An Introduction to Political Psychology for International Relations Scholars

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Abstract

As an increasingly popular interdisciplinary and multi-method approach to studying individual-level political phenomena, political psychology has made important strides in explaining the processes behind political attitudes and behaviour, decision making, and the interaction between the individual and the group. Hence, it is in a unique position to improve the explanatory power of international relations research that deals with the individual, such as in the study of leadership, foreign policy decision making, foreign policy analysis, and public opinion. After discussing the defining characteristics of political psychology, the research trends in the field, and its research methods, the article reviews the existing and potential contributions of political psychology to the study of international relations. Next, the article points to new areas for research in international relations that would particularly benefit from the theories and the methods already in use in political psychology.

Key Words

Political psychology, foreign policy analysis, theory, leadership, public opinion, decision-making.

What is Political Psychology?

Political psychology is neither just psychology nor just political science;[1] instead, it is "at the most general level an application of what is known about human psychology to the study of politics".[2] Hence, it brings together political scientists, psychologists, sociologists, psychiatrists, and communication researchers. What binds them together is their interest in explaining political phenomena at the individual level of analysis and with an emphasis on the process. Political psychology originated in the study of leadership and mass political behaviour, and was later broadened to the study of intergroup relations, decision making, mass communication effects, political movements, and political mobilisation.

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On the international relations front, studies on foreign policy analysis and decision making, international conflict, and conflict resolution greatly benefitted from a psychological perspective in explaining their respective political phenomenon. Dating back to the study of personality and leadership in the 1930s, political psychology established itself as a self-conscious discipline during the behaviourist revolution of the 1960s, lived through the cognitive revolution of the 1980s, and has recently witnessed the emergence of emotions and affect as major explanatory variables of political attitudes, decisions, and behaviour. Recently, new technologies in neuro-imaging, new data made available by genetics research, and the recent studies on the physiology of human behaviour are likely to bring an epidemiological perspective into political psychology.

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Regardless of intellectual trends, political psychology has always had some distinct characteristics that have set it apart from other sub-disciplines in political science. These same characteristics also make it a desirable supplier of theory and methods to studies of international relations. First of all, political psychology searches for explanations, descriptions, and predictions at the individual level of analysis.[3] The bias favouring individual-level explanations over higher level explanations of political phenomena makes political psychology particularly useful for studying subjects in international relations that revolve around an individual or her interactions with a group. Studies on political leaders and their foreign policy decisions, foreign policy decision-making dynamics, and conflict resolution all require an in-depth understanding of how the involved individuals' attitudes are formed, and how they make decisions and act on those decisions.

The focus on the individual, in turn, affects the research questions asked, the methods used, and the type of inference sought by researchers,[4] which leads to another defining characteristic of political psychology: its preoccupation with the explanation of the processes behind political attitudes, decisions, and behaviour. Unlike the behaviourists, current political psychologists want to understand the black-box of the human mind, what goes on in between the stimulus and the response. In order to do that they first incorporate contextual variables into their studies, which in turn gives more explanatory power to their studies. Individual histories and the

political conditions at the time can play a significant role in how the processes of the mind work to give the output of a given response. This perspective is in contrast to the dominant theories of realism or structural realism that consider power and its distribution the prime explanatory variables and regard individuals as redundant in the outcome of international events.[5] Although realists adopt a rational choice perspective, their analyses are not at the level of the individual.[6] It is, however, the individual acting alone or in a group who makes foreign policy decisions. Hence, the dominant theories' predictive power comes at the expense of the richness of process-oriented explanations of international events. The latter is best provided by political psychology. In fact, its strength in process explanation has made the research attractive to many political psychologists with substantive interest in topics such as terrorism, conflict resolution, crisis management, ethnic conflict, racism, stereotyping, social movements, and mass media.

