POLI 100M: Political Psychology

Lecture 1: Introduction

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Introductions

• From Minnesota (Go Vikings!)
• College: William & Mary (Williamsburg, VA)
• 4th year Political Science PhD student
• Research:
  – Dissertation: How does information get distorted as it flows from the media to person to person? How does this distorted information impact political behavior?
    • Political communication, social media, information processing, social networks
  – Coauthored Book Project with Jaime Settle: What are the social, psychological, and psychophysiological underpinnings of political disengagement?
    • Anxiety, stress, personality, political discussions
# Course Overview

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<td>What is political psychology?</td>
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<td>Individual Differences</td>
<td>How do differences in personality, genetics, and psychophysiology impact political behavior?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voting</td>
<td>What are the psychological motivations behind why people vote and which candidates they support?</td>
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<td>(Mis)information</td>
<td>How do individuals process information? Why do people believe political rumors?</td>
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<td>Media</td>
<td>What role does the media play in informing the public? Why do individuals choose information sources?</td>
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<td>Campaigns</td>
<td>How do campaigns use psychology to win elections?</td>
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## Course Overview

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<tr>
<td>Irrelevant and Apolitical Influences on Political Behavior</td>
<td>Do “irrelevant” events influence political behavior? Why?</td>
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<td>Polarization</td>
<td>Why and how are liberals and conservatives different?</td>
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<td>Social Networks, Political Discussion, and Social Media</td>
<td>Why and with whom do individuals discuss (or avoid discussing) politics? How do individuals engage with politics on social media?</td>
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<td>Implicit vs. Explicit Attitudes</td>
<td>What are the psychological explanations for racial bias in politics?</td>
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Syllabus Overview
Political Psychology in Action
Ballot Ordering

Policy Implications: Ballot randomizing
Canvassing

Importance of face to face campaigning to boost turnout and maybe persuade
Survey Analysis

Q. Is health care reform
   a. a bad idea
   b. a really bad idea
   c. a totally despicable idea

   a. □  b. □  c. □

Question wording impacts our interpretation of survey data
5 minute break
What is Political Psychology?

• Basic Definition: “the intellectual and scientific activity that takes place at the intersection of political science and psychology”

• Goal of Psychology: to make generalizations about human nature

• Goal of Political Science: to understand political processes

• Goal of Political Psychology: Establish general laws of behavior that can help explain and predict [political] events that occur in a number of [political] situations
Political Psychology
True to Its Name (TTIN)

• Krosnick & McGraw (2002) distinguish between
  – Political Psychology True to Its Name (TTIN)
  – Psychological Political Science
Political Psychology (TTIN) vs. Psychological Political Science

Political Psychology (TTIN)
- Political Psychology is a subtype of Psychology
- Use the political context to generate more general principles about mental processes and behavior that extend to other contexts
- Conclusions are *pan-contextual*
- Less common

Psychological Political Science
- Political Psychology is a subtype of Political Science
- Use psychology to understand how and why the processes of politics unfold as they do, with little interest in generalizing to other contexts
- Conclusions in political context
- More common
Political Psychology (TTIN) vs. Psychological Political Science

Political Psychology (TTIN)
- Cognitive
- Clinical
- Social
- Political

Psychological Political Science
- Comparative
- International Relations
- American Politics
- Political Psychology
Political Psychology (TTIN): Example

- Psychological Principle: Priming—impact of recently activated cognitive constructs on subsequent judgments
- Political Science Application: News media priming and presidential evaluations
- Findings:
  - Political Science: The news media can shape public evaluations of the president by priming viewers to think about certain issues in which the president is (not) doing well
  - Psychology: Priming effects are conditional on how much people know about politics (Krosnick & Kinder 1990)
    - demonstrates how expertise impacts priming effects, which psychologists had not yet explored
    - maybe it’s actually learning instead of priming
      - Many psychology studies thought to have shown evidence of priming were actually showing learning!
Psychological Political Science: Example

• Psychological Principle: Memory-based vs. on-line decision-making (Hastie & Park 1986)
  – Memory based judgment occurs when someone searches his/her memory to find relevant information to form a judgment when asked
  – On-line processing occurs when motivated to form an opinion without being asked and updates a ‘running tally’ of that opinion as new information is added. When asked to give an opinion, give the existing on-line tally

• Political Science Application: Candidate evaluations

• Finding: At least under some conditions, citizens evaluate candidates in an online fashion (Lodge et al. 1989)
Political Psychology (TTIN) or Psychological Political Science?

