

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical Foundations of Political Psychology

LEONIE HUDDY, DAVID O. SEARS, JACK S. LEVY,
AND JENNIFER JERIT

POLITICAL psychology, at the most general level, is an application of what is known about human psychology to the study of politics. It draws upon theory and research on biopsychology, neuroscience, personality, psychopathology, evolutionary psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, and intergroup relations. It addresses political elites—their personality, motives, beliefs, and leadership styles, and their judgments, decisions, and actions in domestic policy, foreign policy, international conflict, and conflict resolution. It also deals with the dynamics of mass political behavior: voting, collective action, the influence of political communications, political socialization and civic education, group-based political behavior, social justice, and the political incorporation of immigrants.

The field of political psychology has experienced healthy growth since the publication of the second edition of the *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* in 2013. Research continues to be fueled by a mix of age-old questions and recent world events. Social psychologists and political scientists have turned to psychology to understand the origins of support for nationalist and populist political leaders (Forgas et al., 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), political conservatism (Brandt et al., 2014; Jost, 2017), partisan polarization (Iyengar et al., 2019), compliance with COVID-related public health guidelines (Druckman et al., 2021; Pennycook et al., 2022), mass political violence (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022), racial politics (White & Laird, 2020; Jardina, 2019), anti-immigrant sentiment (Davidov et al., 2020; Sirin et al., 2016), signaling resolve in international politics (Kertzer, 2016), and the underpinnings of collective action (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Sustained interest in the topics addressed by political psychologists goes hand in hand with a strong and increasingly global organization, the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP), and the growing circulation of *Political Psychology*, its well-respected journal. The journal has retained its stature as the leading journal in the field, increasing its two-year (4.80) and five-year impact factor (5.57) in the 2021 Journal Citation Reports

database. There are also vibrant political psychology sections of major national and regional organizations such as the organized section of the American Political Science Association (APSA), the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Standing Group, the Political Studies Association, the British Psychological Society, and standalone associations such as the German Political Psychology Network.

There is a continued growth in textbooks, handbooks, edited volumes, and monographs devoted to the field. Textbooks by Cottam and colleagues (2015) and Houghton (2015) have been recently updated, and Mintz and colleagues (2021) recently published a new text. Recent handbooks include *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Psychology* (Nesbitt-Larking et al., 2014), the *Cambridge Handbook of Political Psychology* (Osborne & Sibley, 2022), and *Political Psychology in Latin America* (Zúñiga & López-López, 2021). Several major presses, including Cambridge, Oxford, Routledge, and Palgrave have book series in political psychology. There is also a steady stream of monographs published in the field each year, leading to the existence of three annual book prizes dedicated to political psychology: the Robert E. Lane book prize awarded by the Political Psychology Section of the American Political Science Association, and the Alexander George and David O. Sears prizes awarded by the International Society for Political Psychology.

The current edition of the Handbook takes stock of the past decade's developments in political psychology, building closely on the second edition of the *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Huddy et al., 2013). In this third edition of the *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, widely respected political scientists and psychologists summarize what psychology has contributed to our understanding of the political behavior of both political elites and ordinary citizens, and the insights into basic psychology obtained from research on political behavior. The chapters in the Handbook provide an overview of key terms, major theories, and cutting-edge research within both psychology and political science and will be an essential reference for scholars and students interested in the intersection of these two fields.

We designed the Handbook to provide a comprehensive and expertly distilled account of research in many subfields of political psychology for both the beginning graduate student and the more advanced scholar who may be new to a specific subfield or topic. But we should note that the first two editions of the Handbook will remain useful references because they contain topics and discussions that are omitted from the current volume. Moreover, political psychology is a diverse and growing subfield, and by necessity not all topics could be included in a single volume. Topics that did not make it into this volume include the political psychology of inequality, political extremism, populism and autocracy, and climate change. These topics are touched on within different chapters but may constitute distinct chapters in a future edition of the Handbook.

In compiling this volume, we acknowledge the growing international flavor of contemporary political psychology, which explores topics as diverse as the dynamics of American presidential elections, resistance to immigration in a globalized economy, and the role of emotion and threat in the decisions of political leaders. Where possible, authors of chapters in this volume have chosen examples of good political psychology research from around the globe, demonstrating the broad explanatory power of common psychological forces within different polities. Cognitive biases, authoritarianism, patriotism, ethnocentrism, and social conformity are not constrained by geographic boundaries but are evident throughout the world, albeit in interaction with specific cultures and political systems.

1. WHAT IS POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY?

At its core, political psychology concerns the behavior of individuals within a specific political system. Psychology alone cannot explain the Holocaust, intractable conflicts, war, or most other behavior of states or collective political actors in complex environments. Individuals do not act within a vacuum. Their behavior varies with, and responds to, differences in political institutions, political cultures, leadership styles, and social norms. As Levy notes in chapter 10 (this volume), psychology influences foreign policy behavior primarily through its interaction with specific aspects of the international system, national governments, and distinct societies. The same logic applies to a wide range of different phenomena. Feldman and Weber develop this point more fully in chapter 20 (this volume) on authoritarianism. Do we look to the behavior of leaders or their followers to understand why citizens in the 1930s and 1940s followed fascist leaders who persecuted and killed millions of people? Were the atrocities committed in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia a function of political leadership, the support (acquiescence) of the public, or both? Some scholars attribute the Holocaust squarely to the psychology of authoritarian followers (Adorno et al., 1950); others view it as a function of leadership and the pervasive human propensity to obey authority (Milgram, 1974); still others view it as the reaction of authoritarian individuals to social and political discord (Feldman & Stenner, 1997). In the end it is difficult to believe that someone with authoritarian tendencies will behave the same way under a fascist regime as in a liberal democracy.