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Another defining characteristic of political psychology is the multi-disciplinary and multi-method nature of the inquiry.[7] Political psychologists working on topics relevant to international relations have adopted theories from psychopathology, and social and cognitive psychology. In fact, there are as many political psychologies as there are subfields in political science, each with its own dominant method of inquiry. This theoretical and methodological pluralism strengthens the external validity of the findings, indicating that these findings are not the artefacts of laboratory settings or specific historical occurrences.[8] Moreover, it may help political scientists construct the much needed home-grown theories through discovering cognitive, emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural patterns in politics.[9]

In brief, the individual level of analysis, the focus on process-oriented explanations and its multi-disciplinary and multi-method approach define political psychology. Before delving deeper into the added value of these qualities and of the perspective in general for international relations research, the article reviews developments in the field and the research methods used to better introduce the international relations scholar to the field, and to help researchers see the potential applications in their area of study.

Trends in Political Psychology Research

Personality, a constellation of stable individual characteristics that are assumed to transcend contextual effects, dominated the political psychology field as the main explanatory variable in research in the 1940s and 1950s. The study of the personality of major political figures at the time relied largely on Sigmund Freud's work and as a result psychoanalysis was the dominant method in the analysis of political leaders. Harold Lasswell's *Psychopathology and Politics*, the analysis of Woodrow Wilson by George and George, the study of Martin Luther by Erik Erikson, and the invention of the authoritarian personality by Adorno *et al.* are all prime examples of work that focused on the individual's personality as a stable force that determined political decisions.[10] Although the approach's scientific credentials were weak mainly due to its reliance on psychoanalysis, it has had a lasting impact on political psychology through the study of leadership and psycho-biography. On the mass political behaviour front, however, researchers have made use not of psychoanalysis but of behaviourist learning theories to explain political attitudes, paving the way for the first scientific studies in the field. According to behaviourist learning theories, the learning of long-lasting habits guides future behaviour. Relying on this insight, the field of political socialisation argues that children learn basic political attitudes from their parents and their immediate social context, which later dominate their adulthood political attitudes. Mass communication can only reinforce these attitudes and not create them. Hence, according to Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, voters are under pressure from their demographic group to vote in a certain way.[11] The idea that behaviour is governed by incentives, however, has had a much more substantial impact on the study of mass political behaviour. The seminal book *The American Voter* published in 1960 argues that voters vote in a certain direction due to short-term forces such as candidate traits.[12] The focus on short-term forces and the methodology of this work have set the baseline for much of the studies in American politics in the following decades.

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Gestalt movement that assumed that people have needs for understanding and perceiving order and an innate tendency to simplify an otherwise disorderly

perceptual world, i.e. seek cognitive consistency, has given birth to the field of social cognition.[13] Later, the cognitive revolution in psychology that was taking place in the 1980s led social cognition researchers to use computer analogies to explain cognitive processing. This, in turn, has facilitated the emergence of research demonstrating the strengths and limitations of cognitive processing in political reasoning. Particularly, the very human tendency to use decisional short cuts, "heuristics", and the resulting biases in decision making have been investigated both at the elite[14] and mass levels.[15] In the mean time, the elite manipulation of public opinion through how an issue is framed and what predispositions are primed have become important explanatory variables in the study of political communication.[16] Hence, research that demonstrates the cognitive capacity and the processes of the human mind has contributed to the accumulation of knowledge that has increasingly contradicted the classical assumptions about the rational individual.[17] Relatively recently, the cognitive emphasis on social cognition has been altered and the role of emotions and affect has been incorporated in explanations of how political information is processed.[18] Unlike the enlightenment view that portrays cognition and emotion as contradictory forces, research in political psychology shows the facilitating role of emotions in decision making as an integral element of the human mind, an element that works with cognition. This in turn has led to greater interest in the physiology of emotions, one factor that contributed to the current epidemiological trend in political psychology. We are now better equipped to understand individual decisions, attitudes, and behaviour thanks to the new neuro-scientific and physiological data increasingly made more available to social scientists through the use of new tools in brain imaging and biology, particularly in genetics.[19] Although mostly not causal as it stands, research on the physiological underpinnings of political phenomena is promising. It has the potential to alter many theories reviewed here about individual political psychology and create a truly interdisciplinary new perspective.

Last, it should be noted that despite the emergence and prominence of different perspectives in political psychology at different points in time, almost all the above-mentioned approaches are represented in current research in the field. Because each theory is more appropriate for explaining some political phenomena than others, and due to the breadth of the subject matter, political psychology remains one of the most lively and dynamic lines of inquiry in the study of politics.

