# Political psychology

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Political psychology is a dynamic field of research that offers a unique blend of approaches and methods in the social and cognitive sciences. Political psychologists explore the interactions between macrolevel political structures and microlevel factors such as decision-making processes, motivations, and perceptions. In this article, we provide a broad overview of the field, beginning with a brief history of political psychology research and a summary of the primary methodological approaches in the field. We then give a more detailed account of research on ideology and social justice, two topics experiencing a resurgence of interest in current political psychology. Finally, we cover research on political persuasion and voting behavior. By summarizing these major areas of political psychology research, we hope to highlight the wide variety of theoretical and methodological approaches of cognitive scientists working at the intersection of psychology and political science. © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Political psychology is the application of psychological research methods, theory, and data to politics. Political scientists applying psychology to their research and psychologists applying their research in a political context, at least historically, tend to have distinctly different approaches. This history focuses primarily on the analysis of politics and political principles within psychology, although both approaches share the philosophical and historical context of a scientific method and an interest in similar political questions (Ref 1, p. 439).

Psychological research took deliberate inspiration and motivation from the events of World War II, and political psychology flourished dramatically in the postwar period. Researchers wanted to explain how ordinary, well-adjusted members of Western society could commit the atrocities discovered in the concentration camps. Racism and segregation motivated researchers to investigate the psychological profiles

motivating people to maintain racist power structures, leading to influential theories such as Authoritarian Personality, which had its roots in describing Nazi authoritarian character but came to be used to explain conventional authoritarianism and racism in the United States.[2] At the individual level, psychological analyses were also applied to political leaders and other case studies in psychobiographies.[3]

Trends in political psychology have broadly followed larger trends within psychology; in each period the theories and methods used in psychology as a whole have been applied to political questions. Early approaches included developing personality metrics such as those from Authoritarian Personality Theory[2] and political beliefs and attitudes, including a cognitive dissonance approach,[4] and the psychoanalysis of particular individuals.[5] As personality constructs arose in the literature, an important issue became ensuring that such constructs were valid. From the beginning, political psychology has examined the field of international relations, emphasizing the importance of actors who—contrary to some mainstream theories, before political scientists began to demonstrate otherwise—are not rational and self-interested utility maximizers, but act according to various cognitive biases.[6]

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Both a psychologist and political scientist in training, Jeanne N. Knutson played a key role in solidifying political psychology as a field in its own right. Knutson edited the first major work encompassing the field, the 1973 *Handbook of Political Psychology*, which drew from psychology, sociology, and political science. She also founded the International Society of Political Psychology in 1978, which published the first issue of *Political Psychology* that year. As the field developed, there was increasing agreement around major issues in the field, including the need for political psychology to respond to current issues, the importance of context—for instance, political psychology in individualist versus collectivist cultures—and an acceptance of a wide variety of research methods.[7] A biological approach began to emerge,[8] spurred in part by E. O. Wilson's *Sociobiology*.[9] The influence of political ideology on public opinion for particular issues remained important.

Validated ideological constructs such as social dominance orientation (SDO)[10] and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA)[11] arose out of older ones like Adorno et al.'s Authoritarian Personality Theory.[2] SDO and RWA have been useful frameworks for researchers to examine the mechanisms, types, and motivations for group prejudice and interaction, including personalities related to these ideological orientations. Political psychology has long been interested in explaining major ideological identities such as liberal and conservative on the left–right political spectrum and, in the United States, related attitudes toward the Democratic and Republican parties. Links between political ideology and personality and biological factors are increasingly being examined,[12] and there has been more recognition of other major political identities such as libertarian in the United States and other ways of interpreting 'conservative' and 'liberal' in other countries.

