table? How could research in the realm of international relations contribute to the research done in economics and psychology in this regard or vice versa?
5. Much of social cognition research was criticized for being too "cold," that is, for ignoring the role of affect and motivation in guiding thought and behavior. What do we know about how affect and motivation interact with cognitive processes to influence political judgment and behavior? Do emotions play a substantial role in shaping citizens' political decisions? If so, when? Is such a role problematic? What, in your view, are some of the limitations of political science research on affect and emotions?
6. Is there a relationship between the opinions of citizens and the policies their leaders enact? What is the nature of that relationship? Why do leaders respond to the "will of the public," if indeed they do? Should they, or can one make the case that leaders should operate relatively free of the direct influence of public opinion?
7. Are social and political values important for public opinion? Define values, taking care to distinguish between the terms value, beliefs, affect, and attitude. Make an argument about the role of values in structuring political opinions. What happens when values come into conflict?
8. Framing is a hot topic in a number of fields. How do political scientists use the term? Do they use the term the same way that researchers in other disciplines use it (e.g., sociology, psychology, communications)? How does framing differ from other familiar communication phenomena (e.g., priming)?