• Example 1: Researchers explore whether the psychological concept of conformity applies to political discussions. Psychologists have shown that individuals will give an answer they know is wrong if everyone else in the room says it’s right. Applying this to political discussions, researchers show that individuals will state a political view with which they actually disagree if everyone else in the room holds that view.

• Carlson & Settle (2016)

• Political Psychology
Political Psychology (TTIN) or Psychological Political Science?

• Example 2: Psychological research suggests that suspicion produces a general cognitive state of scrutiny applied to many objects. Yet, in politics, we rarely see people suspicious toward specific politicians. This takes too much cognitive work to figure out who is worthy of suspicion and who is not. Researchers found that politicians communicate strategically, communicating information with which constituents would agree, which makes people less suspicious of them. Considering strategic communication was new to psychologists.

• McGraw et al. (2000)
• Political Psychology (TTIN)
Political Psychology

• There is an important conceptual difference between political psychology true to its name and psychological political science

• In this class, we will use the term political psychology broadly to refer primarily to psychological political science
What is Political Psychology?

Summary

• “the intellectual and scientific activity that takes place at the intersection of political science and psychology”

• Political Psychology (TTIN) uses the political context to teach us new things about psychology

• Psychological Political Science (more common) applies psychological theories to better understand politics

• We will use the term political psychology broadly
Questions?
The Political Being
The Political Being

• Who are the people in our political system?
• What do they do? Why do we care about them?
• Ultimately, we can’t understand politics without understanding people. In order to understand people, we can look inside their minds to better understand why people do what they do.
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
The PB’s Mind: Personality

• The combination of characteristics or qualities that form a person’s distinctive character
• Affects other aspects of thought processes
• Is affected by life experiences
• Stable!
• Affects behavior non-consciously
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
The PB’s Mind: Values and Identity

• Values: Deeply held beliefs about what is right and wrong
• Identity: Deeply held sense of who a person is
• Strong emotional component to both
• Both are stable
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
The PB’s Mind: Attitudes

• Units of thought composed of some cognitive component (knowledge) and emotional response to it (like, dislike, etc.)

• Subject to change based on
  – New information
  – Changes in feelings
  – Persuasion
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
The PB’s Mind: Emotion

- Emotions affect all aspects and are affected by all aspects of the PB’s mind
- Values, identities, and attitudes are emotional, have emotional components
- Emotions interact with cognition
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
The PB’s Mind: Cognition

- Channels through which the mind and environment first interact
- Involves receiving and interpreting information from the environment (the mind’s computer)
- Help us understand an environment that is too complex for any individual to interpret
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
FIG. 1.1. The political being.
The PB in Context

• Environmental factors interact with the PB’s mind
• How might other political beings impact each other?
  – Social psychology helps us understand
  – Group behavior— “Us vs. Them”
The Political Being: Summary

• The PB’s mind is composed of personality, values and identity, attitudes, emotion, and cognition

• PBs interact with their environments and often think in terms of “us” and “them”

• Ultimately, we can’t have politics without *people*. We’re interested in why the people in politics do what they do.
Questions?
5 minute break
How do we study political psychology?
The Scientific Method

1. Observations
2. Hypothesis
3. Hypothesis Testing
4. (Re)evaluate Explanations
The Scientific Method

Observations

(Re)Evaluate Explanations

Hypothesis

Hypothesis Testing
1. Observations

• Observe behavior and events in the real world that you want to explain

• Examples:
  – I observe that many people (about 40% of the voting eligible population) did not turn out to vote in the 2016 presidential election
  – I observe that some people do not express their real political opinions to other people
  – I observe that candidates whose names appear first on the ballot get more votes
1. Observations

• Start to form hunches about which factors (variables) affect the behavior you observe
  – **Variable**: Any entity that can take on different values. Examples?

