POLI 100M: Political Psychology

Lecture 2: Individual Differences

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Announcements

• Grade contracts due on Tuesday! Any questions about this?
• Remember that you must complete 1 reading commentary per week, submitted to TritonEd.
• Office Hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:30 in SSB 341, or by appointment
Last Time

• Syllabus overview
• What is political psychology? Why do we study it?
• The components of the Political Being
• How do we study political psychology?
  – Surveys
  – Psychophysiological data
  – Experiments (lab and field)
  – Correlation ≠ Causation
What questions do you have?
Today: Driving Questions

• How do individual psychological or biological differences impact political behavior?
  – Personality
  – Genetics
  – Psychophysiology

• Why should we care about individual differences as they relate to political behavior?
Today: Learning Outcomes

1. Identify the Big 5 Personality Characteristics
2. Identify some of the key forms of political behavior that correlate with different personality types and explain the intuition behind these correlations
3. List some political behaviors and attitudes that correlate with genetics
4. Identify the main psychophysiological measures used to study political behavior and why they are useful
5. Describe some of the relationships between psychophysiology and political behavior
6. Evaluate why we should care about individual differences in personality, psychophysiology, and genetics as they relate to political behavior
Personality
What is personality?

• Many definitions!
• Important and relatively stable aspects of a person that account for consistent patterns of behavior that may be observable or unobservable, conscious or unconscious

• In political psychology, we’re mainly interested in how personality traits predict political behaviors and attitudes
  – Partisanship
  – Vote choice
  – Whether to vote or participate in politics
  – Information seeking
  – Engagement in political discussions
  – Many more!
What is personality?

• Important and relatively stable aspects of a person that account for consistent patterns of behavior that may be observable or unobservable, conscious or unconscious

• Broad definition! Want to think about more concrete traits that we can use to describe and predict behavior

• What traits have you heard of?
Pick Some Hats And We'll Guess Which Dessert Matches Your Personality?

TYPICAL DONUT.

Choose Your Celeb Squad And We'll Reveal Your Dominant Personality Trait

Taylor Swift or Rihanna?

Clear Technology will make any room feel and smell clean. Plus, there’s a different Febreze for everything! Find the one you need at Walmart.
The Big Five

1. Openness to Experience
2. Conscientiousness
3. Extraversion
4. Agreeableness
5. Neuroticism
The Five-Factor Model

**Low Score**
- Practice, conventional, prefers routine
- Impulsive, careless, disorganized
- Quiet, reserved, withdrawn
- Critical, uncooperative, suspicious
- Calm, even-tempered, secure

**Trait**
- **O** Openness (imagination, feelings, actions, ideas)
- **C** Conscientiousness (competence, self-discipline, thoughtfulness, goal-driven)
- **E** Extroversion (sociability, assertiveness, emotional expression)
- **A** Agreeableness (cooperative, trustworthy, good-natured)
- **N** Neuroticism (tendency toward unstable emotions)

**High Score**
- Curious, wide range of interests, independent
- Hardworking, dependable, organized
- Outgoing, warm, seeks adventure
- Helpful, trusting, empathetic
- Anxious, unhappy, prone to negative emotions

What political behaviors or attitudes are linked to openness?

- Conservative/Republican:
  - Less engagement
  - Seek less information
  - Participate less in political discussions
  - Pay less attention
  - Less politically knowledgeable
  - Less opinionated

- Liberal/Democrat:
  - More engagement
  - Seek more information
  - Participate more in political discussions
  - Pay more attention
  - More politically knowledgeable
  - More opinionated
What political behaviors or attitudes are linked to conscientiousness?

- Liberal/Democrat
  - More political knowledge
  - Participate more in political discussions

- Conservative/Republican
  - Low political knowledge
  - Participate less in political discussion
Extraversion

What political behaviors or attitudes are linked to extraversion?

- Watch the news less
- Less opinionated
- Participate less in political discussions
- Participate more in *individual* political activities

- Watch the news more
- More opinionated
- Participate more in political discussions
- Participate more in *social* political activities
Extraversion in Our Class

Density

Extraversion

Low Extraversion

High Extraversion
What political behaviors or attitudes are linked to agreeableness?

- High political knowledge
- Pay more attention to politics
- More opinionated
- More engaged
- Participate more in political discussions
- Don’t support welfare policies
- Don’t support international cooperation

- Low political knowledge
- Pay less attention to politics
- Less opinionated
- Less engaged
- Participate less in political discussions
- Support welfare policies
- Support international cooperation
What political behaviors or attitudes are linked to neuroticism?

- More collective action
- Slightly more conservative/Republican
- Less opinionated

- Less collective action
- Slightly more liberal/Democratic
- More opinionated
The Big Five Summary

• Openness and Extraversions have the strongest influences over political outcomes
• Agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism influence some behaviors, but generally are inconsistent
Other Personality Traits

• Political psychologists also examine other personality characteristics, such as:
  – Social anxiety
  – Authoritarianism
  – Conflict avoidance
  – Willingness to self-censor
  – Need for cognition

• The Big Five are still the main focus
Questions?
5 minute break
Biopolitics

Genetics, Psychophersiology, and Politics
Why Biology?

