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POLITICAL BEHAVIOR. [*This entry describes the political processes and behavior at the level of the individual.*]

A great deal of research during the twentieth century explored psychological aspects of individual political behavior. Most of this research was driven by an underlying concern about the viability of democratic government. If democracies are to be effective, some political theorists say, then citizens must be well informed and thoughtful about their nation's political past, present, and future, and they must send messages to government in ways that direct its actions according to their desires. Consequently, much research has explored how people's political beliefs and attitudes are formed and changed, as well as the forces that inspire them to perform particular types of political behavior.

Political Attitude and Belief Formation and Change

A great deal of political psychology research has examined the origins and consequences of people's political attitudes and beliefs. We will describe a series of literatures on these topics, addressing the agents of attitude and belief change, the psychological ingredients of attitudes and beliefs, and the process by which attitudes and beliefs are integrated when people select from among competing candidates running for public office.

Agents of Change. News media coverage of politics shapes public attitudes in a number of ways. One effect is agenda setting, whereby the more coverage the media devote to an issue, the more nationally important people perceive the issue to be (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Another media effect is priming, whereby people judge the performance of government officials based mostly on issues heavily covered by the media (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). News media coverage can also frame an issue by drawing people's attention to some aspects of the issue and ignoring others (Iyengar, 1991). The

news media also make government especially salient as a force influencing social life, so people who are highly exposed to the media tend to credit or blame government more for the country's fortunes and misfortunes (Abramowitz, Lanoue, & Ramesh, 1988).

Political events and debates among political figures provoke public attitude change (Zaller, 1992). Commentaries by news reporters can cause sizable opinion change. Also, news stories reporting the opinions of experts on a topic or the findings of research studies tend to sway public opinion, as do speeches by presidents and other prominent political figures. Surprisingly, when interest groups strongly advocate a position, the public tends to move in the opposite direction. Wars, other international crises, and shifts in the state of the national economy provoke changes in public preferences regarding government policy. People are also sometimes persuaded to adopt certain attitudes toward specific government policies because the policies are endorsed by their preferred candidates during debates.

Ingredients of Beliefs and Attitudes. Ingredients of beliefs and attitudes include self-interest, ideology, and attributions.

Self-Interest. Many observers believe that a person's attitude toward a government policy is determined partly by his or her self-interest, which is "the short to medium-term impact on the material well-being of the individual's own personal life" (Sears & Funk, 1991). However, self-interest predicts attitude direction only when the potential gains or losses are substantial and people are well informed about those gains and losses (Sears & Funk, 1991). As such, self-interest has influenced voting on tax reform propositions and attitudes toward smoking restrictions. When people's self-interest is at stake in an issue, they manifest greater consistency among their attitudes on the issue and greater consistency between their attitudes and behaviors. The more self-interest is at stake in an issue, the more importance the person is likely to attach to his or her attitude on the issue (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995).

Ideology. Politicians tend to be either liberals or conservatives, with each group generally having a different vision of what government should do. Therefore, citizens would presumably have an easy time choosing politicians to represent them in government if they themselves are also either consistently liberal or consistently conservative. However, most people are not and instead hold a mix of liberal positions on some issues and conservative positions on other issues.

Rather than simply reflecting liberal or conservative principles, people base their opinions on general values such as individualism (the belief that people should get ahead in life based on their own hard work) and egalitarianism (the belief that everyone should have an

equal opportunity for advancement). Different people endorse these principles to differing degrees, and a particular person's views on policy issues often reflect these sorts of values and the person's perceptions of the relevance of these values to particular issues (Judd & Krosnick, 1991).

Attributions. In order to decide what they would like government to do, people must make sense of the political events that unfold around them. A principal aspect of making sense of events involves understanding what causes them. People appear to be systematic analysts of causality in politics, and the conclusions they draw from such analyses play important roles in their political reasoning.

One illustration of this process emerged when scholars discovered that the political party controlling the U.S. presidency tends to be reelected when the nation's economy is perceived to be good and tends not to be reelected when the economy is perceived to be deteriorating. Scholars initially presumed that this was so because people vote according to their pocketbooks; people who are doing well economically vote for the incumbent party, and the better the economy, the more such voters exist. However, it turns out that people do not attribute their own economic status to government action, so they don't vote their pocketbooks. Rather, people usually hold government responsible only for the entire country's economic situation and vote according to whether it seems to be good or bad (Feldman, 1984). Interestingly, women and liberals are especially likely to hold government responsible for the nation's economic condition (Iyengar, 1991).