• Example:
  – I observe that many people (about 40% of the voting eligible population) did not turn out to vote in the 2016 presidential election
  – Maybe age affects turnout
  – Maybe personality affects turnout
2. Hypothesis

• Formulate tentative explanations—make predictions about the nature of the relationship between variables

• Definition: statement that provides a testable assertion about how the world works

• Example:
  – I observe that many people (about 40% of the voting eligible population) did not turn out to vote in the 2016 presidential election
  – Maybe age affects turnout
    • Younger people are less likely to turn out to vote than older people
  – Maybe personality affects turnout
    • Extraverted people are more likely to turn out to vote than introverted people
2. Hypothesis

- Two types of variables
  - Independent Variable: the factor that causes or changes the outcome you are interested in
    - Examples: age, gender, race, personality, emotional state
  - Dependent Variable: the outcome you are interested in explaining; the factor that \textit{depends on} the independent variable
    - Examples: turnout, vote choice, attitudes toward a candidate

- Examples:
  - Younger people are less likely to turn out to vote than older people
    - IV: 
    - DV: 
  - Extraverted people are more likely to turn out to vote than introverted people
    - IV: 
    - DV:
3. Hypothesis Testing

• Collect data to make more observations
• Test whether your hypotheses were right

Examples:
  – I observe that many people (about 40% of the voting eligible population) did not turn out to vote in the 2016 presidential election
  – Maybe age affects turnout
    • Hypothesis: Younger people are less likely to turn out to vote than older people
      – Test: Collect data on age and turnout. See if the percentage of young people who turned out to vote is lower than the percentage of old people who turned out to vote.
  – Maybe personality affects turnout
    • Hypothesis: Extraverted people are more likely to turn out to vote than introverted people
      – Test: Collect data on personality and turnout. See if the percentage of extraverted people who turned out to vote is higher than the percentage of introverted people who turned out to vote.
3. Hypothesis Testing

• Lots of ways to test a hypothesis!
• Common methods on political psychology:
  – Surveys
  – Psychophysiological studies
  – Experiments
    • Lab experiments
    • Field experiments
• We’ll come back to this in a few slides
4. (Re)Evaluate Explanations

- Reconsider your initial observations, theory, and hypotheses in light of your hypothesis tests
  - Were your hypotheses supported?
    - YES: Examine the limitations of your theory, the mechanism that *causes* the relationship, and/or whether your hypothesis explains behavior in other contexts
    - NO: Examine why your hypothesis was not supported, brainstorm alternative explanations, rethink your theory
4. (Re)Evaluate Explanations

• Example:
  – I observe that many people (about 40% of the voting eligible population) did not turn out to vote in the 2016 presidential election
  – Maybe age affects turnout
    • Hypothesis: Younger people are less likely to turn out to vote than older people
      – Test: Collect data on age and turnout. See if the percentage of young people who turned out to vote is lower than the percentage of old people who turned out to vote.
      – Result: About 45% of young people (18-29 year-olds) voted in 2016; About 71% of older people (60+ year-olds) voted in 2016. Thus, there is support for my hypothesis that younger people are less likely to turn out to vote than older people.
        » Reevaluate: Limitations—Only one country, one election
        » Reevaluate: Causal Mechanism—Young people don’t feel represented? Young people don’t think voting matters? Campaigns don’t target young people? Neither candidate appealed to younger voters?
The Scientific Method

Observations

(Re)Evaluate

Explanations

Hypothesis

Hypothesis

Testing
Questions?
Hypothesis Testing in Political Psychology

- Surveys
- Psychophysiological studies
- Experiments
  - Lab Experiments
  - Field Experiments
Surveys

• How do we know what’s going on inside the PB’s head? *Ask!*
  – **Attitudes:** “Do you think the US Government should increase the minimum wage?” “Do you think the Affordable Care Act should be repealed?”
  – **Values:** “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: The USA should welcome ideas from foreign cultures; American children should be raised to believe in God; Citizens must always be disciplined with strict rules in society”
  – **Identity:** “With which racial or ethnic group do you most strongly identify?” “Generally speaking, do you consider yourself to be a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”
  – **Personality:** Various personality scales, such as the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI).
  – **Emotion:** “On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being you feel depressed and 10 being you feel extremely happy, what would you rate yourself over the past hour?”
Surveys

• Who are you going to ask?
  – Sample: the group of people who complete your survey
  – Representative of the population of interest

• Question wording

• Social Desirability Bias: respondents answer a question in a way that they think will be viewed favorably by others. Over-report “good behavior”

