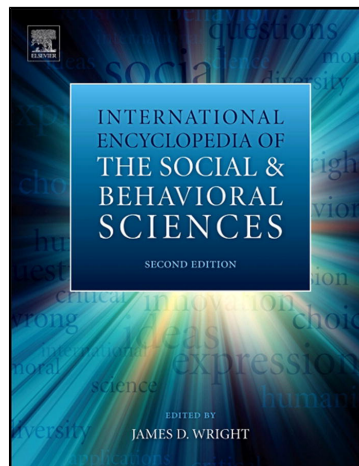


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From Staerklé, C., 2015. Political Psychology. In: James D. Wright (editor-in-chief), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edition, Vol 18. Oxford: Elsevier. pp. 427–433.

ISBN: 9780080970868

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Elsevier

Political Psychology

Christian Staerklé, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

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Abstract

Political psychology is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry concerned with the analysis of political thought and behavior of individuals within politically organized communities. Survey, experimental, and qualitative research examines political behavior at the individual and the collective level, in the general public and among political elites, and as formal and informal processes of political participation. Key topics in political psychology include political beliefs and values, cognitive processes in political decision making, political communication, media effects, political rhetoric, international conflict, racism and prejudice, ethnic identities, and collective action.

Political Psychology

Political psychology is an interdisciplinary scientific field of inquiry concerned with the study of political processes from a psychological perspective. At the most general level, political psychology is concerned with political thought and behavior of individuals within politically organized communities. Research in political psychology examines political behavior at the individual (e.g., decision making) and at the collective level (e.g., collective action), it concerns processes occurring in the general public (e.g., public opinion) and among political elites (e.g., psychology of leadership), and it relates to formal (e.g., voting) and informal (e.g., community involvement) processes of political participation.

The boundaries between political psychology and the various fields of inquiry it draws upon are blurred. The discipline uses theory and methodology derived from cognitive, personality, social, developmental, and organizational psychology, from research traditions within political science interested in political behavior and decision making, from sociology, education, public opinion, and communication research. It is therefore difficult to demarcate without ambiguity the boundaries of research in political psychology from studies in the respective neighboring disciplines.

Its interdisciplinary nature has been an essential feature of political psychology since its beginning. During the short history of the discipline, the two disciplines have often existed side by side, for example, when either psychology (personality analyses, political cognition) or political science (political behavior) defined the main paradigms under investigation. Yet, the question of how to articulate and integrate the different methodologies, worldviews, and epistemologies associated with psychology and with political science remains a recurrent concern. Some approaches may be accused of 'too much psychology' (neglecting political, organizational, and systemic explanations) while others may be seen as 'too much political science' (using simplified models of psychological capacities and motivations and ignoring how citizens actively make sense of political situations). Nevertheless, much research has successfully integrated the two disciplines by creating original and innovative research paradigms in political psychology.

In the next section the historical and institutional context of political psychology is briefly outlined, followed by summaries

of the most common fields of investigation of political psychology.

The Context of Political Psychology

A Short History of Political Psychology

Political psychology has a long past, but a short history. While the origins of the interest in the relationship between psychological processes and political organization can be traced back to ancient Greece, the philosophy of enlightenment and nineteenth century social and political science (with widespread interest in crowd psychology, for example), political psychology as a field and later as a discipline emerges in its own right after WWII. McGuire (1993) distinguishes three phases in the short history of political psychology: in the 1940s and 1950s, researchers were concerned with behavioral pathology and the impact of personality on political processes, inspired by psychoanalytic and behaviorist theories. During the 1960s and 1970s, scholarly interest turned toward political attitudes and voting behavior, largely based on newly available survey data and statistical techniques that allowed, for example, investigating the impact of political campaigns on attitudes and voting behavior. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the field was largely focused on political cognition and individual decision making, thereby reflecting the cognitive trend observable in other behavioral sciences as well. The citizen was represented as a limited information processing machine that was nevertheless able to take good enough decisions based on various cognitive heuristics. While the first handbook of political psychology was published in the early 1970s (Knutson, 1973), it is during this period that a number of textbooks explicitly devoted to the discipline of political psychology appear, all clearly marked by the cognitive approach to political psychology (e.g., Iyengar and McGuire, 1993; Lau and Sears, 1986).