A complex mix of individual psychology and political context also shapes public reactions to terrorism as discussed by Snider and colleagues in chapter 14 (this volume). Public support for anti-terrorism policies depends on how a threatened government reacts, the government's perceived competence and effectiveness in combatting terrorism, and a person's felt vulnerability to a future terrorist event. External forces such as the strength of government national security policy or terrorist determination and capabilities vary over time and across contexts, and they influence, in turn, whether a citizen feels anxious or angry in response to a terrorist event. Powerful terrorists and a weak government tend to generate anxiety among a threatened population, whereas a powerful government and weak terrorists will likely generate feelings of anger. Moreover, not everyone responds to threat in the same way, and individual psychological dispositions play an added role in determining whether someone reacts to terrorism with anger or anxiety. In general, a society dominated by feelings of anger may support aggressive antiterrorism action, whereas a population dominated by feelings of anxiety may oppose aggressive action that exacerbates the risk of terrorism (Albertson & Gadarian, 2015; Huddy & Feldman, 2011). Neither individual psychology nor political circumstances alone is likely to fully explain these reactions.

In a more general sense, questions about public reactions to terrorism or an authoritarian response to fascist rule are closely linked to one of the perennial questions raised by political psychology: How well are citizens equipped to handle their democratic responsibilities (Le Cheminant & Parrish, 2011)? Can they deliberate over the issues of the day fairly to arrive at a reasoned judgment, or conversely do they succumb to internecine enmities and fall victim to irrational intolerance? Many of the chapters in this Handbook grapple with such issues, underscoring the democratic capabilities of the citizenry while highlighting

ways in which leaders and citizens fall short of the democratic ideal. The question of a citizenry's democratic competence is addressed very directly by Jerit and Kam in chapter 15 (this volume) as they consider the variability in information processing and the conditions under which citizens update their beliefs and attitudes in response to new information. It is also central to Young and Miller's account of contemporary political communications research in chapter 16 (this volume). Both citizens and leaders exhibit distorted reasoning and a slew of cognitive and emotional biases that are well cataloged in this volume. Partisan resistance to new information, ethnocentric reactions to immigrants, automatic and pre-conscious reactions to a political candidate's facial features, greater risk-taking in the face of losses than gains—the list goes on. Many of these same processes are at work among political leaders for whom partisan loyalties loom large, threat impairs their ability to deliberate rationally, and emotions such as humiliation and anger affect their political decisions. In that sense leaders are vulnerable to emotional and cognitive psychological biases like those observed within the electorate.

Yet democratic societies more or less work, and political psychology has focused in recent years on individual differences among citizens to explain why a characterization of the public as biased, ethnocentric, fearful, or any other singular characterization is erroneous. Individual differences grounded in early socialization, genetic makeup, social context, and personality generate liberals and conservatives, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, tolerant and intolerant individuals, more and less well-informed citizens, and sectarian partisan elites. Politics emerges from such individual differences, leading to political disagreements that are visible and widely debated within well-functioning democratic societies. Even if citizens engage in biased reasoning, competing arguments are pervasive and difficult to avoid completely; the passionate are free to make their case, and the dispassionate can evaluate their efforts and arguments. The democratic process may be messy, unsatisfying, and frustrating, but it is an inherently human activity. As scholars we need to know something about both a political system and human psychology to make sense of it. The interplay of psychology and politics, especially within democratic processes, is a central theme of this volume and lies at the core of many of its chapters.

2. INTELLECTUAL UNDERPINNINGS OF POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

As we noted in the very first edition of this Handbook, there is no one political psychology (Sears et al., 2003). Rather, researchers have employed several different psychological theories to study political behavior and attitudes. Some theories are more appropriate than others for analyzing certain political phenomena, as seen in many of the chapters in the Handbook. For example, Freudian psychodynamics can be applied to questions concerning the psychology of political leaders, and discourse theory is applied specifically to the analysis of political rhetoric and communications. But some of the psychological approaches employed across these chapters are marshaled to understand diverse political phenomena. For example, the influence of cognitive and emotional processes on elite and citizen decision-making is discussed in several chapters. Basic aspects of the affective and

cognitive system such as the link between anger and risk seeking or the limits of working memory and attention have broad ramifications for the study of political behavior across diverse political topics. To deepen insight into the intellectual underpinnings of political psychology, we lay out the major classes of psychological theories that have been applied to the study of political behavior (see also Cottam et al., 2015; Marcus, 2013; Sullivan et al., 2002). Each of the broad approaches we discuss contains several different theories and concepts yet are brought together by their focus on broadly similar psychological processes and mechanisms.

