

Political Psychology in International Relations: Promises and Pitfalls

Personality, perception, emotion and human imperfection: these are just some of the many psychological factors that occupy a paradoxical position in the world of International Relations (IR). While they are frequently evoked in the explanation of particular cases (Hitler was insane, George Bush invaded Iraq because he had daddy issues, Americans' collective fear and irrational hatred of Islam has perpetuated the war on terror), IR theory frequently omits both individual and group level psychology for the sake of simplicity. This is not without reason: psychological phenomenon are inherently messy, difficult to measure, and their applicability is uncertain, yet it is difficult to fully understand international politics without them.

This course explores the promises and potential pitfalls of psychological methods and theories in IR, starting with the traditional, pre-experimental applications of psychology to IR. We will focus on recent experimental work drawn from substantive areas of psychology (ex. Perception, judgment, personality, emotions), paying particular attention to the challenges of applying psychology at the international level. For example, how do you measure or test beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and other psychological concepts? How can you know when a particular psychological tendency will manifest? Finally, we will examine some substantive areas of psychology that have yet to be incorporated into IR and discuss the theoretical possibilities and practical considerations involved in potentially bridging this divide in the future.

This course does not require a background in psychology or political psychology, though the structure of the course assumes some familiarity with foundational elements of IR theory (it would be helpful for students to have taken the introductory International Politics course, for example). While this course is not a history of political psychology in IR or a comprehensive examination of IR theory as such, students will probably come away understanding the broader contours of both.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain the tradeoffs of psychological vs. rationalist approaches to International Relations
- Understand and apply key theories on the role of psychology in International Politics
- Evaluate the utility and drawbacks of experimental approaches to IR, and analyze the practical considerations involved in accounting for psychological factors
- Discuss, and make informed suggestions about, possible future applications of psychological research to IR

Course Format and Requirements:

Classes will be primarily discussion based seminars, though I will lecture briefly on some occasions, such for the introductory session and the beginning of most sessions.

As such, students are expected to come to each class having done the assigned readings and prepared to discuss them in depth. We will spend a large portion of class in discussion, both as a full class and in

smaller groups. Because this course emphasizes discussion and joint exploration of topics, active participation is a vital component of your learning. I understand that not everyone is equally comfortable with speaking in class, however, so while I encourage people to make their best effort to do so I am open to figuring out alternative means of participation if necessary (for example, handing questions and comments to me before class). Please approach me at the end of the first class, during my office hours, or via e-mail if you wish to discuss such an arrangement.

There are three primary assignments for this course in addition to reading and discussion:

- 1. Presentation and short paper.** Each of you will select a day of the syllabus and find 1-3 readings related to the topic of that day but not listed in the required readings. After clearing your choice of readings with me, you will then write a critical reflection on those readings (2 pages single space) due on the class day in question, and come to class prepared to give a 5 minute presentation on your chosen readings to the class.
- 2. Experimental design.** In groups of three, you will propose an experimental design to address an international relations question of your choosing by bringing in a psychological concept of your choosing. While these could be areas we have covered in class, they could also come from outside of the syllabus: the only requirement is that you clear your selections with me. The proposal should be short (5 pages), and may assume resources (funding, facilities, etc...) to which you as students lack access. Your groups will be assigned at the end of week 5 and the designs will be due at the end of week 7.
- 3. Long Paper.** Your final assignment is a long (12-15 page) paper due at the end of the quarter that can be either a critical literature review of a topic from class or a proposal of a novel application of a psychological concept to international relations. The critical literature review option should focus on one of the weekly topic headings and constitute an in-depth examination of the assigned readings from the week as well as related work that you as a student will be responsible for finding. If you choose to posit a novel application of psychology to political science, you may draw from any of the areas of psychology we cover *or* find one that falls outside the explicit scope of this class. Regardless of which assignment you choose, you must send me a 1 page proposal for the assignment by the end of week 5 and meet with me during office hours to discuss your plans. This assignment will be covered in greater detail during class by no later than the end of week 3.