Since the mid-1990s, the field has grown significantly and has become ever more diversified. Today, no single approach can be considered as dominant or organizing the field as a whole. 'Classical' research topics on personality profiles of leaders, psychodynamic explanations of political behavior, cognitive approaches to political decision making, or analyses of prejudice and racism in political processes continue to

attract the attention of researchers. Political psychology has been thriving during the past two decades and an evident sign of this trend is the increasing number of new books published under the header of political psychology, including edited books (Borgida et al., 2009; Monroe, 2002), a textbook (Cottam et al., 2010), a reader (Jost and Sidanius, 2004), and a handbook (Sears et al., 2003; Huddy et al., 2013; for the second ed.). Moreover, reflecting the trend toward integration of biological and social processes, political behavior is increasingly explained with neurological and genetic models (Marcus, 2012).

The Societal Turn

In 1993, McGuire was correct in predicting that a fourth wave of political psychology would concern research on intergroup relations, social change, and ideological beliefs. These new topics seem to reflect a deep change that has occurred in political psychology since the mid-1990s. Much like social psychology, political psychology has moved toward closer scrutiny of societal issues related to power relations between groups, political legitimacy, and civic participation. One may speculate that this changing focus is the result of changing historical conditions of the recent past, including the breakdown of cold war certainties in 1989, growing economic inequalities in contemporary free market societies, an increasing number of grievances and claims by minority groups, tense political polarization in many Western countries, and the various terrorist attacks that have marked recent history.

This theoretical expansion of political psychology is associated with a significant geographical development of the discipline. Since its beginning as a modern scientific discipline, political psychology has largely been defined through North American research. Accordingly, until the mid-1990s, non-American political psychology was virtually nonexistent. This situation of American predominance has now radically changed: the single most important development in the recent history of the discipline is the growing interest for and the massive expansion of research in political psychology in non-American countries, in particular Europe. This is evidenced with increasing attendance from European researchers at political psychology conferences, with the number of papers published by European researchers, and with the founding of the new *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* in 2013 that explicitly seeks to attract a broad international audience. More importantly, this move toward Europe has also sparked new theoretical developments, for example, critical political psychology that focuses on collective action, globalization, and the migration experience (Kinnvall et al., 2014; Tileagă, 2013) and a social representations approach to political psychology that proposes dynamic, contextual, and normatively determined analyses of political behavior (e.g., Howarth et al., 2014).

Methods in Political Psychology

The field relies on a variety of methodological approaches. Survey research is privileged by political scientists to study research questions requiring correlational and longitudinal

analyses, for example, dynamics of public opinion and voting behavior, political values and ideological beliefs, and cross-cultural differences in political attitudes. Experimental approaches are more often used by psychologists to test causal models, for example, concerning cognitive processes in rational choice decision making. The recent shift toward research concerned with societal issues has brought qualitative approaches to the forefront of political psychology, including discursive and rhetorical approaches that enrich the traditionally positivist worldview of political psychology with a more constructivist epistemological orientation.

Institutionalization

While research in political psychology has existed since the 1940s, proper institutionalization of the discipline began in 1978 when the International Society of Political Psychology was founded by Jeanne Knutson from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). In 2013, the association had about 800 members many of which attend the Annual Meetings that have been held every year since then, with rotating locations between North America, Europe, and other locations around the globe. A summer academy in political psychology for young scholars is linked to the Annual Meetings. The society publishes *Political Psychology*, the respected quarterly flagship journal of the discipline, and, starting in 2014, the annual series *Advances in Political Psychology*.

Moreover, a 3-week summer school in political psychology is organized by Stanford University, and major associations such as the American Political Science Association and the European Consortium for Political Research have active political psychology sections.

Graduate and undergraduate courses under related titles are taught in leading universities around the world, and many American universities offer degrees in political psychology, mostly in political science departments. While Queens University, Belfast, is the first European university to offer a complete political psychology program, many other universities have graduate programs that run under different labels but nevertheless offer curricula closely related to political psychology (e.g., various social psychology programs).