Finally, reflecting a shift in cognitive psychology toward recognizing the role of emotion in cognition, affective neuroscience began to play a larger role in the field, emphasizing the influence of emotion on political beliefs, attitudes, political party affiliation,[11] decision making, and behavior (Ref 12, pp. 196–205). Political neuroscience has not only emphasized a larger role for emotion but also, through social neuroscience, examined racial prejudice and intergroup relations, partisan bias, left–right differences, and the structure of political attitudes.[13] Theodoridis and Nelson[14] cautioned the field about falling into the trap of emphasizing 'brain mapping' in neuroscience at the expense of research that develops political psychology theory.

After 40 years since the original *Handbook*, psychological approaches have been applied to seemingly every facet of political thought and behavior. Political science and social/personality psychology have certainly played the most prominent roles, but contributions from cognitive, evolutionary, cultural, and evolutionary psychology have all been important, as have contributions from other fields such as genetics, public policy, international relations, and political philosophy. Psychological insights into political science range from psychological theories specifically dealing with political interaction and ideology to applications of more general psychological theories to politics. Such perspectives can be seen to advance older insights in the field, from the individual difference approaches of political personality and ideology research to the emerging fields of political neuroscience[15] and implicit political cognition.[16]

## METHODS AND MEASURES IN POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

As the result of a 'long affair' between psychology and political science,[17] political psychology has benefited from the application and mixing of research methods from two disciplines. In this section, we give an overview and select examples of the major methodological approaches used by political psychologists, including qualitative methods (case studies and narrative approaches), survey methods (cross-sectional or longitudinal), experimental methods (in the laboratory or in the field), and implicit methods (including cognitive reaction time tasks, psychophysiological measures, and neuroscience measures).

### Qualitative Methods

Many approaches in political science are qualitative, relying on narrative, historical, or conceptual analyses rather than quantitative statistical analyses. Although not used as often by political psychologists, such approaches can be an important addition to quantitative methods.[18,19] Case studies can provide rich and detailed information on both political actors (e.g., personality profiles of political leaders) and political situations (e.g., narrative analyses of politically relevant events such as the Cuban missile crisis). Political psychologists are more likely to use methods that combine qualitative and quantitative techniques. For example, McAdams et al.[20] coded narrative interviews with liberal and conservative Christians in order to statistically test psychological hypotheses from Moral Foundations Theory[21] and Moral Politics Theory.[22]

## Survey Methods

Survey methods in political psychology entail directly asking groups of people (often nationally representative samples) for their thoughts and opinions on political issues, political candidates, voting intentions, or values, as well as personality and attitude measures less directly related to politics. The American National Election Studies (ANES) have provided cross-sectional snapshots of the American electorate since 1948, and have included scales, questions, and even reaction time tasks designed by psychological scientists. And polling organizations such as Pew and Gallup have increasingly included psychological questions in addition to standard political questions about voting intentions and candidate preferences. Such databases can provide cross-sectional information about relations between variables at different times; however, to test causal hypotheses, longitudinal designs (in which the same people are polled at different time points) are needed when random assignment to experimental conditions is not possible.[23] Two recent examples of longitudinal studies in political psychology involve using temperament and behavioral assessments of infants or children to predict their political preferences later in life.[24,25]

## Experimental Methods

Experimental manipulation involves setting an independent variable at different levels for different conditions of random assignment (whether those conditions are within-person or between-persons), and has been the preferred method in political psychology since the 1980s.[16] In fact, many of the prototypical examples of experimental social psychology, such as Milgram's obedience experiments,[26] were attempts to provide psychological answers to the political question of how something like the Holocaust could occur. Political psychology experiments are often done in the laboratory under carefully controlled conditions meant to mimic real political decision situations. For example, inspired by a 2000 George W. Bush campaign ad that quickly highlighted the word 'rats' in 'Democrats', Weinberger and Westen[27] subliminally flashed the word 'rats' before an unknown politician, resulting in lower candidate assessments for the experimental group when compared with a control group. Other experiments have been run in the field, often using actual voting data as a dependent variable. In one classic example, the entire city of Allentown, PA was divided into three experimental conditions, and every adult resident was given either an 'emotional' leaflet supporting the minority Socialist ticket, a 'rational' leaflet supporting the same, or no leaflet; the Socialist ticket had the highest increase in votes (compared to the previous election) in the emotional wards, the next highest in the rational wards, and the lowest increase in the control wards.[28]