Grading:

Your final grade is determined as follows: -

- Participation: 25%
- Short paper and presentation: 20%
- Experimental design: 20%
- Final Project: 35%

Readings:

The following book is required for the course:

- Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword*. Yale University Press, 2008.
- Jervis, Robert. *Perception and misperception in international politics*. Princeton University Press, 2017

- McDermott, Rose. *Political psychology in international relations*. University of Michigan Press, 2004.

All other readings listed can be found on the course site in electronic form.

Recommended Readings:

I will provide, separately from the syllabus, an extended list of recommended readings for each week.

For all substantive weeks I ask you to read the abstracts of at least five of these articles. The purpose of this is to give you a fuller sense of the range of questions and research designs that have been applied in each area. You are of course encouraged to read in full any that capture your interest.

Pre-course reading material:

The Undoing Project by Michael Lewis.

This is a non-academic book that is a superb primer on many of the psychological concepts we will be dealing with as well as the historical trends incorporating psychology into other areas (politics, economics, etc...). While not essential, I HIGHLY recommend reading this either before or throughout the course both because it is valuable in the context of the course and, frankly, it's a great, easy read.

Structure of the Course:

Part 1: The Old: Foundations

Week 1: Introduction: What is political psychology in IR?:

-Mercer, Jonathan. "Rationality and psychology in international politics." *International organization* 59, no. 1 (2005): 77-106.

-Goldgeier, James M., and Philip E. Tetlock. "Psychology and international relations theory." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4, no. 1 (2001): 67-92.

-Jervis, Robert. "Political psychology: Some challenges and opportunities." *Political Psychology* (1989): 481-493.

Week 2: The Old: Perceptions, personality, and belief systems:

-Jervis, Robert. *Perception and misperception in international politics*. Princeton University Press, 2017. **Introduction and one chapter of student's choice (clear this choice with me).**

-Renshon, Jonathan. "Stability and change in belief systems: The operational code of George W. Bush." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 6 (2008): 820-849.

-Greenstein, Fred I. "Can personality and politics be studied systematically?." *Political Psychology* (1992): 105-128.

-(Recommended) George, Juliette L., and Alexander L. George. "Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A reply to Weinstein, Anderson, and Link." *Political Science Quarterly* 96, no. 4 (1981): 641-665.

Part 2: The Experimental turn and Behavioral Revolution:

Week 3: Viva la Behavioral Revolution: The Introduction of Experiments

-Hafner-Burton, Emilie M., Stephan Haggard, David A. Lake, and David G. Victor. "The Behavioral Revolution and International Relations." *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017): S1-S31.

-Powell, Robert. "Research Bets and Behavioral IR." *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017): S265-S277.

-McDermott, Rose. "Experimental methods in political science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 5, no. 1 (2002): 31-61.

-(Recommended) Kertzer, Joshua D., and Dustin Tingley. "Political Psychology in International Relations: Beyond the Paradigms." *Ann. Rev* 21 (2018): 1-23.

-(Recommended) Tomz, Michael. "Domestic audience costs in international relations: An experimental approach." *International Organization* 61, no. 4 (2007): 821-840.

Week 4: Risk and Resolve:

-Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword*. Yale University Press, 2008. **Selected pages.**

-Levy, Jack S. "Prospect theory, rational choice, and international relations." *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1997): 87-112.

-McDermott, Rose, and Jacek Kugler. "Comparing rational choice and prospect theory analyses: The US decision to launch operation 'Desert Storm', January 1991." *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no. 3 (2001): 49-85.

-Kertzer, Joshua D. "Resolve, time, and risk." *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017): S109S136.

-(Recommended) Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky. "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk." *Econometrica* 47, no. 2 (1979): 263-292.

-(Recommended) McDermott, Rose. "Prospect theory in political science: Gains and losses from the first decade." *Political Psychology* 25, no. 2 (2004): 289-312.

Week 5: Reputation and Intentions:

-Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword*. Yale University Press, 2008. **Selected pages.**

-Mercer, Jonathan. *Reputation and international politics*. Cornell University Press, 2010. **Ch. 1-2**

-Tingley, Dustin, and Barbara Walter. "Reputation building in international relations: An experimental approach." *International Organization* 65 (2011).