Overview

In this text, some of the most emblematic research in political psychology will be presented, but many important topics are necessarily left out (e.g., biological, genetic and evolutionary approaches, deliberation and network research, emotional and motivational approaches, psychobiography, conflict resolution). Research in political psychology can be organized into three major categories of research, and the presented approaches are deemed to represent some of the key characteristics of each of these categories.

Individual-level processes are concerned with personality profiles of citizens and political leaders, with political beliefs and values, with the role of socialization and individual development in the formation of political beliefs, and with the examination of cognitive processes in political decision-making. A second strand of research is concerned with *political communication*, including media communication, political

rhetoric, and constructivist approaches. A third field of research examines *group-level processes* in political thought and behavior, including international relations and conflict, the role of racism in politics, group identities and cultural diversity, and collective action and social change.

Individual-Level Processes

Personality Profiles of Citizens and Political Leaders

Personality is understood as being composed of traits, needs, motives, and self-conceptions that predispose individuals to relatively stable and consistent patterns of political thought and behavior. Hitherto referred to as 'temperament' or 'character,' personality profiles have been amply used to explain the behavior of both political leaders and followers. Psychodynamic approaches were dominant in the early days of research on personality, referring to unconscious drives and mechanisms. The *Authoritarian personality syndrome* (Adorno et al., 1950) was developed in the aftermath of WWII to explain mass submission to political authorities, aggressive behavior against minority groups, and uncritical endorsement of totalitarian ideologies. This pioneering study was further developed with research on dogmatic personalities that leads individuals to be more receptive to rigid, closed-minded belief systems (Rokeach, 1960). But it was not until the 1990s that the 'Big five' became an almost consensually accepted general system to describe personality traits through five dimensions (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience). Much research since then has examined the relationship between personality traits and political orientation, showing, for example, that openness to experience is generally associated with left-wing support, whereas conscientiousness is more likely to lead to support for right-wing parties. Other studies have shown persistent links between extraversion and openness to experience and various forms of political participation, including voting, attending meetings, campaigning, and signing petitions. Another personality dimension concerns general needs and desires, differentiated by McClelland (1985) into the three basic motives of achievement, affiliation, and power. Research in the motivated social cognition tradition, in turn, distinguishes between epistemic, existential, and relational needs, and showed that political conservatism is associated with the epistemic need for cognitive closure and the existential need for safety (Jost et al., 2003).

Studies on *personality profiles of political leaders*, in turn, suggest that history is at least partly shaped by leaders' idiosyncratic ways of perceiving and interpreting social reality (e.g., distortions, confirmatory bias), private memories (e.g., war experiences in childhood), personal goals (e.g., power orientation), cognitive styles (e.g., rigidity), and emotional reactions to stress (e.g., low tolerance for stress). Autocrats' grandiose self-conceptions, fears, and obsessions also play a role in their strategies to maintain power. The major difference with large-scale personality studies is that leader personalities can generally only be assessed with indirect methods, including psychobiography (accounting for leader personality through an analysis of childhood experiences), content analyses of formal and informal speeches, and

personality ratings by individuals close enough to leaders to judge them.

Political Beliefs and Values

Political beliefs differentiate individuals and groups according to their ideological orientations and political preferences. Debates revolve around the question of the structure of beliefs systems. In many studies, a single dimension (conservatism vs liberalism or left- vs right-wing orientation) is used to differentiate individuals, but it becomes increasingly clear that one-dimensional models are no longer adequate to account for the heterogeneity and variation of political beliefs. There is today a large consensus that at least two independent dimensions are required, one organized around social and cultural issues (traditional morality vs cultural freedom), and the other one around economic positioning (egalitarianism vs meritocracy). An important set of studies has, for example, analyzed the complex and context-dependent relationships between *Social Dominance Orientation* (assessing attitudes toward group-based inequality) and *Right-Wing-Authoritarianism* (the ideological equivalent to the authoritarian personality described above).