2.1. Rational Choice

Over the last six decades, rational choice theory has been a major influence on political science models of both elite and mass political behavior. This is understandable since democratic theory is predicated on the notion of a well-informed citizenry capable of handling and digesting information on issues of the day to arrive at well-informed decisions. As Chong explains in chapter 4 (this volume), rational choice theory is built on a set of basic assumptions about human behavior that resemble the requirements for a well-functioning citizenry: first, individuals have consistent preferences that reflect their desires and goals, which are often defined as the pursuit of economic self-interest; second, individuals assign a value or utility to these goals which helps them choose among multiple preferences; and third, probabilities are assigned to the different ways of achieving such goals. This culminates in Chong's definition of rational choice as "choosing the course of action that maximizes one's expected utility." If utilities, or goals, are equated with economic self-interest, as they often are, a rational choice model predicts that an individual will be motivated to act in ways that are most likely to pay the highest financial dividend. In politics, this translates into support of candidates and policies that are most likely to improve voters' economic bottom line and benefit them personally. Expectancy-value theory was formalized in psychology as an early version of the rational choice idea (Edwards, 1954; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

As Chong notes, however, pure rationality is something of a fiction when applied to human behavior. Downs (1957) was the first to identify the paradox of voting, a major problem for rational choice theory, in which the costs of voting far exceed its expected benefit to one's self-interest, suggesting that it is irrational even though frequently practiced (see also Green & Shapiro, 1994). Since Downs, it has become increasingly clear that neither leaders nor citizens make entirely rational political decisions. Researchers are moving away from or modifying a rational model of human behavior in many branches of political science, as reflected in Chong's discussion of bounded and low-information rationality. At the forefront of this effort lies pioneering research by social psychologists on systematic biases in human decision-making (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman et al., 1982).

In chapter 11 (this volume), Stein provides a succinct account of a rationalist approach to threat perception in the field of international relations and highlights its inadequacy to fully explain elite behavior and decision-making (see also Caster and Yarhi-Milo, chapter 12). Stein documents several cognitive, motivational, and emotional biases that distort elite threat perceptions and reactions to threat. Levy (chapter 10, this volume) develops these themes further. He summarizes prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) as an alternative to rationalist expected utility as a theory of choice under conditions of risk. He also

reviews the literature on intertemporal choice, on how people make trade-offs between current and future outcomes, noting the limitations of standard rationalist models of discounting over time (Loewenstein et al., 2003).

At the level of mass politics, among the earliest challenges to rational choice were observations that major political attitudes were in place well before adults began contemplating the political arena, in studies of political socialization and voting behavior (see Sears and Brown, chapter 3, this volume). Later challenges came from Kahneman and Tversky's findings on cognitive heuristics and biases, which blossomed into the subfield of behavioral decision theory and behavioral economics (Camerer et al., 2004), fields that intersect quite closely with political psychology. Behavioral economics and other well-documented psychologically based deviations from rationality are discussed at some length by Lau and Redlawsk (chapter 5, this volume) on citizen political decision-making.

In conclusion, it is difficult to overstate the importance of rational choice theory as a foundational basis for democratic theory and a stimulus to political psychology research. Its emphasis on the structure of information, careful deliberation, and weighting of one's interests as essential to the formation of informed positions on political matters continues to serve as a baseline for much political psychology research. Rational choice theory may provoke political psychologists to document the ways in which human behavior fails to conform with its stringent expectations, but even in that role it is highly influential. Moreover, even to political psychologists the public's democratic shortcomings are cause for consternation no matter how well explained psychologically, suggesting some lingering desire for the normative standard of rational deliberation and well-informed political decisions.

2.2. Biopolitics

Over the last decade or so, social scientists have begun to view human behavior through the prism of biology with intriguing results: neuroscience sheds light on information processing and emotion, evolutionary psychology underscores the biologically adaptive role of various social behaviors, and behavioral genetics uncovers the heritability of many social and political behaviors (Hatemi & McDermott, 2011). Political psychology has adopted this perspective, leading to a key focus on biological reasoning and evidence in several chapters in the volume, and a passing reference to biological evidence in many others.

At one level an explanation of human behavior grounded in evolutionary thinking seems consistent with a focus on rationality since human behavior is functional, geared toward enhanced reproductive fitness via the process of natural selection. In the Handbook, Bang Petersen explains the evolutionary approach to political psychology in chapter 7, beginning with the distinction between "proximate" and "ultimate" explanations. A proximal explanation describes the psychological mechanism responsible for producing political behavior—for example, how partisan social identities influence political participation. An ultimate explanation engages the question of why those identities form in the first place. Although politics may seem busy, technical, and complex, Bang Petersen observes that many ancient challenges were political in nature: "who is in the outgroup, how to divide resources within the group, and how to sanction those who take more than their share." While classic rational choice theory postulates a conscious goal of maximizing utility, an evolutionary approach views citizens as "adaptation executioners"—making decisions based on evolved

psychological mechanisms that increased fitness in ancestral environments. This perspective is at odds with other branches of political psychology that lament the sophistication of the average citizen. However, and as Bang Petersen notes, the adaptations that evolved to solve the problems of the ancestral past may “fail in predictable ways when applied to the problems that are unique to the politics of modern mass societies.”

Evolutionary psychology focuses on attributes of psychology common to all members of the species, but some questions tackled by biopolitics deal with marked individual variation in human behavior. Why are some people open to experience and others closed, or some conscientious and others not? In chapter 8, Settle and Detert pick up where Bang Petersen leaves off, providing an overview of how political scientists have integrated biology into the study of politics. This work has taken place in four domains: genetics, neuroscience, physiology, and hormones. Settle and Detert evaluate the research on genetics, concluding that heritability shapes a range of fundamental political orientations and behaviors, including political ideology, strength of partisanship, political interest, and political participation. In a sign that the field of biopolitics is no longer in its infancy, progress has been made elaborating the mechanisms (e.g., operating at the hormonal or neurocognitive level) that link genetic variation to downstream attitudes and behaviors. One of the fastest growing areas of biopolitics explores physiologically instantiated responses, measured by heart rate or skin conductance, to external stimuli such as campaign ads, news content, or political discussions.