## Implicit Methods

Implicit measures are those intended to bypass conscious awareness and control in order to capture nonconscious and automatic aspects of cognition. The subfield of implicit political cognition, which applies the methods of implicit social cognition to political thought and behavior, is still in its toddlerhood but is growing rapidly.[14] Some studies use reaction time for decisions or reactions as a gauge of nonconscious or heuristic processing.[29] Studies using priming (activating affect or associations outside of conscious awareness) have shown nonconscious affective influences on attitudes toward political groups, issues, and leaders.[30,31] For example, people's fast and unreflective judgments of competence following candidate pictures flashed for just 1/10th of a second predicted the winners of more than two thirds of gubernatorial and Senate races—moreover, asking people to make their judgments slowly and carefully actually *decreased* the accuracy of their predictions.[32]

Psychophysiology methods have been used to shed light on political decision making and individual differences, for instance showing associations between conservatism and physiological reactivity as measured by startle eye blink and skin conductance.[33] Neuroscience measures such as electroencephalography (EEG) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) are beginning to be used in conjunction with politically relevant stimuli (e.g., candidates and issues) to capture aspects of mental activity not directly reportable by participants.[15,34] For example, Amodio et al.[35] used EEG to measure conflict-related anterior cingulate activity during a task-switching task in order to test the hypothesis that liberals would have more automatic sensitivity to cues of novelty, leading to greater flexibility for altering habitual response patterns. As the technology behind such neuroscience methods improves, this approach may be increasingly used by political psychologists to uncover nonconscious aspects of political thought and behavior.

## IDEOLOGY

Ideology is generally understood by psychologists as an internally coherent network of beliefs, attitudes, and preferences regarding how society should be organized. Psychologists have characterized the left-wing/right-wing spectrum of ideologies as reflecting two essential dimensions: the extent to which individuals (1) embrace versus resist social change and (2)

accept versus reject inequality.[36] For the most part, current psychology continues to embrace a unidimensional, left–right model that reflects the bipolar nature of the liberal and conservative political spectrum.[37] The concept of ideology as beliefs and preferences regarding the overall organization of society is overtly political. But in recent years, the psychological study of ideology has expanded to include the underlying personality, cognitive, and emotional factors that help to determine where an individual falls along this liberal–conservative continuum. Ideology has come to be understood not only in terms of explicit political affiliations and attitudes toward social structures but also in terms of the psychological needs and lifestyle preferences that are reflected in these attitudes.

This is not an entirely new development. From its inception, the psychological study of ideology has been intertwined with the psychology of personality: one of the first major psychological accounts of ideology was Adorno's concept of the Authoritarian Personality.[2] To the extent that ideologies capture beliefs about the nature and structure of a good society, and the proper role of the individual within it, it is reasonable to expect that they should also reflect an individual's general psychological tendencies, temperament, and broader orientation to the world.[38] Empirical evidence gathered over the last several years validates this conjecture, in particular when it comes to core personality traits and lifestyle preferences. Although the general idea of the 'ideological personality' is not entirely new, many of the recent methods used to gather evidence for its specific characteristics are. Methodological innovations have enabled researchers to look beyond traits such as authoritarianism or social dominance that have traditionally dominated the study of ideological personality (e.g., authoritarianism) to include personality characteristics that are more relevant to nonpolitical domains of life.

One tool with which researchers have recently gained insight into liberal and conservative personalities is The Big Five Personality Inventory, which is used to classify the essential components of personality and measure how they vary from person to person.[39] According to the Big Five account of personality, everyone falls somewhere along the dimensions of extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Consistent with the account of ideology as predominantly related to attitudes about social change and inequality, by far the strongest difference between the liberal and conservative personalities is along the dimension of openness—the tendency to tolerate, or even to seek out, things that are new and different, and which may explicitly challenge one's existing habits or the social norms in one's community.[40] Individuals high on this trait tend to be creative, flexible, and curious, whereas those who score low on openness show a preference for convention and stability.