Political attributions also influence people's attitudes on policy issues. For example, people who believe that generations of slavery and discrimination have prevented African Americans from having equal opportunities for success in contemporary society are especially likely to favor government programs to remedy this situation (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Likewise, blaming government for poverty leads people to favor government programs to ameliorate poverty (Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

Attributions also play important roles in people's reasoning about political scandals. When a politician is found to have committed a misdeed of some kind, he or she often offers excuses (denying responsibility) and/or justifications (denying offensiveness) for the action. Politicians are viewed negatively when they claim ignorance as an excuse or when they blame their subordinates for committing the act. But when politicians convincingly explain the benefits of their action or explain past mitigating circumstances that justify it, people evaluate them more positively (McGraw, 1991).

Voter Decision Making. Research has explored processes of perceiving politicians and forming preferences among them.

Perceptions of Politicians' Attitudes. Some political theorists believe that for democracy to function, citizens must elect candidates with whom they agree on policy issues. In order to vote for candidates according to this criterion, citizens must decide what candidates' attitudes are toward various policies. Since the 1970s, political psychologists have been interested in the notion that people may project their own attitudes onto candidates they like and project disagreeable attitudes onto candidates they dislike. In this sense, people may rationalize their candidate preferences by distorting their sense of candidates' stands on policy issues.

Although many studies have reported results consistent with this hypothesis, there are shortcomings inherent in the methods used in these investigations. Recent research using improved methods has found no such distortions of candidates' attitudes to rationalize voters' likes and dislikes of candidates (Krosnick, 1990). Furthermore, people seem remarkably accurate in their perceptions of candidates' positions on issues, especially in light of the fact that candidates rarely state clearly where they stand (Page, 1978). Thus, the criterion that voters accurately perceive candidates' stands on issues is often met.

Candidate Preferences. How do voters decide which candidate to vote for in an election? Research on elections in the 1940s and 1950s showed that voters' choices were shaped partly by basic dispositions: demographic characteristics such as social class, religion, and place of residence (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944) and identification with a political party (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). More recently, party identification has not been as powerful a determinant of votes, in part because identification with political parties has weakened (Wattenberg, 1991).

People are now more likely to vote for the candidate (1) with whom they most agree on policy issues they care most about (Krosnick, 1988a); (2) who most closely shares their ideology (Knight, 1985); (3) of the incumbent party if they believe that the incumbent has performed well in handling national problems (Fiorina, 1981); (4) who is perceived to possess more competence, integrity, leadership strength, and empathy (Kinder, 1986); and (5) who evokes more positive emotions from voters (Abelson, Kinder, Peters, & Fiske, 1982). People who are more knowledgeable about politics place more weight on policy issue and ideological agreement, whereas less knowledgeable people are more likely to vote based on the parties of the candidates, their perceived personalities, and the performance of the incumbent party in handling national problems (Knight, 1985).

Although some voters approach the candidate evaluation task in a memory-based fashion, most do so online (Lodge, McGraw, & Stroh, 1989). Less politically knowledgeable people tend to use a memory-based ap-

proach, entering the voting booth and making choices based on the considerations they can bring to mind (e.g., Kelley, 1983). More politically knowledgeable people tend to use an on-line approach, constructing evaluations of each candidate throughout the campaign and simply retrieving and comparing those evaluations in the voting booth.

Political Behavior

Citizens in a democracy communicate their preferences to elected officials through behavior: by helping organized lobbying efforts, by expressing attitudes publicly, by contacting legislators directly, by turning out to vote in elections, by participating in social protests, and more. Summaries of some research on each of these topics follow.

Issue Publics. The American electorate can be divided into "issue publics," small groups of people who are deeply concerned about a particular government policy issue (e.g., the abortion issue public, the gun control issue public). Issue public members are most likely to express their views on an issue to government officials, to contribute money to lobbying organizations, and to write letters to the editor that are published in newspapers and magazines (Schuman & Presser, 1981). Therefore, government policy on an issue is especially likely to correspond to the desires of the majority of the issue public (Krosnick & Telhami, 1995). Issue public members also vote for candidates who share their views on the issues they care about most, thus shaping government actions by selecting elected representatives as well (Krosnick, 1988a). People become members of an issue public because the issue is relevant to their material self-interest, to the interests or identities of individuals or groups with which they identify, or to their cherished values (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995).

If issue public members are emotionally overwrought zealots, then one might imagine that they represent threats to rational and effective politics. But in fact, issue public members tend to have beliefs and attitudes that reflect systematic and informed perceptions of the political world. People who care deeply about an issue selectively expose themselves to information about that issue, think deeply about that information, and accumulate large stores of highly accurate knowledge in memory (Boninger, Krosnick, Berent, & Fabrigar, 1995). As a result, issue public members are especially likely to have firmly crystallized attitudes that are resistant to change (Krosnick, 1988b) and that reflect their core values (Krosnick, 1990).