Other chapter authors allude in passing to the growing field of biopolitics. Stein discusses developments in the neural understanding of emotions in reference to the perception of threat among political elites. Bakker notes that political ideology and aspects of personality have heritable components. This point is reinforced by Feldman and Weber, who discuss the heritability of an authoritarian tendency, and Ben-Nun Bloom indicates that popular measures of values and morality have a common genetic basis. Petersen discusses a genetic basis to pathogen sensitivity that is linked to political preference but also makes clear that evolutionary psychology is distinct from behavioral genetics. Attention to the biological bases of political behavior will hopefully reinforce existing insights into political behavior and help to identify basic biological pathways that may be central to an understanding of political psychology.

2.3. Personality and Psychodynamics

Many political psychologists have examined an individual's personality or characterological predispositions to explain the behavior of political leaders and the ideological choices of citizens. Personality is usually defined as a collection of relatively persistent individual differences that transcend specific situations and contribute to the observed stability of attitudes and behavior. In the last fifteen years, political psychologists have shown renewed interest in stable personality traits and their effects on political attitudes and behavior based, in part, on growing consensus on the basic structure of personality traits.

Psychologists commonly identify five basic clusters of personality characteristics or traits—neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness—commonly referred to as the five-factor or Big Five framework of personality. These dimensions are described in some detail and their links to political ideology

examined in the Handbook by Bakker in chapter 2. The five-factor model has broad influence in political psychology and is touched on in Handbook chapters by Settle and Detert, Jerit and Kam, Federico and Malka, Ben-Nun Bloom, and Feldman and Weber. Bakker goes beyond conventional accounts of personality, first by describing other theoretical approaches such as the HEXACO model and the Dark Tetrad, and second, by noting the challenges of measuring personality and identifying its effects on political attitudes and behavior. There is growing evidence regarding the relationship between personality and vote choice, political engagement, and the strength of political loyalties. Yet as Bakker points out, “the cross-sectional research designs that make up most of the personality-politics literature do not allow for causal interpretations.” He explains how the adoption of open science practices (e.g., replication, preregistration) can move the field forward.

Sigmund Freud had a great deal of influence on early political psychologists because his psychoanalysis of specific individuals lent itself well to the analysis of the personalities of specific political leaders. Harold Lasswell, in his *Psychopathology and Politics* (1930), was a pioneer in analyzing the personalities of political activists in terms of the unconscious conflicts that motivated their political activities. This approach led to numerous psychobiographies of famous leaders, such as the analysis of Woodrow Wilson by George and George (1956), or of Martin Luther by Erik Erikson (1958). Mohls and colleagues critique past scholarship on leadership for its dependence on personality explanations, noting recent trends that emphasize its subjective and context-dependent nature. The idiographic approach to personality and politics pursued in past psychobiographies can also be contrasted with the nomothetic approach discussed by Bakker, which statistically places large numbers of people at various positions on specific dimensions of personality.

Federico and Malka (chapter 17) also add an important caveat to the study of personality and politics, outlining the interplay between dispositional predictors of ideology and the political environment. Personality and temperament remain influential in the origins of ideological reasoning, but this relationship is moderated in predictable ways by issue domain, national context, and exposure to elite discourse.

2.4. Cognitive and Affective Psychology

Cognitive psychology and neuroscience have had profound influence on political psychology through their discovery of key features of the cognitive system: limited attention and working memory, implicit attitudes that lie outside conscious awareness, the rapid formation of habitual mental associations, and the interplay of affect and cognition. In essence, the cognitive system is highly efficient, processing a great deal of information with relatively little mental exertion. Under appropriate conditions, individuals can override the human tendency toward fast and efficient decision-making (Kahneman, 2011). But political decision-making is often beset with biases that privilege habitual thought and consistency over the careful consideration of new information. This is not always bad. Indeed, in the realm of consumer and other choices, such fast gut-level decisions are often superior to reasoned thought. But in the realm of politics, reliance on this form of reasoning privileges consistency through the process of motivated reasoning in which disagreeable or challenging information is quickly rejected. This can lead, in turn, to biased and suboptimal political decisions (Bartels, 1996).

In myriad ways, cognitive psychology has undermined the rational choice model of elite and public decision-making, and we briefly describe how awareness of each aspect of the cognitive system has shaped the study of political psychology over the last decade. Much of this research is dedicated toward understanding how well (or poorly) democratic citizens function and the degree to which they deviate from the normative ideal of rational decision-making.

2.4.1. *Cognitive Economy*

Clear limits on human information-processing capacity underlie the widespread use of cognitive heuristics or shortcuts, which can distort the decision-making of elites (Jervis, 1976; Larson, 1985) and members of the public. These limits often lead to what Herbert Simon (1957) refers to as “bounded rationality,” discussed at some length in the Handbook chapter by Chong.

Lau and Redlawsk turn to the use of cognitive heuristics among citizens and review work on behavioral decision theory, contrasting normative models with behavioral descriptions of how ordinary people make political decisions. Here too the cognitive limits on rationality lead to a variety of problem-solving strategies that involve cognitive shortcuts. The use of mental shortcuts is not necessarily pernicious, however. The chapter by Lau and Redlawsk suggests that the use of cognitive shortcuts for reasoned political deliberation may not be as bad for mass political decision-making as once feared (also see Pierce & Lau, 2019). Brader and Gadarian also note that anxiety reduces reliance on heuristics but can have other negative effects on reasoning such as an increased attention and reliance on threatening information.