Values play also a central role as individual-level organizers of political judgments and behavior. Schwartz's (1992) theory of the human values system paved the way for the systematic analysis and comparison of the impact of values on political behavior. Typically, left-wing political orientations are associated with values of universalism and benevolence, whereas right-wing positions are related to the values of self-enhancement, power, achievement, and conformity.

The origins of political beliefs and values can partially be traced back to *socialization* during childhood and early adult years. There is increasing evidence that early learning of politically relevant information, including political beliefs, intergroup attitudes (e.g., racism), and social identities (e.g., national identity) remain stable across time, giving rise to considerable political continuity over an individual's life course (Sears and Brown, 2013). There is also support for the hypothesis of preadult family transmission, with studies showing substantial parental transmission of political party identification to adolescent children. Nevertheless change in sociopolitical behaviors, attitudes, and opinions still occurs in adult years, as a function of new contingencies and changes in the wider sociocultural environment.

Cognitive Approaches to Political Decision Making

Political decision making is one of the most important research domains in political psychology, and rational choice theory is the most commonly used theoretical framework to explain decision-making processes. Basic assumptions of (normative) rational choice theory are that individuals have a coherent set of preferences, gather the necessary information to reach an informed decision, evaluate alternative actions, and choose actions that are optimally related to their beliefs and values. Such decisions are expected to further individuals' self-interest and are therefore deemed rational. However, the rational choice approach is confronted to a paradox, since research has amply shown that in practice political decision-making virtually never follows these principles. People lack consistency in

their opinions, use information incorrectly, are overconfident in their own choices, fail to adapt existing evaluations in light of new information, draw unwarranted conclusions from insufficient data, and express prejudiced opinions. Moreover, political decision making, in particular voting, is only weakly related to actual self-interest.

Following the implausibility of a 'full' rational choice model, researchers have developed models of 'bounded' rationality that are based on similar assumptions as rational choice theories, but that recognize individual and contextual variation in decision-making processes and outcomes (Kahneman, 2011). To compensate limited information, cognitive biases and lack of motivation, bounded rationality models such as behavioral decision-making theory describe a number of cognitive strategies that help individuals to make 'good enough' decisions: simplifying the decision task, selectively filtering new information, interpreting information as a function of preexisting ideological predispositions, and making sense of political issues through evaluations of social groups involved in the decision (e.g., beneficiary groups of welfare programs). Individuals also refer to opinions of others to make up their mind, for example, by relying on expert judgments, by socially validating their opinion through comparisons of opinions with those of relevant others (informational influence), or by aligning their opinion with the perceived majority opinion in their community to avoid marginalization (normative influence). Finally, they may also defend the interest of their group (collective self-interest) rather than only their individual self-interest.

Nevertheless the amount of *factual knowledge* citizens possess does make a difference for the decision-making process (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). High levels of knowledge are, for example, likely to increase the alignment of one's decision with one's beliefs and preferences. Yet, while many studies highlight low levels of political knowledge and lack of political sophistication of citizens, the actual implications of this general lack of knowledge remain debated.

Political Communication

Media Communication

Communication between citizens and between citizens and political leaders is another key topic for political psychology. Research on mass media has analyzed how media shape political outcomes by directing the public's attention to major issues (agenda setting) and by describing those issues as a function of the communicator's interests (framing effects). *Agenda setting* shows how successful the media are in determining what citizens 'think about,' based, for example, on research showing nearly perfect correspondence between the issue priorities of the public and news organizations. Research on *framing* in turn has shown that individuals are highly sensitive to the way policies are described and survey questions worded, and that even minor changes in the labeling of political alternatives can produce strong effects on public opinion. For some, such findings challenge the validity of democratic opinions, since opinions appear to be highly volatile as a function of irrelevant pieces of information. Antidotes to framing effects are deliberation, expertise, and exposure to

competing frames (Druckman, 2004). Nevertheless, framing effects can also be viewed as part and parcel of everyday political reasoning, since people necessarily rely on peripheral cues to form an opinion. Framing has also a strong strategic dimension, since messages are deliberately framed by political elites (parties, interest groups) to move opinions in the direction of their interests. Extremist groups, for example, may be portrayed as exercising their right to freedom of expression, or they may be described as a risk for public safety. Similarly, poverty may be explained with individual behaviors or with political choices, thereby altering attributions of responsibility and ultimately affecting political decisions.

