POSC 203

Political Psychology

Fall Term 2001

TTh 3:10-4:50

CMC 210

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Office Hours TTh 1:30-2:30, 5:00-5:30

In this course, we will examine the intersections of politics, personality and social psychology, exploring the usefulness of psychological theories for conducting political analysis. We will investigate the role of the individual, of group processes, of political and social cognition, and of the political context in political decision-making by both leaders and the general public. We will address the following questions so as you do the assigned reading, keep them in the front of your mind:

* **Personality and Political Leadership:** Do the personalities of political leaders affect the type and quality of their decision-making? Are certain kinds of leaders more dangerous than others, what is the nature of this danger, and under what circumstances does this danger emerge? Does the electoral process systematically select certain types of people for leadership positions? If so, with what consequences?

* **Group Processes and Elite Decision-making:** What group processes interfere with good decision-making, and how can leaders adapt decision-making processes to minimize these effects? What is the role of a leader's personality in shaping and guiding group decision-making?

* **Political Cognition and Elite Decision-Making:** What role do individual differences in social and political perception play in elite decision-making? How do decision-makers employ historical analogies and broader metaphors when they decide the fate of nations? What is the importance of principles of information processing and cognition?

* **Leadership Applications:** How does one take a specific example of decision-making and apply concepts from individual and group psychology to that particular set of decisions? We will focus on the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the Iranian Hostage Crisis.

* **Ordinary Authoritarianism:** What is the role of authoritarianism and obedience in politics today? Is authoritarianism a personality predisposition? Is it a situational set of attitudes and behaviors? How do authoritarians differ politically from non-authoritarians? What is the role of threat and anxiety in activating and shaping authoritarian attitudes and behavior?

* **Social Dominance:** To what extent are ordinary examples of racist attitudes and behavior a manifestation of dominance attitudes and predispositions rather than of self-interested behavior or even emotional, symbolic reactions to perceived outgroups?
Self Interest and Altruism in Political Life: Is our country currently in a political era that overemphasizes individualism and selfish interests at the expense of a broader commitment to the common good and common interests? Do most citizens political attitudes and actions reflect a narrow self-interest motivation? On the other hand, what is altruism? What are the causes and consequences of altruism, and what are its implications for politics? What are the factors that predispose individuals toward altruism? Are ordinary citizens capable of political altruism, or are only extraordinary people likely to engage in this type of extraordinary activity?

We will address these general questions in the context of specific political decisions and issues by examining several case studies, such as the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Iranian Hostage Crisis, the My Lai massacre, and the Holocaust rescuers of Le Chambon and elsewhere.

The required texts include: James David Barber, The Presidential Character; Irving L. Janis, Groupthink; Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War; Bob Altemeyer, The Authoritarian Specter; Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto, Social Dominance; and Kristen Renwick Monroe, The Heart of Altruism. These readings are also available on reserve in the library, in the event someone wishes to save money and do the reading in the library.

Grades will be based on four essays, class participation, and a final examination. Each essay should be no more than 7 double spaced pages with 1 inch margins and 12 cpi. You are assigned to write on four (out of eight) essay questions whose due dates are noted below. (N.B., you should not write on more than three of the first six topics.) Your essays should be analytical and not merely descriptive. I have read these materials, and do not need to be reminded of what I have read. Do not summarize the authors arguments, but rather integrate, analyze, and critique them. Be prepared to discuss each essay topic on the due date, whether or not you have chosen to write about that particular topic. Each student should also keep a video journal, writing a page or two about your thoughts and feelings about the assigned videos. Be sure to relate the videos to concepts from the class. Video journals are due the last day of class.

Course Outline

Tuesday September 11 An Introduction to Political Psychology

Thursday September 13 Introduction (continued)

Video: "Groupthink"

Tuesday September 18 Psychological Approaches to Foreign Policy Decision-Making


Thursday September 20 Kennedy

Video: "At the Brink"

Tuesday September 25 JFK's Demise and Resurrection: The Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Vietnam

Read: Janis, chs. 2, 6, pp. 14-47, 132-158; Barber, ch. 11, pp. 341-385; Khong, ch. 4, pp. 71-96.