Cognitive economy represents one end of the epistemic continuum. In the Handbook, Jerit and Kam describe features of individuals and contexts that can impart the motivation to devote more rather than less effort to politics. Someone who is low in the need for closure, for example, will make judgments in a different manner than someone who is high in this trait. Likewise, in particular settings such as an uncertain election outcome or a high stakes foreign conflict citizens may be compelled to invest more effort in the decision-making process. The notion of a continuum of effort is at the core of dual-process models, with labels such as “System I–System II” or “Heuristic–Systematic.” These models are described at length by Jerit and Kam and featured in chapters by Lau and Redlawsk, Bang Petersen, Ben-Nun Bloom, and Chong.

2.4.2. *Implicit Attitudes and Automaticity*

Conscious cognitive activity is a limited commodity, and decisions are often made, and opinions influenced, by information outside conscious awareness. The brain is largely devoted to monitoring the body, and most of its activity lies outside consciousness, reserving conscious thought for important higher-level activities. Political psychologists might regard political decisions as a high-level activity warranting conscious deliberation, yet political attitudes can be influenced by information of which someone may be unaware. Jerit and Kam discuss this phenomenon most fully in their chapter, noting that System I processing can occur automatically and unconsciously. Examples include rapid, unreflective trait inferences based on candidate attractiveness or instantaneous positive/negative affect

in response to political objects. Several chapters discuss implicit attitudes and the widely used Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998). Kinder extends this discussion to implicit racial attitudes, examining their nature and political effects. Schneider and Bos discuss the use of implicit gender-bias measures to examine bias against women political candidates. The measure of implicit attitudes continues to shed light on the political effects of racial, gender, and other group biases.

The notion of automaticity shares an intellectual link with behaviorist theories that were much in vogue in the middle half of the 20th century. One version of behaviorist theories emphasizes the learning of long-lasting habits, which in turn guide later behavior. They were inspired by the classical conditioning studies of Pavlov, who showed that dogs could be conditioned to salivate at the sound of a bell if it were always followed by food; by the instrumental conditioning studies of Watson and Skinner, who showed that animals could develop complex habits if their behavior proved instrumental to the satisfaction of their basic needs such as hunger or thirst; and the imitative learning examined by Bandura, who showed that children would engage in imitative behavior without any involvement of need satisfaction. Such theories long dominated the analysis of mass political attitudes. The field of political socialization, as described in chapter 3 by Sears and Brown, developed from the assumption that children learned basic political attitudes (such as party identification and racial prejudice) from their families and friends, and that the residues of these early attitudes dominated their later political attitudes in adulthood, such as their presidential vote preferences, triggering a host of automatic associations not readily subject to conscious scrutiny.

2.4.3. *Spreading Activation and Habitual Association*

The process of automaticity is linked to the axiomatic notion, developed by Hebb (1949), that neurons that fire together, wire together. The simultaneous pairing of two objects in the environment leads to the firing of their relevant neurons. If this pairing persists, the brain associates the two objects habitually and recalls the second when primed with the first in a process of spreading activation. For example, if the word liberal is frequently associated in popular conversation with loose-living, pot-smoking, intellectual, or impractical dreamers, or the media depict African Americans in settings that emphasize their poverty, unemployment, and drug-related crimes, the terms will become connected mentally. This set of mental associations may lie at the heart of implicit racial, gender, and other group stereotypes discussed in the Handbook by Donald Kinder in chapter 27.

The existence of habitual associations in the brain results in consistent thought patterns that link, for example, abortion and liberal-conservative ideology, or positive feelings about capitalism and support for government fiscal austerity measures. These associations are typically constructed through political rhetoric, as discussed by Hopkins in chapter 9. In general, such associations anchor policy positions and contribute to attitude stability over time, especially among those who connect policies to stable political attitudes such as political ideology or other basic values. But habitual mental associations also vary among individuals; political sophisticates with strongly anchored political beliefs show stronger habitual mental associations than those with few or weakly held beliefs. The existence of consistent mental associations helps to explain why reframing a political issue—discussing

a tax cut in terms of reduced government waste rather than growing inequality, for example—will be effective for citizens for whom the concept of a tax cut is not anchored by other stable political beliefs but will be less successful among political sophisticates.

Understanding the factors or situations in which someone scrutinizes their habitual mental associations is of critical interest to political psychology and the study of a democratic citizenry more generally. In chapter 6 on political emotion, Brader and Gadarian present evidence that habitual thought is less common when individuals feel anxious. Under those circumstances, citizens seek out new information, process it carefully, and are motivated to reach the “right” decision. The distinction between more and less effortful information processing is captured within dual-process models that posit both a superficial and more deliberate path to attitude change. The delineation of conditions under which citizens engage in careful political deliberation and are open to new information remains of key interest to political psychologists and will continue to stimulate research in both psychology and political science.

2.4.4. *Interplay of Affect and Cognition*

Contemporary political psychology draws increasingly on affective processes. We noted in the previous version of the Handbook a tilt away from reliance on purely cognitive explanations to a greater consideration of affect and emotion. This trend has strengthened in the last decade, leading to an even greater reliance on “hot” cognition and an increasingly emotional view of political behavior in the current edition. It is difficult to find a chapter in the volume that does not make at least passing reference to the role of political emotions in research on citizens or political elites.