Research Methods in Political Psychology

Scientific information in political psychology, as is the case with other disciplines, can only be obtained through the use of the scientific method. Political psychology research has progressed a great deal in its use of the scientific methodology since its initial reliance on psychoanalysis. The methods used in political psychology vary based on the kind of explanations that researchers seek, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches. However, because political psychology research has shown particular interest in explaining the processes involved in individual-level political phenomenon, dissecting the components of the political phenomenon and showing how these components interact in progress, laboratory experiments feature prominently in the field, followed by large-scale surveys and survey experiments.

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Laboratory experiments allow for causal explanations, a highly regarded prize in science, and provide high internal validity due to the highly controlled conditions of the laboratory setting. For instance, if the researcher is interested in deciphering the processes behind stereotyping and prejudice, or the affective spillovers in decision making, the sterile conditions of the laboratory where the treatments such as the appearance of a political candidate or the valence of messages are strictly controlled are highly desirable. One thing that researchers should pay attention to in an experimental design is the match between the subject pool and the inference group.[20] Laboratory experiments' subjects are often drawn from undergraduate courses, and at best they are an adult body that roughly represents the nation. If the study is about mass political behaviour, this does not preclude generalising the findings to the public; and sometimes political psychologists are less interested in generalisation and more interested in the explanation of a process. However, if the study's aim is to draw conclusions about political elites, because it is extremely hard to recruit political elites as experimental subjects, the study results may remain rather limited in generalisability. This is particularly important for studies in foreign policy decision making as the causal links in decision making established by laboratory experiments with ordinary citizens may change at the elite level. Another limitation of

experiments is their ability to produce information on only a couple of variables at a time, making it less desirable as a method for understanding mass political attitudes on a variety of topics. The latter is best achieved by survey methodology.

Unlike experiments, large-scale surveys have high external validity. As a result, the survey methodology is widely used to understand the public's political attitudes and behaviour. From the early studies[21] onwards, political surveys have become almost synonymous with public opinion studies, and have produced much of what we know about the relationships between contextual, demographic, and short-term forces and political attitudes, particularly in the US context. In the meantime, as research on the mechanisms of survey response have progressed, it has become evident that asking political questions that seem so simple to the lay person requires a technique that minimises the response instability over time and the framing and response effects. For instance, framing effects, i.e. a change in the responses due to the wording, order, and the number of available responses, question format and labelling, pose a major threat to the internal validity of survey research.[22] Hence, the choice of a survey design very much depends on the researcher's stand on this trade off between the ability to generalise the findings to real world situations and the ability to isolate causal relationships. The latter cannot be demonstrated using cross-sectional surveys. However, in the study of international relations, public opinion on foreign policy decisions, and the attitudes toward existing foreign policies, can best be investigated by survey research. The large number of variables involved, the laboratory settings' limitations, and the fact that public opinion research is primarily interested in mapping where the public stands on an issue all make the survey methodology a good fit for studying public opinion on foreign policy. An alternative method, the survey experiment, unites the strengths of surveys and experiments and helps researchers establish generalisable causal relationships. As a result, survey experiments are becoming more popular in political psychology, helping us answer questions about how the public thinks about political issues as well as what they think about them.[23] In the case of foreign policy public opinion research, survey experiments may help researchers solve the causality problem involving the leader and mass interaction on attitudes by showing how individual citizens form their foreign policy views.

Qualitative methods that are particularly relevant for political psychology include content analysis of documents and media sources, interviews, focus groups, and case studies. Among these content analysis stands as a popular approach in the study of the public policy proclivities of important political figures. More often than not,