• Broadly, why do we do what we do?
• What makes us who we are?
• Nature vs. Nurture
• Both biology and our environment influence political behaviors
An Evolutionary Theory of Political Behavior

• “Allows for the combination of familial socialization, cultural norms, environmental stimuli, rational action, and endogenous or innate influences...” (Hatemi & McDermott 2011)
  – Allows us to predict how individuals vary in their political behavior
  – Biological and Environmental factors work together
Genetics
Genetics: Some Background

• Gene: the functional and physical unit of heredity passed from parent to offspring

• Video Clip: American Society of Human Genetics

• Many human traits (height, hair color, eye color) can be inherited from parents
  – Complex traits are impacted by both genes and the environment
Example: Height

- Both parents are really tall (genes)
- Child never eats fruit, vegetables, protein, etc. (environment)
- Child might not be as tall as his/her genetic potential

I’m even standing on a rock...
Genes and the Environment

• Genetic makeup is constant throughout our lives
• Genes alone do not determine our future
• All genes work in the context of our environment
Twin Studies
Twin Studies

• Identical twins have the same genetic makeup
• Ideal way to test genes vs. environment?
  – Twin Studies!
    • Raised in the same household (share environment)
    • Raised in different households (different environment)
• Identical twins raised apart have about an equal chance of being similar to each other in terms of personality, interests, and attitudes as identical twins raised together.
Genetics + Politics = Genopolitics

- Genes + environment influence our behavior and attitudes
- *Political* behavior and attitudes too!
Genopolitics: Attitudes

• Shared genes can explain up to 50% of the variance in the following political attitudes:
  – Immigration
  – Death penalty
  – Euthanasia
  – Conservatism
  – Authoritarianism
Genopolitics: Behavior

• The following political behaviors are in part heritable:
  – Being a leader
  – Religiosity (how often you attend religious services, how religiously observant you are)
  – Voter participation
  – Political intensity
  – Partisan attachment (how strongly you feel attached to your political party)
Genopolitics: Key Points

• Voter preferences are not simply a function of one’s issue positions, party affiliation, or level of information (environmental)
• Rather, they reflect elements influenced by one’s genetic makeup too
• Genes do not determine political attitudes or behavior (there isn’t a “voter gene” or a “conservative gene”), but with the environment they can have an impact
Questions?
Psychophysiology

• “The scientific study of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral phenomena as related to and revealed through physiological principles and events” (Cacioppo & Tassinary 1990)
• Assumption: human thought, emotion, and actions are physiologically embodied
Psychophysiology

- Psychological states have a physiological basis
  - When you experience fear, what does your body do?
  - When you experience anxiety, what does your body do?
- Changes in our bodies are in some way related to changes in our psychological states
- Mind-body connection is a route through which genetics could impact social attitudes and behavior
Psychophysiology: the not so missing link

Genes → Political attitudes & behavior
Psychophysiology: the not so missing link

- Genes
- Physiology
- Political attitudes & behavior
Psychophysiological Measurement

- Recall from Lecture 1: What are some things that we can measure when doing psychophysiological research?
A Typical Psychophysiological Study

• Enter the lab, inform consent, answer some survey questions
• Wash hands, get fitted with the equipment
• Collect baseline physiological measures
• Watch videos, look at pictures (stimuli)
  – Example: Videos of people arguing about politics, campaign ads, presidential speeches
  – Example: Previously validated videos or images designed to evoke certain emotions
• Answer some more survey questions
Example Stimuli

• International Affective Picture System (IAPS) is a set of images designed to evoke certain emotions
  – Disgust
  – Fear
  – Happiness
  – Etc.
Psychophysicsology and Politics

• Disgust Sensitivity
  – Conservatives are more disgust sensitive than are liberals
  – Those with higher disgust sensitivity are more likely to oppose immigration, abortion, and gay marriage
  – Why?
Psychophysiology and Politics

• Threat sensitivity
  – Those who are more physiologically reactive (EDA) to threat are more likely to be persuaded by messages that are framed to invoke physical danger
  – Broader point is that physiological predispositions can make some people more susceptible to persuasion depending on the frame
Psychophysiology and Politics

• Physiological arousal in response to uncivil discourse
  – Individuals are more physiologically reactive (EDA) to viewing politicians argue in an uncivil manner than a civil manner
Psychophysiology and Politics

• Physiological arousal and participating in political discussions
  – Individuals show a much larger increase in heart rate when told that they will have to discuss politics with another person than watching videos of people arguing about politics or apolitical topics.
  – *Participating* is more physiologically arousing than observing
Psychophysiology and Politics

• Heart rate and preferences for agreement
  – Individuals whose heart rates increase the most when told to discuss politics are more likely to discuss politics with people who agree with them in the real world
  – The idea is that discussing politics is physiologically uncomfortable, so people try to avoid that discomfort by discussing politics with people who agree with them
Psychophysiology Summary

• Psychophysiological differences between liberals and conservatives
• Psychophysiology can affect how we receive and process political information
• Psychophysiology is connected to how we view politicians debating issues and our own engagement in politics
• Active and growing area of research!
Questions?
5 minute break
Why should we care?

• The relationships between individual differences and political attitudes and behavior are interesting
• But...why should we care?
Activity

• Get together in groups of 2-3 people
• You are a campaign strategy team for a candidate of your choice
• You have the opportunity to get personality, genetic, and physiological data on constituents in your candidate’s district
• Do you choose to use that data?
  – If NO: Why not? What information are you missing out on by not using that data? What if your competitor has the data?
  – If YES: How will you use the data to help your candidate win?
• One person in each group should write down your responses to turn in. Make sure all group-members’ names are on the paper.