Voter Turnout. Voting is one of the most common political activities in which citizens engage (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). In order to vote in the United States, people must first be registered. People with greater cognitive resources (e.g., more education,

more political experience, more political knowledge) and with strong ties to their communities are more likely to know how to register and are therefore more likely to do so (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

Once registered, people must have the resources necessary to vote. Individuals with greater cognitive abilities are more likely to vote, in part because they are better able to process information relevant to the election (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). People with ties to the community care more about what others think of them and are therefore more likely to vote (a socially positive behavior) for self-presentational reasons (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). In addition, even a simple act like voting demands transportation and time, both of which are more likely to be had by those with economic resources (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Racial minorities are less likely to vote, partly because they sometimes have fewer necessary resources (Verba & Nie, 1972).

Even registered and able respondents may not vote unless they are motivated to do so. Citizens may vote because they care about the outcome of an election or because they believe that their votes will affect the outcome (Verba & Nie, 1972). In addition, voter turnout is increased by having more positive attitudes toward the candidates in a race and preferring one candidate far more than the other (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

Other Forms of Political Participation. Citizens' political participation can also include other activities. For example, many people engage in campaign-related behaviors, such as working on behalf of candidates or contributing money to campaigns (Verba et al., 1995). These types of activities can be done with relatively few resources and are performed by people with particular attitudes and demographic characteristics (e.g., Verba et al., 1995).

A smaller percentage of people engage in more costly, effortful types of participation, such as contacting a politician (Verba et al., 1995). Individuals often perform such activities when their interests or the interests of groups with which they identify are at stake (Verba et al., 1995). Parents play an important role in influencing the extent to which their children participate in politics, and citizens are especially likely to become active if they are asked to do so (Verba et al., 1995). Because more educated, wealthier people are more likely to be asked to perform effortful activities, they are more likely to do so (Verba et al., 1995).

A social movement occurs when a large group of people organize to pursue particular political goals. Participation in these movements results from a number of causal factors: (1) widespread dissatisfaction with public policy, which a social movement hopes to alter (Barnes, Farah, & Heunks, 1971); (2) psychological stress from a major social or economic event (such as

an economic depression), which can inspire the hardest-hit individuals to express their frustration and solve it (Smelser, 1962); (3) people's desire to pursue their self-interests (Ferree, 1992), to express their values, or to protect social groups they care about (Johnson, Larana, & Gusfield, 1994); and (4) the availability of financial and other resources to support collective action (e.g., McCarthy & Zald, 1973).

People may also join social movements to express their social values or because of their identity in a group (Johnson et al., 1994). In fact, people sometimes engage in social protest to express a value even if they believe that they will gain nothing from the movement (e.g., Oliver, 1983).

Obedience to Authority. When and why citizens choose to obey political authorities has been the subject of much social psychological research (Tyler, 1990). The more people feel that the judgments, decisions, and procedures of the government are fair, the more obedient they are. Perceptions of fairness increase compliance with water restrictions (Tyler & DeGoey, 1995), waste management laws (Ebreo, Linn, & Vining, 1996), and many other sorts of regulations. Unfortunately, authorities perceived to be legitimate can also elicit immoral or illegal behaviors from people (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989).

Authoritarians are people who are especially disposed to obey authority figures (Altemeyer, 1988). The trait of authoritarianism is composed of three attitudinal clusters: authoritarian submission (the degree to which a person feels that submission to governmental authority is legitimate), authoritarian aggression (the degree to which a person will be aggressive toward others in accordance with perceived governmental policy), and conventionalism (the degree to which a person complies with perceived governmental and societal norms).

Authoritarians tend to hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993), African Americans (Duckitt & Farre, 1994), and environmentalism (Schultz & Stone, 1994) and positive attitudes toward harsh solutions to social problems (Peterson, Doty, & Winter, 1993). Authoritarians are also especially likely to vote for a bill to reduce benefits to immigrants (California Proposition 187; Quinton, Cowan, & Watson, 1996) and are especially likely to perform orthodox religious behavior (Leak & Randall, 1995).

Conclusion

As we hope this review makes clear, much fascinating research has illuminated the workings of the human mind in the context of politics. We have reviewed only a small portion of the research on the political psychology of the individual, and we encourage readers to

consult books (e.g., Hermann, 1986) and review articles (e.g., Kinder, 1998) describing more of this work.

As a whole, this work suggests that people are generally well informed about many aspects of politics, and that they use systematic decision making in forming and changing their political beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, political behavior appears to be instigated by considerations and forces that seem both reasonable and consonant with democratic political philosophy. Therefore, when taken together, these research findings suggest that the psychological conditions necessary for effective democracy often seem to exist.

[See also *Political Decision Making: and Political Leadership.*]

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