content analysis in political psychology has been used to make inferences about the psychological state of politicians from the oral or written material attributed to them. The approach is an indispensable one in the study of political leaders and other elites as it is nearly impossible to have them participate in a quantitative research study. If the unit of analysis is the political leader, transcribed material presents the researcher with the opportunity to derive many variables of interest from the text and then apply statistical techniques to test the research hypotheses. Although the systematic and objective study of the text in content analysis is the method's scientific strength, the method's findings are valid to the extent that the text really belongs to the political leader studied. Moreover, the sampling of the texts or oral material should be done as randomly as possible, which requires utmost attention to the compilation of the relevant material to sample from. Otherwise, generalising the findings to the political persona of the leader would not be possible. Another limitation of the method is the absence of a controlled comparison, making the method vulnerable to inferential biases and errors. Less scientifically rigorous yet important in collecting preliminary data are open-ended interviews. This method, too, helps researchers gain insight about important political figures who cannot be studied using other methods. However, one should be aware of the fact that because there is no systematic measurement of predetermined variables, the evidence generated does not lend itself to scientific hypothesis testing. Less scientifically rigorous studies of political leaders such as psycho-biographies benefit from such interviews in addition to the analyses of transcribed material attributed to the leader. Focus group studies are an improvement over open-ended interviews in deciphering the political attitudes, decisions, and behaviour of ordinary citizens and political elites alike, although it may still be hard to recruit important political leaders for such studies. Focus group studies allow researchers to at least control the topics or questions to be discussed in a group setting where the participants are also allowed to interact. This provides a more natural setting than in a one-to-one interview. Moreover, it can easily be combined with a self-administered survey or a process-tracing method to see initial attitudes and how they change. However, the interval validity of the findings is still low due to a lack of

Content analysis in political psychology has been used to make inferences about the psychological state of politicians.

control of the predetermined variables and their consistent measurements. Other limitations of this method are the possibility of group dynamics and social desirability effects altering the responses and damaging the external validity of the findings. Focus groups, however, can be a great complement to quantitative studies to improve the richness of data and the explanatory power of research.

Case studies are more popular in political science and less so in psychology. In this method, different cases are compared along their most similar and most different dimensions to determine the significant contextual differences affecting the dependent variable of interest. For instance, Jervis used the cases of the First World War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Falklands War to investigate the relationship between the psychology of risk-taking and deterrence.[24] Jervis found that deterrence backfires because it creates a sense of insecurity on the part of the opponent. In political psychology, case studies abound in the study of conflict resolution and war and peace. However, because of the lack of controlled comparison cases, this method falls prey to the same inferential problems that affect content analysis. Comparison of a couple of cases does not create the conditions to establish causality, either. This should be left to the experiment. A careful choice of cases both in line and against the researcher's initial intuition is necessary for a genuine understanding of the conditions leading to political outcomes such as war and peace. Such insight can also help quantitative researchers understand what aspect of a problem they should focus and what variables to include in their study.

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As the discussion here details, each method has its advantages and disadvantages. It is up to the researcher to decide which one to choose based on the subject matter and the nature of the hypotheses tested. No matter what the choice is, however, researchers should bear in mind that it is the scientific rigor of their chosen method that will determine whether the information their study produces is scientific or not. Hence, although there are multiple methods and there may well be valid reasons to choose one method over the other, there is a hierarchy among social science methods in terms of the methods' ability to produce scientific information. This does not mean that researchers should use only the most scientifically rigorous method. In fact, a multi-method approach would be the strongest one in terms of improving the scientific quality of the findings. Combining

separate methods with different strengths in terms of generalisability, establishing causality or correlation, and providing in-depth information will help researchers ensure that the findings are not artefacts of the method used. As in all science, political psychologists working in the international relations field should take every possible precaution against the inclination to impose one's own expectations or theories onto the evidence. The use of the scientific method is perhaps the only proven way to counter this very human tendency.

Existing and Potential Contributions of Political Psychology to the Study of International Relations

As discussed above, because of its data-driven nature, political psychology contributes to the scientific quality of international relations studies. Its contributions, however, are more far reaching than just that. Although it focuses on the individual, political psychology can shed light on studies in international relations at various levels of analysis. At the individual level of analysis international relations is studied from the vantage point of foreign policy decision making, which in turn focuses on the leader as well as the close group of people that the leader interacts with to arrive at foreign policy decisions. Here, both insights from psychology on the decision maker's perceptions of the greater decision-making context and the foreign policy situation, and the insights from political psychology on the decision-making processes that take place within the group of the leader, advisors and bureaucrats can advance our understanding of the human agency in international relations. At the level of the state, public opinion research enriches our understanding of the domestic constraints on foreign policy decisions. Studies on executive influence attempt to pin down the interaction between the leadership and the masses in the formation of foreign policy decisions and the influence of public opinion on foreign policy making. At the level of the international system, macro theories of international relations use assumptions about decision-making processes that would be greatly refined by what decision-making research and its application to politics have taught us about decision-making errors and biases. At the transnational level, studies on the membership in social movements and terrorist organisations that cross borders can benefit from political psychological research. In brief, at all levels of analysis, political psychology can contribute to the study of international relations by advancing our understanding of the individual and social cognitive and emotional mechanisms.