Such differences between individuals who endorse liberal and conservative political ideologies do not just show up on personality scales. In one study, Carney et al.[38] took this idea to the streets (or, more accurately, to the office and the dorm room), and found that in the living and working environments of liberals, signs of openness were literally scattered everywhere, including art supplies, movie tickets, travel books, and event tickets. For conservatives, such signs were less likely to be found, although indications of the conscientiousness dimension—cleaning supplies, organizers, calendars, and even postage stamps—resided in neatly organized fashion in many conservative dwellings. In another study of ideology-as-lifestyle, Jost et al. found that sensation-seeking liberals prefer everything from erotica to Asian food when compared with tradition-oriented conservatives, who express stronger preferences than liberals for organizations (fraternities and sororities, churches, etc.), fishing, and their fathers.[36] Such evidence suggests that the roots of ideology run deep. Many of the same general attitudes and dispositions that govern everything from our physical environments to our taste in music are also strong contributors to how hierarchical versus egalitarian we would like society to be, and the extent to which we advocate for pushing past versus upholding social and political traditions. Importantly, these differences in ideological personality are not merely psychological constructs—they have direct practical implications for the world of political partisanship and political action. The Big Five traits relate not only to ideology but also to political party affiliation and degree of political participation.[41,42]

The deep roots of ideology also reveal themselves in liberal–conservative differences in cognition—the way the mind works when people gather and processes information. In one study, liberals and conservatives played a computer game that involved sampling various elements of the environment in order to discover which ones would lead to positive versus negative outcomes.[43] Results showed that liberals tended to seek information more broadly, sampling a wide range of targets, whereas conservatives focused more on learning which targets produced negative outcomes. Other studies of ideological differences in positive versus negative cognitive foci found that liberals are more easily persuaded by arguments that emphasize what stands to be gained, whereas conservatives

respond more readily to those same arguments when they are framed in terms of what might be lost.[12,44,45]

This conservative tendency to orient toward avoiding and protecting against negative outcomes is also reflected in the particular moral concerns that characterize conservative ideology. Political psychologists have theorized that people's moral beliefs and judgments of right and wrong can be understood in terms of basic intuitive 'foundations' of moral concern: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and purity/degradation.[20] In research that explored who tends to be concerned with which domains of morality, they discovered that across the political spectrum people have strong gut intuitions about the moral significance of issues related to care and fairness—unsurprisingly, no one on either side of the political spectrum seems to want to tolerate hurting people or treating them unjustly. When it comes to the domains of group loyalty, purity, and respect for authority, though, conservatives are much more likely to find them morally relevant than liberals (while liberals find suffering and unfairness more morally troubling than conservatives). For example, conservatives are more likely than liberals to report that 'whether or not someone's actions showed love for their country' is a moral issue.[46] This result is not surprising, given the general trend in personality research showing that conservatives have a much more positive orientation toward tradition and organization than do liberals, who tend to emphasize individualism and flexibility in their tastes and preferences.

A broad empirical base of psychological research conducted over the last few decades has demonstrated that ideology, as understood in terms of the political left-wing/right-wing spectrum, is strongly related to everything from basic moral intuitions to personal tastes and even temperaments. Recent research has begun looking at ideological worldviews not represented on a unidimensional left–right spectrum as well, for example tracing the political beliefs of libertarians (who tend to be socially liberal and economically conservative) to underlying personality and interpersonal styles.[47] The breadth of psychological phenomena that are related in one way or another to ideology is powerfully indicative of just how psychologically coherent and important ideologies are, and the extent to which they are worthy of our attention.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