Levy discusses the impact of cognitive biases and motivated biases (motivated reasoning) on foreign policy decision-making. Cognitive biases, sometimes referred to as “cold” cognitions, are based on the application of cognitive heuristics such as anchoring, in which prior probability assessments exert a disproportionate weight and in which the updating of priors based on new information is slow and inefficient. Motivated reasoning is driven by “hot” affective processes, by people’s interests and policy preferences and by their psychological needs and emotional well-being. Wishful thinking and related patterns help to maintain cognitive consistency and to preserve the integrity of one’s belief system, but at the costs of potentially serious distortions in the processing of information. Such biases in adulthood force an examination of the origins of attitudes and beliefs that require such vigorous defense, as developed in the chapter on childhood and adult development by Sears and Brown.

In addition to Brader and Gadarian’s detailed discussion of political emotions, emotions surface in numerous ways in this edition of the Handbook. Young and Miller describe how the change to a more decentralized and micro-segmented media landscape has increased the emotional content of the information environment. Levy comments on growing interest over the past decade in the study of emotions within international relations, at both the elite and mass level. Stein discusses the influence of emotions on elites’ perceptions of, and responses to, external threats. She builds on Brader and Gadarian’s discussion of the origins and cognitive consequences of different classes of emotions to explain the likely consequences of fear, humiliation, and anger for elite decision-making. Kertzer describes

several emotion-based explanations for the rally effect in which leaders experience increased public support in times of war. Snider and colleagues discuss the varying political effects of emotional reactions to terrorism and war.

Positive and negative affect is an integral component of implicit attitudes, as noted by Jerit and Kam, and in that sense emotion plays a very central role within modern attitude research in both psychology and political science. The integral role of emotions in the public's political decision making is made clear in numerous chapters. Young and Miller discuss the role of anger and anxiety in driving selective information exposure. Ben-Nun Bloom discusses at length a modern approach to the study of morality in which it is regarded as an emotional and intuitive basis of political judgement. Mason underscores the contribution of intergroup emotions to help explain partisan reactions to political threat and the development of partisan cohesion and action. Kinder discusses the importance of affect to the study of racial prejudice. Cohen-Chen and Halperin discuss the key role play by emotions such as anger, hatred, fear, and hope in both inflaming and deescalating intractable group conflicts, shedding light on important processes of emotion regulation.

Brader and Gadarian review research on political emotions in considerable detail. Their chapter underscores a fourth crucial aspect of the cognitive system, the intricate interplay between affect and cognition. Hot cognition underscores the degree to which motivational and affective states influence decision-making, and is discussed at some length by Jerit and Kam. Motivated reasoning serves as a pervasive example of hot cognition in which individuals are motivated to preserve their beliefs, oppose challenging or contradictory views, and dismiss the other side's arguments as far weaker than one's own. In essence, it produces rapid (and perhaps preconscious) dismissal of opposing views. The existence of motivated reasoning generates a paradox, however, when it comes to political sophisticates, who turn out to be most subject to automaticity and motivated reasoning. In Chong's words, "the beliefs of the best informed may reflect an ideologically distorted perspective rather than the objective state of the world," raising real questions about the rational basis of public opinion. If those with the information needed to make a fully informed decision are also the most biased in their reasoning, rational deliberation seems like an unattainable political ideal.

2.5. Intergroup Relations

In tandem with a growing interest in emotions, contemporary political psychology is also increasingly focused on collective behavior and theories of intergroup relations as explanations for political behavior. This trend has accelerated in the past decade. The second edition of this Handbook contained numerous chapters linked to intergroup relations. This focus continues and has been expanded in the current volume. Chapters explicitly devoted to intergroup relations have increased to additionally include the political psychology of gender, authoritarianism as a form of group defense, an explicitly group-based account of leadership, public reactions to terrorism, nationalism, the politics of minority status, and status hierarchies. Moreover, the increased focus on group-based political behavior is entwined with other changes that have occurred within politics and the field of political psychology. There is a very noticeable increase in references to intergroup theories such as social identity theory in the current Handbook. The political importance of group identities

is discussed at length in Mason's chapter on political identities but is also referred to as a basis of political attitudes and behavior in chapters on political rhetoric, communications, authoritarianism, collective action, nationalism, minority status, status hierarchies, and intractable conflict.

The field of intergroup relations does not embody a single theoretical approach; rather it draws on diverse psychological theories. But it is fair to say that many, if not most, analyses of collective behavior deviate from a rational choice account of human behavior. For instance, Bang Peterson notes the power of collectives within human evolution and how solutions to the problems of cooperation (e.g., cheater detection) have implications for contemporary political attitudes and behavior. Early research on intergroup relations, conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, stressed the biased and emotional nature of out-group animosity, especially toward Jews and Negroes (Allport, 1954). Much attention has been paid to the childhood socialization of prejudice and stereotyping, as indicated in the chapter by Sears and Brown. Feldman and Weber discuss research on the authoritarian personality, a highly influential study of prejudice, which emphasized the importance of interrelated and emotionally motivated aspects of personality such as authoritarian submission and authoritarian aggression in the development of racial prejudice and anti-Semitism (Adorno et al., 1950).

Some accounts of intergroup behavior, such as realistic conflict theory, are consistent with rational choice and are often pitted against symbolic explanations of group political cohesion and conflict. Mason highlights the distinction between social identity theory, which stresses social prestige and intergroup respect as motives for intergroup behavior (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and realistic interest theories, which place emphasis on shared material interests and conflict over tangible resources (Blumer, 1958; Sherif & Sherif, 1953). A similar distinction between realistic and affective responses to members of an out-group surfaces in research on racial attitudes in Snider and colleagues' discussion of public reactions to terrorism, Kinder's discussion of prejudice, and Green and Staerke's chapter on immigration and multiculturalism. On balance, there is greater support for symbolic than realistic sources of political group cohesion and conflict.