In doing so, it can contribute to international relations theorising. As Goldgeier and Tetlock suggest, almost all strands of theorising in international relations can benefit from psychology in explaining what is not easily accounted for by the dominant rational model of decision making in the field.[25] Anomalies and boundary conditions can best be addressed by understanding the individual's role in the political outcome. All macro-level theories often implicitly and at times explicitly make assumptions about human psychology or map individual-level empirical assumptions onto states as in the assumptions of power maximisation, utility maximisation, or constructions of normative worlds. International relations scholar made assumptions about human agency while leaving the connection between these assumptions and the psychological mechanisms through which they translate into action largely unaddressed. Further theorising on the latter can refine significantly the predictions of the macro international relations theories. For instance, Jervis writes about the cognitive constraints on rational decision making within a realist framework and provides us with an error-and-bias portrait of the foreign policy maker.[26] Because from a cognitive point of view all causal inference and policy lessons are the product of mental construction, cognitive psychological analysis of world politics is particularly compatible with constructivism.[27]

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In addition, there are quite a few strands of international relations literature that directly benefit from political psychology. As explained above the study of foreign policy attitudes through public opinion research is one area that has a basis in the study of mass political behaviour from a psychological perspective. The use of cognitive errors, misperceptions, and biases approach as well as the initial perception of threat explanation of foreign policy decisions by scholars such as Philip Tetlock or Robert Jervis have further integrated psychology and international relations.[28] Again on the foreign policy decision-making literature, in-group pressures toward cohesiveness and conformity is considered one reason behind defective foreign policy decisions.[29] Studies of risk-taking in political psychology, particularly those using the prospect theory, constitute another body of literature that has a direct bearing on foreign policy analysis, and require more attention here.

Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, two Nobel laureates, have developed

the prospect theory to explain decision making under conditions of risk.[30] The theory has two phases: an editing phase and an evaluation phase. Contrary to the assumptions in the rational choice model of dominance, invariance, and transitivity, in the editing phase decisions can be substantially affected by the order and the manner in which the situation or the choice is presented. These effects are referred to as framing effects, as the presentation may leave out certain options or include some others to alter the final decision. In a classic study, Kahneman and Tversky asked their experimental subjects to make a choice between two health programmes on the outbreak of an Asian disease.[31] When the choices were presented in terms of the number of lives saved by the different programmes, a majority of subjects chose the risk-averse (certain) option, whereas when the choices were presented in terms of the number of deaths, a majority of subjects chose the risky (probabilistic) option. Hence, whether the question is framed as lives saved or lives lost altered the final decision.

The second phase of the prospect theory, the evaluation phase, has in turn two functions: the value function and the weighting function. The value function represents the evaluation of outcomes in terms of gains and losses relative to a status quo reference point. Also, the value curve is concave for gains and convex for losses, meaning people are risk-seeking for losses, and risk-averse for gains. Moreover, the value curve is much steeper for losses than for gains, meaning that losses loom larger than gains. The weighting function, on the other hand, tells us that people give too much subjective weight to low probability events, whereas medium and high probability events are not given sufficient weight in decision making. Hence, low probability makes people risk-taking in gains, and risk-averse in losses, a reversal of the value curve effect. These insights on decision making under conditions of risk have been applied to a variety of international relations situations to explain foreign policy making, such as the Roosevelt's behaviour in the Munich crisis, the U-2 crisis, the Suez crisis, and the Iranian hostage rescue mission.[32] However, the prospect theory has not received as great an attention as the significance of its predictions in the literature. One reason for this is the difficulty in determining the reference point, hence the loss or the gain frame that the decision maker operates in. Despite this, prospect theory is still a source of research opportunity for scholars interested in the behaviour of foreign policy decision makers.