Political and moral psychologists have recently broadened their scope of interest to include a number of domains of moral life (e.g., the five types of foundational moral intuitions mentioned previously), but prior to this new wave of research political psychologists studying morality primarily concentrated on issues related to social justice. More specifically, the moral psychology literature has traditionally been dominated by work on three types of social justice beliefs—beliefs related to procedural, retributive, and distributive justice. Procedural justice beliefs concern the processes by which people think materials should be distributed and conflicts should be resolved[48]; retributive justice beliefs concern how people think people should be punished for their misbehavior[49]; and distributive justice beliefs concern how people think resources should be distributed.[50] All three of these types of social justice beliefs differ as a function of political ideology, but given the current academic and nonacademic emphasis on economic inequality, in this section we will focus primarily on ideological differences in distributive justice beliefs.[51]

A long history of social justice research suggests that there exist numerous psychologically discrete types of distributive justice beliefs,[52] but psychologists have concentrated almost exclusively on equity, equality, and need-based beliefs. Advocates of equity principles suggest that wealth, goods and services, and other tangibles should be allocated in proportion to a person's output (or potential output). For instance, wealth should be allocated according to how much effort a person puts into their job, how much a person contributes to society, or the amount of valuable skills a person possesses. In terms of distributive justice, the principle of equality refers to the idea that things should be allocated evenly among everyone, regardless of their character or abilities. Finally, advocates of need-based distributive justice suggest that things should be allocated in proportion to the needs of each person. For example, if someone has substantial health problems that require a significant amount of medical attention this person should have a higher salary than someone who does not have serious medical problems.

Germane to the focus of the current chapter, research suggests that there are strong cross-ideological differences in the degree to which people endorse these three types of distributive justice beliefs. Specifically, liberals are more likely than conservatives to endorse need-based and equality principles, but conservatives are more likely than liberals to endorse equity or merit-based principles.[53,54]

## What Drives Ideological Differences in Justice Beliefs?

A number of psychological variables appear to contribute to these cross-ideological differences. Three

such variables are SDO, system justification, and life-guiding personal concerns (i.e., goals and values) related to social harmony and productivity.

SDO refers to 'a general attitudinal orientation toward intergroup relations, reflecting whether one generally prefers such relations to be equal, versus hierarchical' (Ref 55, p. 742). Thus, almost by definition, SDO is positively correlated with equity concerns[56]; less intuitively, it is also negatively correlated with need-based beliefs.[57] Furthermore, SDO is strongly and positively related to conservatism.[55]

Another variable that seems to mediate the relationship between political ideology and distributive justice beliefs is system justification. System justification refers to a cognitive style that causes people to manufacture artificial reasons for why current levels of inequality are morally acceptable or even morally good.[58] According to system justification theorists, the (1) positive relationship between conservatism and SDO, (2) positive relationship between conservatism and equity endorsement, and (3) negative relationship between conservatism and endorsement of equality and need-based distributive justice principles are all largely the consequence of the fact that conservatives are more motivated to justify the system than are liberals.[59]

Though there is substantial evidence that distributive justice beliefs are partly shaped by this type of motivated reasoning, there is also reason to believe that at the heart of at least some people's non-egalitarian beliefs lies a true conviction that equality is not always best for society. One reason to suspect that conservatives' distributive justice beliefs can be explained by more than motivated reasoning alone is that people's goals and values may account for a large portion of cross-ideological differences in distributive justice beliefs. Although the endorsement of equality and need-based principles appears to be largely driven by personal concern for social harmony, endorsement of the equity principle seems to be more strongly driven by concern for productivity.[60–62] Furthermore, there is evidence that conservatives value productivity more than liberals, whereas liberals value social harmony more than conservatives.[50] This combination of findings has led researchers to suspect that these goals mediate the relationship between political ideology and distributive justice beliefs.[63]

Though much is known about the relationship between distributive justice beliefs and political ideology, many important theoretical questions remain unanswered. Furthermore, because of the continuing rise in public concern about economic inequality,[51] coupled with the ongoing political intractability surrounding economic social policy initiatives, the practical importance of this issue seems destined to increase substantially in the coming years. Together, this promises for an exciting and fruitful future for this line of research.

