

# The Psychology of Politics

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# The Psychology of Politics

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# Preface

*The Psychology of Politics* is an introduction to political psychology. The field has a long past, but as an organized discipline, it has a short history. The long past is detailed in Jaap van Ginneken's historical first chapter of the book. The short history of political psychology as an organized discipline dates from 1978, when the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP) was founded (Stone, 1981, 1988). The formal establishment of an interdiscipline drawing upon various social sciences had numerous predecessors in the 20th century: Wallas's (1908) *Human Nature in Politics*, Harold Lasswell's *Psychopathology and Politics* in 1930, a book with the present title by Eysenck (1954), and *The Handbook of Political Psychology*, edited by the founder of the ISPP, Jeanne Knutson. Her *Handbook* defined the field at the time of its publication in 1973 (see especially Davies' chapter).

The present revision of Stone's (1974) work is more modest in its aspirations. It provides a selective introduction to the field, emphasizing topics that the authors believe to be representative and important. Many psychologically relevant topics, such as political socialization, participation, voting behavior, and leadership, are not represented among our chapter titles. However, these topics link naturally with those we have chosen to emphasize, and they are addressed at various places in the text. We intend the book to be a general introduction to the field; our choice of topics is necessarily somewhat arbitrary, but it represents our best judgment based on earlier surveys by Schaffner and Alker (1981–1982) and Schaffner (1981–1982) of textbooks in political psychology.

Our point of view is social psychological, broadly conceived. We share a social constructionist perspective on the field. By this term, we mean that the reality we experience is shaped by social consensus, expressed through agreed-upon terms of understanding (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen & Gergen, 1986). The social construction of reality is demonstrated in Chapter 1 in the strikingly different political psychologies constructed by liberal and conservative thinkers over the past 100 years.

Readers just beginning their study of psychology and politics may wish

to defer Chapter 1 and go directly to Chapter 2, which begins our presentation of the modern field of political psychology. It emphasizes the multiple points of view from which one can consider political behavior, showing how political actions and reactions are conditioned by the historical environment, political culture, current events, and the immediate situation. Although the *person* is the central focus of these influences, the study of the personality of political leaders is only one of many possible points of view in this field. In Chapter 3, however, we do consider personal character, the ways in which it is shaped by political facts as well as familial influences, and the ways in which attitudes reflect personality. According to our perspective, ideology (Chapter 4) is an important aspect of character. We employ ideology as an explanatory construct in various places in the text.

Motives are important components of personal character; our treatment in Chapter 5 focuses on the ancient question of the drive for power and also the affiliation and achievement motives in leaders. Lasswell and others have written about the “political type.” Although we believe that type theories conceal much individual diversity, focus on types does help to illustrate certain themes in political psychology. In Chapter 6, we discuss types and traits, and develop the authoritarian, Machiavellian, and narcissistic types.

Democratic theorists have always debated the question of human rationality. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the rational and irrational qualities in the thinking of political elites and the masses, respectively. Chapter 8 also explores the role of mass media and the question of stability and change in public opinion.

Possibilities for the future of the human race hinge on our ability to live together on Earth without destroying each other. The threat of nuclear annihilation has profoundly influenced the lives of individuals, at least those in the more advanced nations. More and more, the planning of national leaders is haunted by the spectre of nuclear war (Chapter 10). The origins of the underlying conflicts that threaten to bring on this catastrophe are discussed in Chapter 9, together with some hopeful possibilities for the conciliation of national antagonisms.

Our final chapter addresses psychological aspects of social change. Again we emphasize the breadth of our field by considering changes as small as local neighborhood lobbying and as large as the evolution of entire political institutions and traditions.

Fifteen years have passed since the publication of the first edition of *The Psychology of Politics*. This second edition reflects the burgeoning of interest, the elaboration of theoretical perspectives, and the diversification of research methods that characterize the development of political psychology since 1974. Most of the material in this edition is new. There is more focus on conflict, particularly international conflict, and less on voting behavior. Through our historical chapter, and in various other ways, we have

striven to gain a more international perspective. From the first edition we have carried over the goal of providing a readable, broadly representative introduction to the field. We are sorry about the interesting things we had to leave out.

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