Threat plays a special role in the political life of a collective. It can galvanize and unify an in-group while leading to vilification of an out-group and is thus particularly potent politically. Threat is widely discussed in Handbook chapters dealing with the political psychology of mass politics, including Snider et al.'s overview of public reactions to terrorism, Feldman and Weber's chapter on authoritarianism, Mason's chapter on political identities, Huddy's discussion of nationalism, Green and Staerke's consideration of immigration and multiculturalism, Kinder's overview of racial prejudice, and Chen-Cohen and Halperin's overview of intractable conflicts. The concept of threat has long dominated research on conflict within international relations, as noted at some length in chapters by Stein, Casler and Yarhi-Milo, and Kertzer. Research on both mass and elite politics assesses the rationality of threat reactions and generally rejects that interpretation, at least in broad stroke. Highly distorted subjective judgments often influence elites' perception of threat, as noted in chapters by Levy, Stein, and Kertzer. Moreover, economic threats are typically less politically potent than cultural and other less tangible noneconomic threats in mass politics, as discussed in chapters by Craig and Phillips, Kinder, and Green and Staerke.

Finally, humans' impressive capacity for cooperation, a topic discussed at length by Bang Petersen, leads us back to consider the political psychology of positive normative change.

Cooperation can extend to groups as reflected in Craig and Phillips discussion of allyship and contexts in which members of a dominant group seek to reduce social inequality. Tropp and Dehron consider strategies, such as intergroup contact and changing social norms, that reduce prejudice. Cohen-Chen and Halperin describe various conflict-resolution strategies, including new interventions designed to facilitate emotional regulation. As social animals, humans are profoundly affected by social norms, which are often learned early and well in the socialization process, as indicated by Sears and Brown. Such norms hold the potential for good as well as evil.

Have the scales tipped toward a more humane and cooperative world? Such a claim would undoubtedly be disputed by scholars of international conflicts, indigenous oppression, economic inequality, and other societal ills. Nonetheless, research on values and social justice opens political psychology to the positive forces of cooperation, tolerance, and respect on which modern democratic societies pivot. Adherence to a norm of cooperation may not be rational for an individual (if defined as the pursuit of self-interest) but can have clear advantages to human groups. We had suggested in the previous edition of the Handbook that positive forces in human society may come to play a larger role in future political psychology research, and we have seen some greater research emphasis on individual and intergroup empathy in the last decade (see Sirin et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2015).

3. ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

We begin this volume with a section on broad psychological theories. This section includes basic theories that concern personality, early childhood and adult development, rational choice, decision-making, the study of emotion, evolutionary psychology, biopolitics, and political language. Then we move to the substantive focus of different areas of political psychological research, which tend to cut across theoretical approaches. We start with international relations, focusing on elite judgment and decision-making and on public opinion on foreign policy and domestic terrorism. The next section focuses on mass political behavior, including an analysis of information processing, political ideology, moral values, gender, political communications, and authoritarianism. The final section considers collective behavior, including nationalism, political leadership, identities, status hierarchies, collective action, prejudice, migration and multiculturalism, discrimination, and intractable conflict.

We characterize political psychology as the application of psychology to politics, but we would like to see greater two-way communication between disciplines. Feldman and Weber discuss problems posed by the Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale, common in psychology, for political scientists because of the explicit ideological content of some scale items. From their perspective, psychologists could benefit from the adoption of a measure of authoritarianism that lacks any reference to political content. Huddy notes that political scientists would benefit from the adoption of language common in social psychology, which distinguishes clearly between patriotism and nationalism as two distinct forms of national attachment. Likewise, Mols and colleagues discuss the benefits to political scientists of adopting a psychological social identity approach to leadership that emphasizes the need for shared leader and follower identity.

Before closing, we also want to refer the interested reader to several other recent volumes with different goals from our own but with somewhat similar titles. This Handbook is intended as a comprehensive statement of the current state of knowledge in political psychology. There are several other volumes in the Oxford Handbooks series that touch on related aspects of political behavior. Handbooks edited by Kaltwasser and colleagues on populism (2017), Della Porta and colleagues on social movements (2015), and Uslaner on social and political trust (2018) go into greater detail on some of the topics addressed in this Handbook.

In contrast to those handbooks, the current volume goes more deeply into original psychological research, includes authors from both psychology and political science, and is unique in combining research on both elite and mass politics. The current Handbook is the place to go to find out what is currently known about the many different fields in the umbrella topic of political psychology and learn more about psychology, political science, and their vibrant intersection.