## POLITICAL PERSUASION

Political psychologists often examine political persuasion by looking at the effects of both high-effort and low-effort processing on political decision making, voting behaviors, and candidate evaluations, as well as the manner in which these modes are incorporated in political campaigns. High-effort processing requires both motivation to process and sufficient cognitive resources to do so. In the absence of either of these, people rely on low-effort processing that uses heuristics and cues when evaluating a message or responding to a persuasive argument.[64,65]

### Likeability, Credibility, and Trustworthiness of the Political Candidate

The effectiveness of persuasive messages, and the extent to which individuals are receptive to persuasive arguments, has been shown to be related to communicator-specific heuristics.[63,66] Research has demonstrated that perceptions of an argument's validity can be influenced by the degree to which a candidate is seen as likeable and credible.[67–69] Research has suggested that likability, credibility, and trustworthiness are highly correlated. Credibility and believability are highly influenced by perceptions of candidate competency, trustworthiness, and goodwill. These three features of credibility also strongly predict likeability.[69]

### Resistance to Persuasion and Attitude Change

Forewarning is the act of informing the message recipient that they will hear counterarguments in the future, but that these arguments are weak and incongruent to the argument at hand.[70] Forewarning and inoculation can be seen in political rhetoric surrounding election campaigns.[71,72] Candidates might begin their speech by briefly establishing their own position before proceeding to describe their opponents' position on the same issue, essentially warning potential voters that they will at some point be exposed to their opponent's position on the issue. These forewarnings typically emphasize the negative aspects of their opponent's argument, often presenting it as a weak argument that insufficiently addresses the issue

and is incongruent with the constituents' ideology and interests. This also helps the candidate appear more credible, confident, reliable, and competent. Though, as is the case with other forms of persuasion and attitude modification, the effectiveness of this persuasion technique is moderated by ideology, forewarning is effective only to the extent that the argument is consistent with self-relevant preexisting attitudes.[70]

Research has demonstrated that political party membership plays a crucial role in political persuasion. Munro et al.[73] suggest that simply identifying the source of information as either a member of the ingroup party or the outgroup party has a significant influence on perceptions of argument strength and validity. Participants expressed more support for a platform and believed that the central argument was stronger when the message was attributed to a member of their own party than when attributed to the opposing party. Research also suggests that this preference persists even when the positions otherwise violate party ideals. This is illustrated in a study by Cohen in which liberals were more likely to support a non-egalitarian welfare policy when the endorser was another liberal.[74] Thus, the specific content of issues is less important than the political party delivering the information.

## The Role of Mass Media in Persuasion

Mass media have been implicated as a significant influence on both political agendas and public attitudes.[75–77] As a specific policy or event receives increased news coverage, the public interprets this emphasis as an indicator of priority and importance. This agenda setting is largely a consequence of the availability heuristic, as the media enhance ease of attitude retrieval through repeated, and often sensationalized, coverage of an issue, policy, or event. As a result, the ease of attitude and information retrieval caused by the media's news coverage and issue priming is often misinterpreted as an indication of issue importance and general importance compared with less covered issues.[78] Thus, if the media place significant emphasis on a policy, the public may interpret this as an indication of a need for immediate attention and action, even if the issue or topic is relatively trivial. This also contributes to voting behavior and policy approval. Miller and Krosnick[75] offer empirical support for the media agenda-setting hypothesis. They found that participants who were knowledgeable about the issue in the news and trusted the news source were more likely to utilize the news story in their performance evaluations. However,

these results were not found with participants who were less knowledgeable about the issue or viewed the news source as less trustworthy.[78,79]

### Campaign Strategies and Political Advertising

Televised campaign advertisements have been shown to have a strong persuasive effect on voters.[80–82] Gerber et al.[80] found that televised campaign ads are successful persuasion tactics and directly impact voting preferences and behaviors. However, their effects are temporary and short-lived, suggesting that the effectiveness of the campaign ads is likely due to priming effects rather than permanent attitude change. Huber and Arceneaux[81] assert that advertisements are most successful at influencing voter behavior when used toward the end of the campaign rather than the beginning. Campaign advertisements also relay information to potential voters. Valentino et al.[82] found that both politically 'aware' and politically 'unaware' voters became more informed about the candidates and their platforms by viewing the ads; however, only the most politically aware individuals were able to absorb the information and utilize it to infer the candidate's position on unrelated topics.