Another line of scholarship at the intersection of political psychology and international relations has focused on the political leader as the prime actor influencing the outcome of political events. Operational code analysis has

its roots in the classic work "A Study of Bolshevism" by Nathan Leites.[33] Leites analysed Politburo members' cognitive heuristics and the characterological traits that influenced Soviet decision making, combining social cognition with the study of personality. He developed the operational code construct, the cognitive aspects of which were later conceptualised as a typology of political belief systems by Alexander George and Ole Holsti.[34] George argued that individuals' beliefs are consistent in the sense that they are constrained by master beliefs such as philosophical beliefs about the nature of politics and conflict, and instrumental beliefs about how to advance one's interests. Holsti further developed new typologies for operational codes grounded in cognitive schemas and scripts. A related theory, image theory, is designed to capture the perception of international relationships. It is a theory of strategic decision making where ideas about other international actors are organised into group schemas, or images, with cognitions and beliefs regarding the other's motives, leadership, and primary characteristics. Image studies include a detailed account of the cognitive perceptions of the other party, the relationship, and the resulting images, and the strategic responses associated with the perceptions. Images, or stereotypes of other nations, justify a nation's reaction to or treatment of another nation.[35]

Leadership trait analysis is another line of inquiry that helps us understand how political leaders would act in international relations. It is preoccupied with the decision maker's personal characteristics such as beliefs, motives, decision-making style, and social style in explaining foreign policy behaviour. Margaret Hermann considered both the need for power and the need for achievement as motives.[36] Decision-making style includes openness to new information, cognitive complexity, ambiguity tolerance, and risk propensity. In her research Hermann found two types of leaders: those who are participatory and seek change and those who are secretive and dislike change. These leadership styles in turn are believed to determine how leaders manage information, handle conflict, and lead their countries. One limitation of the leadership trait analysis is that leaders are analysed from a distance, mostly by content analyses of their speeches and writings. However, given the difficulty of reaching most political elites, it greatly contributes to what we know about foreign policy decision makers.

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Political psychology contributes to studies that emphasise group perception

and interaction as well. For instance, conflict analysis and resolution is a growing field of practice that has benefitted from a social-psychological approach. According to this specific take on conflict resolution, international conflict is considered a process driven by collective needs and fears, an inter-societal process, and a multifaceted one of mutual influence. Moreover, it can be a self-perpetuating process. Perceptual-cognitive processes may promote conflict or perpetuate it, hence negotiation and in its absence mediation, or interactive conflict resolution should all be carried out bearing in mind the perceptual and cognitive processes involved.[37]

Public Opinion Research

Both public opinion research on foreign policy and comparative public opinion research have relevance for the international relations scholar. Regarding the former, researchers have focused on the extent to which politicians shape the foreign policy attitudes of the mass public as well as the influence the public has on the foreign policy rhetoric and decisions of political leaders. Although public opinion has not been a major area of research for international relations scholars, it is a major component of political psychology literature. As such, it has advanced tools to inform the scientists and political elites alike regarding the foreign policy attitudes of the domestic mass public and of the publics abroad. As countries democratise the decision makers pay more attention to public opinion. Information on public opinion indicators from other countries might also be an important factor to be accounted for in crafting policies toward other nations.

Public opinion analysis aims to disentangle the complex individual influences that ultimately form one's political attitudes and judgments.

Public opinion research does not only describe the state of the mass public's attitudes, but also investigates its determinants and consequences. Public opinion research provides an overall understanding of how political attitudes are formed and changed. In line with the process-minded political psychology research, public opinion analysis aims to disentangle the complex individual influences that ultimately form one's political attitudes and judgments. Understanding public opinion requires an empirical analysis of certain variables through well-founded theories. From the influence of ideology and nationalism to the theories of identity and group-level behaviour public opinion research is multifaceted. Hence, the literature can help us understand the precursors

of change in the public that have implications for foreign affairs. The Arab Spring and several seemingly bottom-up governmental changes that are taking place in the Middle East require political psychological research, in particular public opinion research, to understand their determinants in the masses.