REFERENCES

- Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D. J., & Sanford, R. N. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Albertson, B., & Gadarian, S. K. (2015). *Anxious politics: Democratic citizenship in a threatening world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor.
- Bartels, L. M. (1996). Uninformed voters: Information effects in presidential elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40(1), 194–230.
- Blumer, H. (1958). Race prejudice as a sense of group position. *Pacific Sociological Review*, 1(1), 3–7.
- Brandt, M. J., Reyna, C., Chambers, J. R., Crawford, J. T., & Wetherell, G. (2014). The ideological-conflict hypothesis: Intolerance among both liberals and conservatives. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(1), 27–34.
- Camerer, C. F., Loewenstein, G., & Rabin, M. (Eds.). (2004). *Advances in behavioral economics*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Cottam, Martha L., Elena Mastors, Thomas Preston, & Beth Dietz. (2015). *Introduction to political psychology* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Davidov, E., Seddig, D., Gorodzeisky, A., Raijman, R., Schmidt, P., & Semyonov, M. (2020). Direct and indirect predictors of opposition to immigration in Europe: Individual values, cultural values, and symbolic threat. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(3), 553–573.
- Della Porta, D., & Diani, M. 2015. *The Oxford handbook of social movements*. Oxford University Press.
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Druckman, J. N., Klar, S., Krupnikov, Y., Levendusky, M., & Ryan, J. B. (2021). Affective polarization, local contexts and public opinion in America. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 5 (1), 28–38.
- Edwards, W. (1954). The theory of decision-making. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51, 380–417.
- Erikson, E. H. (1958). *Young man Luther: A study in psychoanalysis and history*. New York: Norton.
- Feldman, S., & Stenner, K. (1997). Perceived threat and authoritarianism. *Political Psychology*, 18, 741–770.

- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention, and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Joseph P. F., Crano, W., & Fiedler, K. (2021). *The psychology of populism*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.
- George, A. L., & George, J. L. (1956). *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A personality study*. New York: Dover.
- Green, D., & Shapiro, I. (1994). *Pathologies of rational choice theory: A critique of applications in political science*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Greenwald, A. G., McGhee, D. E., & Schwartz, J. L. K. (1998). Measuring individual differences in implicit cognition: The implicit association test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 1464–1480.
- Hatemi, P. K., & McDermott, R. (2011). *Man is by nature a political animal: Evolution, biology, and politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hebb, D. O. (1949). *The organization of behavior*. New York: Wiley.
- Houghton, D. P. (2015). *Political psychology: Situations, individuals, and cases* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Huddy, L., & Feldman, S. (2011). Americans respond politically to 9/11: Understanding the impact of the terrorist attacks and their aftermath. *American Psychologist*, 66(6), 455–467.
- Huddy, L., Sears, D. O., & Levy, J. S. (2013). *The Oxford handbook of political psychology*. Oxford University Press.
- Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22 (2019), 129–146.
- Jardina, Ashley. (2019). *White identity politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jervis, R. (1976). *Perception and misperception in international politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Jost, J. T. (2017). Ideological asymmetries and the essence of political psychology. *Political Psychology*, 38, 167–208.
- Kalmoe, N. P., & Mason, L. (2022). *Radical American partisanship: Mapping violent hostility, its causes, and the consequences for democracy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Kahneman, D., Slovic, P., & Tversky, A. (Eds.). (1982). *Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk. *Econometrica*, 47, 263–291.
- Kaltwasser, C. R., Taggart, P. A., Espejo, P. O., & Ostiguy, P. (2017). *The Oxford handbook of populism*. Oxford University Press.
- Kertzer, J. D. (2016). *Resolve in international politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Larson, D. (1985). *Origins of containment*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1930). *Psychopathology and politics*. New York: Viking.
- Le Cheminant, W., & Parrish, J. M. (2011). *Manipulating democracy: Democratic theory, political psychology and mass media*. New York: Routledge.
- Loewenstein, G., Read, D., & Baumeister, R. F. (2003). *Time and decision: Economic and psychological perspectives on intertemporal choice*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Marcus, George E. (2013). *Political psychology: Neuroscience, genetics, and politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority*. New York: Harper & Row.

- Mintz, A., Valentino, N. A., & Wayne, C. (2021). *Beyond rationality: Behavioral political science in the 21st century*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nesbitt-Larking, P., Kinnvall, C., Capelos, T., & Dekker, H. (2014). *The Palgrave handbook of global political psychology*. Palgrave Studies in Political Psychology Series. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Newman, B. J., Hartman, T. K., Lown, P. L., & Feldman, S. (2015). Easing the heavy hand: Humanitarian concern, empathy, and opinion on immigration. *British Journal of Political Science*, 45(3, July), 583–607.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Osborne, D., & Sibley, C. G. (2022). *The Cambridge handbook of political psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pennycook, G., McPhetres, J., Bago, B., & Rand, D. G. (2022). Beliefs about COVID-19 in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States: A novel test of political polarization and motivated reasoning. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 48(5), 750–765.
- Pierce, D. R., & Lau, R. R. (2019). Polarization and correct voting in US presidential elections. *Electoral Studies*, 60 (2019), 102048.
- Sears, D. O., Huddy, L., & Jervis, R. (2003). *Oxford handbook of political psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sherif, M., & Sherif, C. W. (1953). *Groups in harmony and tension; an integration of studies of intergroup relations*. Harper and Brothers.
- Simon, B., & Klandermans, B. (2001). Politicized collective identity: A social psychological analysis. *American Psychologist*, 56(4), 319–331.
- Simon, H. A. (1957). *Models of man: Social and rational*. New York: Wiley.
- Sirin, C. V., Valentino, N. A., & Villalobos, J.D. (2021). *Seeing us in them: Social divisions and the politics of group empathy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sullivan, J. L., Rahn, W. M., & Rudolph, T. J. (2002). The contours of political psychology: Situating research on political information processing. In J. H. Kuklinski (Ed.), *Thinking about Political Psychology* (pp. 23–48). Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin and S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Uslaner, E. M. (2018). *The Oxford handbook of social and political trust*. Oxford University Press.
- White, I. K., & Laird, C. N. (2020). *Steadfast democrats*. Princeton University Press.
- Zúñiga, C. E., & López-López, W. E. 2021. *Political psychology in Latin America*. American Psychological Association.