### Selective Exposure

Selective news exposure facilitates biased elaboration by providing access to numerous news sources. Technological advancements have resulted in a significant increase in the development of additional forms of news sources (e.g., cable news networks, internet journalism, and podcasts).[83–86] The increased availability of partisan news sources allows people to selectively expose themselves to news coverage, information, and political commentary that directly aligns with their own beliefs and ideology.[86,87]

The increased amount of control individuals have over their political news exposure, and their clear ideological preferences, has paved the way for more significant polarization in public consciousness, attitudes, and political behaviors.[84,86,87] Selective exposure to ideologically consistent news sources extends beyond political issues. Iyengar and Hahn[83] proposed that in addition to ideologically consistent political news sources, liberals and conservatives are also turning to these same sources for so-called soft news, i.e., nonpolitical news. This only enhances polarization. If media prime individuals to place significant emphasis on specific policies, issues, events, and politicians, and different news sources cover issues specifically related to their target audience's ideologies, it is reasonable to conclude that the polarization between conservatives and liberals is, at least partially, the result of ideological differences in news source agenda setting.[77,78,84,88]

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VOTER BEHAVIOR

Voting and citizen participation in the political process are major democratic cornerstones, and motivating citizens' political engagement has long been a focal point for academic discourse. Recent developments in political science and psychology have identified key factors that influence voting and other measures of political engagement. Specifically, habit formation, emotional engagement, social motivations, and personal moral concerns all contribute to the likelihood that individuals will vote and the extent to which they will actively seek political information.

When an individual voted in the last election, their likelihood of voting in the next election is estimated to increase by 13–23 percentage points.[88,89] Although there are stable situational and psychological factors that may contribute to this increase, research has also indicated that the act of voting as a behavior can become a habit and be susceptible to habitual processes.[90,91] A habit can be defined as the 'repetition of a response under similar conditions so that the response becomes automatically activated when those conditions occur … in the same, or very similar, context' (Ref 91, p. 536). Aldrich et al. found that citizens with strong voting habits who have consistent past voting behavior and voting context stability (as indicated by having lived in the same location for at least 10 years, or five elections) are more likely to vote in the future regardless of their current goals, motivations, or decision-making processes. Additionally, those with strong and weak habits will respond to different persuasion and influence methods.

Voters' memory of political information also plays a strong role in the decision-making process on Election Day,[92] and voters' ability to recall this information accurately significantly affects their ability to make good decisions.[93] Research has found that voters remember information to which they had an emotional reaction more than information that elicited no emotions, regardless of whether the emotion evoked was anxiety, enthusiasm, or anger.[94,95] Additionally, the theory of affective intelligence states that information that elicits an incongruent emotional response leads to feelings of anxiety that activate conscious attention toward that information. This attention then results in more rational, conscious processing of the content,[96] increased future recall of the information presented, and new information seeking.[97]

Strong emotional response to political information is not always beneficial for the voting process, however. Where passive negative emotions such as anxiety can lead to increased attention and information seeking, active negative emotions such as anger can have the opposite effect. Affective preference for a candidate can hinder processing of new, affect-inconsistent information. In fact, individuals who have strong emotional preferences for a candidate are less likely than their nonmotivated counterparts to effectively evaluate incongruent candidate information when it elicits feelings of anger.[98] The result of this emotional motivation is an increase in candidate support despite the incongruent, negative information. Anger also leads to decreased counter-attitudinal information processing through decreased seeking of new policy information.[98]

Strength of partisanship is strongly correlated with political attitudes and behaviors though the group-level emotions elicited by identifying with a political group,[99] and the effect of partisanship group identification on voting behavior has been steadily increasing since the early 1970s.[100] However, partisanship is only one of many social factors that influence voting intentions and behaviors. Bond et al.[101] found that a single social message sent to Facebook users increased voter turnout not only for those that received the message but also for their close friends and the friends of their friends.