Watch video on reserve in library: "The Kennedys"

Essay #1: Using the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis to illustrate your arguments, discuss and evaluate the major strengths and weaknesses of Janis's use of groupthink and Barber's use of character analysis to illuminate Kennedy's presidential decision-making. Present and evaluate the major evidence from the readings and videos that supports, and that which undermines, both Barber and Janis in their analysis of John Kennedy and his decision making. Finally, address whether and
how we might deepen our understanding of presidential decision-making by integrating these two theoretical approaches.

Thursday September 27 Schema Theory and Analogical Reasoning

Read: Khong, ch. 3, pp. 47-70.

Video: Vietnam coverage from "LBJ"

Tuesday October 2 LBJ's Demise: Vietnam

Read: Khong, chs. 5-7, pp. 97-205; Janis, ch. 5, pp. 97-130; review Barber on LBJ.

Essay #2: Do not write this essay if you wrote essay #1. Discuss and evaluate the major strengths and weaknesses of Janis's use of groupthink, Khong's use of analogical reasoning, and Barber's use of character analysis to illuminate LBJ's Vietnam decision making. Which of these theoretical approaches seems to be most helpful in this instance, and why? Which approach is least helpful, and why?

Watch optional video on reserve in library: "LBJ: A Biography"

Thursday October 4 Nixon

Video: Watergate footage from "Nixon"

Tuesday October 9 RMN's Demise: Watergate

Read: Janis, ch. 9, pp. 198-241; Barber, ch. 5, pp. 123-168.

Essay #3: Evaluate the relative theoretical power of Janis's theory of groupthink and Barber's analysis of presidential character in helping to explain each of the four cases studied thus far-Bay of Pigs, Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam War and Watergate. Does one theory "work better" in all three instances, or is the relative performance of the two theories dependent on context? Discuss how well each theory fits the "facts" in all four cases and assess how useful each is in explaining foreign policy decision-making. Do the theories contradict or support each other?


Thursday October 11 Carter's Demise: Iranian Hostage Crisis


Essay #4: Evaluate McDermott's "test" of prospect theory. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of her application of prospect theory to the decisions that were taken with regard to the hostage crisis. Also discuss the role played by Carter's character, as identified by Barber and Buchanan, in the decision analyzed by McDermott, and suggest ways to integrate the analysis of character into an application of prospect theory.

Tuesday October 16 Right Wing Authoritarianism

Read Altemeyer, The Authoritarian Specter, chs. 1-6, pp. 6-166.

Video: "Blood in the Face"

Thursday October 18 Authoritarianism (contd.)

**Tuesday October 23 Social Dominance Theory**

Read: Sidanius and Pratto, *Social Dominance*, chs. 2-4, pp. 31-125.

**Essay #5:** Altemeyer describes right wing authoritarianism. Apply his theory and research to an analysis of the right-wing extremists in the video, "Blood in the Face." Examine his main findings and conclusions and evaluate how well they seem to apply to the individuals in the video. Which parts of his theory and empirical research seem to fit and which do not seem to fit these individuals? Does his theory work equally well for right-wing followers and right-wing leaders?

**Thursday October 25 Social Dominance (contd)**


**Tuesday October 30 SDO (contd.)**


**Essay #6:** TBA

**Thursday November 1: Obedience & My Lai**


**Video:** "Remember My Lai"

**Tuesday November 6 My Lai**

**Essay #7:** Kelman and Hamilton’s discussion of the My Lai Massacre, and the video, *Remember My Lai*, describe individuals who appear to have committed "crimes of obedience" and others who either resisted unjust orders or acted heroically in the face of these crimes. What factors seem to have made the difference? What distinguishes those who obeyed unjust authority, and those who did not obey? (Be sure to apply Kellman and Hamilton’s "three processes of social influence.) Did RWA or SDO seem to play roles in this genocide, or not?

**Video:** "Weapons of the Spirit"

**Thursday November 8 Heroic Rescue: The Case of Le Chambon**


**Tuesday November 13 Altruism & Politics**

Read: Monroe, *Heart of Altruism*, chs. 1-5, 7, 10-11, pp. 3-118, 137-160, 197-238.

**Essay #8:** Analyze the factors that led the villagers of Le Chambon to shelter Jews during World War II, and compare and contrast them to the factors that Monroe identifies as precursors to individual Europeans becoming rescuers. Le Chambon is an example of concerted group action, whereas the rescuers’ actions were often more akin to individual actions in the face of group pressure not to help. What are the relevant differences and similarities in the two cases?

**Final Examination:** TBA