• Sometimes people don’t remember exactly what they did or why they did it

• Expensive! A nationally representative 10 minute survey of ~1,000 Americans can cost $15,000+
Psychophysiological Studies

• How do we know what’s going on inside the PB’s head? Measure the PB’s psychophysiological responses

• Measure:
  – Electrodermal Activity (EDA) (how much your palms sweat)
  – Heart rate
  – Facial muscle movements (to track facial expressions)
  – Eye tracking
  – Brain activity (fMRI)

• Helps solve self-report biases in surveys because we can’t control these responses
Psychophysiological Studies

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<th>Psychophysiological Measure</th>
<th>Emotion or Behavioral Measure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Electrodermal Activity (EDA)</td>
<td>Increases when people feel disgusted, startled, angry, happy, proud, interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart Rate</td>
<td>Increases when people feel disgusted, startled, angry, happy, proud, interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial Muscle Movements</td>
<td>When electrodes are placed on the relevant muscles, can measure positive or negative emotional responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eye Tracking</td>
<td>Track what people look at on a screen, how long they look at it, what they fixate on, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain activity (fMRI)</td>
<td>See which parts of the brain are activated during different activities. The amygdala is closely linked to emotion.</td>
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Psychophysiological Studies

• Really cool, really useful for getting around self-report biases in surveys
• Time-consuming and expensive to conduct
• Often rely on convenience samples (e.g. college students), which limits generalizability of findings
• Best when paired with survey data
What’s the problem so far?

• Surveys and psychophysiological data can give us really good evidence of whether our Independent and Dependent Variables correlate

  – Correlate: to have a mutual relationship or connection

    • Positive Correlation:
      – IV increases, DV increases
      – IV decreases, DV decreases

    • Negative Correlation:
      – IV increases, DV decreases
      – IV decreases, DV increases
Examples of Correlations

• Age is positively correlated with political participation

• Disgust sensitivity (how you react to disgusting things) is positively correlated with conservative ideology

• Ice cream sales are positively correlated with homicide rates
  – Spurious Correlation: a relationship in which two variables are correlated due to a third “lurking” variable
Divorce rate in Maine correlates with Per capita consumption of margarine

Correlation: 99.26% (r=0.992558)

Data sources: National Vital Statistics Reports and U.S. Department of Agriculture
Total revenue generated by arcades correlates with Computer science doctorates awarded in the US

Correlation: 98.51% (r=0.985065)

Data sources: U.S. Census Bureau and National Science Foundation
Per capita cheese consumption correlates with Number of people who died by becoming tangled in their bedsheets

Correlation: 94.71% (r=0.947091)

Data sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture and Centers for Disease Control & Prevention
CORRELATION ≠ CAUSATION
Experiments

• Key advantage of experiments: causal identification!
  – With a properly executed experiment, we can actually determine what *causes* what

• Why can’t we establish causality in correlational studies?
  – Lurking variables
  – Selection into “treatment”
Experiments

• **Random Assignment** to treatments
  – *Randomly* assign each participant to a treatment related to your independent variable
  – Example: Does watching MSNBC cause people to have more liberal policy views?
    • *Randomly* assign half of my participants to watch MSNBC
    • *Randomly* assign half of my participants to not watch MSNBC
    • Measure their policy attitudes
  – Why is this *causal*?
Experiments

• Random Assignment allows you to avoid lurking variables from impacting your results.

• If we observe differences in our DV between our treatment groups, we are confident that our treatment caused the change in the DV.
  – But for random chance our two groups should be highly similar.
  – But for random chance, lurking variables are not impacting the DV.
Experiments

Lab Experiments

• Conducted in a research lab
• Highly controlled
• More common in political psychology
• High Internal Validity (we know exactly what the treatment was and that’s the only thing that could have caused the DV)

Field Experiments

• Conducted in the real world
• Less control
• Less common in political psychology
• High External Validity (results generalize well to the real world)
How do we study political psychology?

Summary

• Surveys are a good way to get lots of representative data relatively quickly, but we can often only get correlational results.

• Psychophysiological studies help us measure nonconscious activity, but they’re expensive and often only correlational.

• Experiments help us get causal identification! But, they often lack external validity. They can be conducted in the lab or in the field.

• CORRELATION ≠ CAUSATION
Questions?