-Yarhi-Milo, Keren. "In the eye of the beholder: How leaders and intelligence communities assess the intentions of adversaries." *International Security* 38, no. 1 (2013): 7-51.

-(Recommended) Weisiger, Alex, and Keren Yarhi-Milo. "Revisiting reputation: How past actions matter in international politics." *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (2015): 473-495.

Week 6: Emotions:

-Mercer, Jonathan. "Emotion and strategy in the Korean War." *International Organization* 67, no. 2 (2013): 221-252.

-McDermott, Rose. "The feeling of rationality: The meaning of neuroscientific advances for political science." *Perspectives on politics* 2, no. 4 (2004): 691-706.

-Herrmann, Richard K. "How Attachments to the Nation Shape Beliefs About the World: A Theory of Motivated Reasoning." *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017): S61-S84.

-Hall, Todd H., and Andrew AG Ross. "Affective politics after 9/11." *International Organization* 69, no. 4 (2015): 847-879

Week 7: Neuropolitics and Biopolitics:

-McDermott, Rose, Dominic Johnson, Jonathan Cowden, and Stephen Rosen. "Testosterone and aggression in a simulated crisis game." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 614, no. 1 (2007): 15-33.

-Renshon, Jonathan, Julia J. Lee, and Dustin Tingley. "Emotions and the micro-foundations of commitment problems." *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017): S189-S218.

-Holmes, Marcus. "The force of face-to-face diplomacy: mirror neurons and the problem of intentions." *International organization* 67, no. 4 (2013): 829-861.

-(Recommended) Horowitz, Michael, Rose McDermott, and Allan C. Stam. "Leader age, regime type, and violent international relations." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 5 (2005): 661-685.

Week 8: Group Behavior and Decisionmaking:

-Saunders, Elizabeth N. "No Substitute for Experience: Presidents, Advisers, and Information in Group Decision Making." *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017): S219-S247.

-Badie, Dina. "Groupthink, Iraq, and the war on terror: Explaining US policy shift toward Iraq." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6, no. 4 (2010): 277-296.

-Paul't Hart. "Irving L. Janis' victims of groupthink." *Political Psychology* (1991): 247-278.

-(Recommended) Redd, Steven B. "The influence of advisers on foreign policy decision making: an experimental study." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 3 (2002): 335-364.

Part 3: The Future of Political Psychology in IR:

Week 9: Higher order beliefs:

-Gilovich, Thomas, and Lee Ross. *The Wisest One in the Room: How You Can Benefit from Social Psychology's Most Powerful Insights*. Simon and Schuster, 2016. **Ch. 7**

-Pronin, Emily, Daniel Y. Lin, and Lee Ross. "The bias blind spot: Perceptions of bias in self versus others." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (2002): 369-381.

-Pronin, Emily, Kathleen Kennedy, and Sarah Butsch. "Bombing versus negotiating: How preferences for combating terrorism are affected by perceived terrorist rationality." *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 28, no. 4 (2006): 385-392.

-Selected pages from Rose McDermott's academic dissertation

Week 10: Race and Stereotypes/Final discussion: -

We will determine the final week's readings as a class

Sample Assessment:

Throughout this course we have explored the application of concepts, findings, and methods from psychology to the study of international relations. Such applications promise a wide range of useful insights, but suffer from a number of common drawbacks (external validity, crossing levels of analysis, the 'aggregation problem,' and operationalization to name a few). For this final assignment option, propose a research agenda for a novel application to IR of a substantive area of psychology research. You may choose an area we have covered in class or draw one from independent research, and the principle novelty could be conceptual or methodological. Your proposal should address the following: why would this represent a novel Contribution? What sorts of insights do you expect to gain and what is a specific theory or hypothesis you propose to test? What are the problems you foresee in carrying out this research agenda? How do you propose to overcome these obstacles?

Your Proposal should be a minimum of 12-15 pages

Rubric:

-Clarity and Coherence of proposed agenda (15 points)

-Use of in class sources (5 points)

-Use of sources from independent research (5 points)

-Writing quality (10 points)

-Creativity and ambition (potential bonus points)