

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. 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?
2. 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.

Section B: Research Methods in Political Psychology

1. 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.
2. Scholars generally agree that the method employed in any piece of research should be evaluated according to how well it satisfies the twin criteria of internal validity and external validity. Define these two criteria. Discuss three methods that are frequently employed in political psychology, and describe how well these methods generally satisfy the two criteria. Pick a specific research study that you believe is particularly strong in terms of internal and external validity, and another that you believe is particularly weak. Explain why each does, or does not, measure up.

Section C: Topics in Political Psychology

1. 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?
2. Most models of deterrence and bargaining assume fairly rational calculations of risk. What do we know about risk-taking in international relations and how would you suggest we model this phenomenon? Make a case for the superiority of your approach by illustrating with concrete examples of where other approaches fail. If there are holes in our knowledge that must be filled before we operate any model, explain what those are and how we can address them.
 3. 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?
 4. Values are thought to underlie the opinions of citizens and the behavior of nations. It is popular to attribute international conflict to a clash of values or even civilizations, and to attribute a citizen's political opinions and actions to his or her basic values. What are values, how have they been conceptualized, and how have they been studied empirically in the comparative international or domestic politics realms? How should we decide whether to attribute the opinions and behavior of individuals or states to values, value conflict, or some other factor? Your answer may focus on mass politics, international politics, or both.
 5. 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.
 6. Much of social cognition research is criticized for being too "cold" for ignoring the role of affect and motivation in guiding thought and behavior. How do 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?
 7. With all the talk about the political impact of the mass media, one would assume that scholars agree that the media are, collectively, a powerful political force. Yet, there are many scholars who say the political impact of the mass media is "minimal" at best. What are the major theories about the political influence of the mass media, and what is the evidence?