## Social Media and Voter Engagement

The increased presence of user-generated media such as blogs and social networking websites[102,103] allows individuals to engage in a new form of political participation.[104] Individuals are able to extend their political discussions beyond their immediate physical environment and can now share information, ideas, and beliefs with others around the world.[103] This is a reciprocal process in which users are able to import, absorb, and incorporate the information into their own attitude structure, particularly if these views are similar to their own. In addition to introducing this new form of political engagement, the internet also facilitates more traditional forms of political participation (e.g., petitions and campaign donations) by allowing them to reach a broad audience rapidly.[104]

### *The Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns*

In response to this, politicians are incorporating social media into their campaign strategies.[103,105] In the 2012 election, every presidential candidate utilized social networking websites to some degree.[105,106] Perhaps one of the most significant draws to online campaigning is the unique ability to directly connect with potential voters. A candidate may post photographs or comments on a social networking websites creating a sense of intimacy with potential voters. It allows individuals to feel some personal connection to these candidates who are otherwise

largely inaccessible.[103,105] In addition to offering this unique form of connection, it also allows candidates to directly deliver important campaign information to the individual, circumventing any media bias or inaccurate representations, allowing politicians to exercise greater control over their public image.

While the effects of the internet and social media are most powerful for young voters,[107] the 2008 Obama presidential campaign demonstrated that the integration of social media in campaign strategies can significantly influence the outcome of an election. The 2008 election saw record highs in youth voters. President Obama frequently posted messages and campaign updates online and was frequently photographed using his smartphone. The combination of his online activity and his smartphone usage elicited a feeling of connection, accessibility, and understanding between young voters, which was strongly reflected in voter turnout.[103,107]

Additionally, face-to-face political mobilization efforts such as door-to-door canvassing have been shown to be significantly more effective than other methods such as mailers or telephone calls.[108] More chronically, collective voting norms[109] and feeling connected to one's social environment[110] also significantly predict voting behavior. Individuals who participate in other social communities (e.g., voluntary associations, community affairs, and church congregations) are significantly more likely to be politically active.[111] Conversely, feeling unrepresented by one's political candidates[112] and mismatches between one's own moral concerns and those most associated with one's ideological group[113] lead to decreased intention to participate in the political process.

The effects of these social influences are often qualified by motivational differences at the individual level. People use values to lend coherence to their attitudes,[114,115] and these values are often informed by convictions about what is and is not moral.[116,117] Additionally, past nonvoting behavior and explicit intention not to vote are associated with lower endorsement of moral concerns and values.[114] More specifically, these patterns are consistent with known ideological differences in these moral concerns,[46] suggesting that nonvoting intentions and behaviors can result not only from a lack of overall moral motivation but also from a moral mismatch between one's ideological group and one's personal moral profile.

## CONCLUSION

As McGuire[17] put it 20 years ago, political psychology is the ongoing creation of a 'long affair' between psychology and political science. This affair continues to evolve, and with it the topics of interest, theoretical approaches, and methodological innovations of current political psychology. In this overview, we have highlighted a few major areas of research to show the wide variety of what a political psychology study can be. As interest in political psychology continues to grow—as indicated by increasing empirical submissions to *Political Psychology*, new journals such as the *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, and increasing memberships in organizations such as the International Society of Political Psychology and the International Society for Justice Research—this variety will only increase. As this interest spreads to those with increasingly diverse methodological expertise (e.g., big-data analytics, network analysis, genetic assays, and psychophysiology), we are eager to see what insights the next few decades will yield into political thought and behavior.

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