Comparative public opinion research can prove particularly useful for understanding the masses' influence on governmental decisions in the EU enlargement process or in other intergovernmental processes that require direct public approval. Understanding EU member countries' stands on the Turkish candidacy to the EU requires understanding the determinants of public attitudes in those countries toward enlargement generally and Turkey's accession process. Such attitudes are both shaped by the political elites and they themselves shape the rhetoric and decisions of political elites. Research that helps explain this loop of influence and that combines data from public opinion research and data on governmental decisions and policies toward accession countries will further shed light on Turkey's prospects for EU membership.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Political psychology has contributed and will contribute further to the study of international relations. A reliance on macro theories in international relations that adopt individual-level assumptions from rational choice theory but consider the individual irrelevant in the outcome of international events point to a unit of analysis problem in international relations theory. This in turn makes it hard for international relations scholars to explain the boundary conditions or anomalies in predictions. Insights from political psychology at the individual or group level of analysis will help improve the explanatory power of international relations studies by providing more information about the processes involved. Moreover, time is long due for a reassessment of the macro theories in light of increasing political psychology evidence that is contrary to the rational choice model. Political psychology also contributes to data-driven research on international relations and improves the scientific rigor of research methods in international relations.

In addition to the existing lines of inquiry at the intersection of international relations and political psychology reviewed here, there are emerging research opportunities for scholars interested in topics made more salient by recent international developments. Political upheavals, civic disobedience, and group actions including terrorism are all political phenomena that require psychological explanations. Because of the prominence of individual action and

communication in such phenomena international relations scholars have to turn to social psychology and political communication to gain an in-depth understanding of the conditions, motives, and human tendencies to theorise international change through individual and group action. Emotion, an increasingly popular explanatory variable in political science thanks to the contribution of political psychology, may be particularly instrumental in this endeavour.

Emotions have been shown to result in different yet automatic responses in individuals. Discrete emotions do colour perception and guide individual action in milliseconds, well under the time span that consciousness can intervene. As such emotions may serve as strong forces that mobilise people, make them automatically engage in a form of behaviour, or avoid it altogether. Research on discrete emotions has shown that emotions govern whether people rely on political habits or pay attention to new information. The latter often happens when they are anxious. It also affects risk-taking. While anxiety makes people more cautious, another negative emotion, anger, reduces risk-perception and may make people support military action they would otherwise not support.[38] These forces are likely in play in the recent political changes in the Middle East and in other areas where ordinary citizens are mobilised for extreme forms of political participation and action.

Political psychology contributes to data-driven research on international relations and improves the scientific rigor of research methods in international relations.

Another promising research area concerns the study of the political leader. An increasingly epidemiological look of some political psychology research gives us reason to be hopeful about the emergence of a new perspective in the study of leadership that takes into account the physiological state of the leader in predicting foreign policy and other decisions. McDermott argues that illness, age, and addiction provides specific, predictable, and recognisable shifts in attention, time perspective, cognitive capacity, judgment, and emotion.[39] This in turn predictably affects the decisions of impaired leaders. Hence, leadership traits cannot be construed as stable but are rather dependent upon the physical conditions of the leader. Research incorporating the personality perspective with the new data on the behavioural implications of human physiology may reinvigorate the study of leadership, the very topic that gave birth to political psychology and later waned in popularity.

In brief, there is much for international relations scholars to research from a political psychology perspective, particularly in the context of Turkey. Turkey presents the international relations scholar with ample opportunity and data, if sought, to study strategic interaction and particularly decision making. The prospect theory is underutilised in explaining foreign policy behaviour, and can serve as a fountain of several hypotheses on foreign policy making in Turkey and in its neighbours. More political psychology research on the foreign attitudes toward Turkey, as well as on Turkish attitudes toward other countries and the European Union is needed to understand the ebb and flow of positive and negative feelings and cognitions over time. As the contributions in this special issue also show, political psychology is a promising field for international relations scholars interested in Turkey and beyond. It will become even more relevant and popular as the roles the individual and the group play in international change become more important and visible in the post Cold War world.

Endnotes

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