Constructivist, Critical, and Rhetorical Approaches

The growing number of constructivist and critical approaches to political psychology can be seen as one of the most important theoretical developments in the recent history of the discipline. These approaches offer a conceptual alternative to the causal models characterizing a majority of studies in political psychology (Tileagă, 2013). In a constructivist perspective, political thought and behavior is contextualized within the social and cultural environment.

This constructivist perspective can be exemplified with the social representations approach that has recently entered political psychology. This approach explores the processes by which citizens come to a shared understanding of political issues and how this shared understanding relates to their possibilities for political action (Elchereth et al., 2011). Communicating knowledge creates communities of belief that transform individual opinions into social representations, that is, into knowledge shared and debated by members of the group. Such shared knowledge (e.g., awareness of excessive social inequalities) then becomes the basis for political action, both individual (e.g., voting) and collective action (e.g., mass demonstrations). In line with constructivist principles, social representations do not just reflect social reality but they constitute that social reality, and sometimes change the nature of that reality. Hence, political thought and behavior is to a large extent shaped by what people think others are thinking (meta-representations).

Given its focus on the social context that produces representations, a social representations approach highlights the role of power relations in the communication and dissemination of representations between individuals and between groups. Political participation, for example, can be conceptualized as the power to construct and convey particular representations over others (Howarth et al., 2014). In this view, the 'framing' of concepts is a sign of the inescapably contested nature of political concepts such as freedom, equality, democracy, or justice. Such abstract notions are open to debate and dispute and much of political action and discourse can be viewed as competitive attempts to impose specific interpretations of political concepts, events, and situations consistent with the actor's political goals. Opposing sides may, for example, refer to a same concept that is assumed to appeal to the people: for the Democratic Party in the United States, the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) brings 'justice' to the American people, whereas for the Republican Party only the repeal of the same law would do so. Quite clearly, the interpretations of 'justice'

vary wildly in these two rhetorical perspectives. A social representations approach thus examines the construction of legitimate and dominant political knowledge, and the strategies used to marginalize and silence alternative ways of knowing and being. While this type of power is typically afforded to high-status groups who have the power to construct what is 'real' or 'true,' social representations nonetheless allow for resistance and agency through the active reappropriation of existing knowledge.

Another variant of a constructivist perspective are political rhetoric approaches that take up a critical stance toward conventional models of decision making and psychological functioning, arguing that dispute and conflict are essential features of political thought and behavior (Condor et al., 2013). According to this line of work, citizens are embedded in a sociocultural environment characterized by ideological dilemmas and opposing worldviews that shape citizens' attitudes toward political issues. Rather than being expressions of an irrational common sense, such contradictions are the preconditions for political thought and for rhetorical deliberation within and between members of a society, and consequently for a lively democratic political culture.

Group-Level Processes

International Conflict

Research on international relations and international conflict is a traditionally important aspect of political psychology. Rooted in a social psychological perspective, this strand of research offers a complementary view on structural, strategic, and realist analyses of international conflict. It assumes that subjective perceptions of the conflict determine actions and responses by the conflicting parties, that these perceptions develop in the context of dynamic and changing intergroup relations, and that ongoing interaction between conflicting parties determines the development and outcome of the conflict (Fisher et al., 2013). International conflict is thus a process driven by collective needs and fears rather than by objective national interests, in particular concerning identity, recognition, and autonomy of ethnonational groups.

This focus on subjective perceptions of conflict is evident in research on stereotypical images of countries. These images are held by both the general population and political elites and define the perceived threats and opportunities countries are confronted with. They are stable, difficult to change, and easily become taken-for-granted assumptions that produce routinized responses of what is seen as in a country's interest or against it. A limited number of such images seem to organize international relations, including enemy, ally, degenerate, colony, and barbarian images (Herrmann, 2013). An enemy image implies, for example, a tendency to dehumanize its population and to interpret any activity by its government as evidence of resolve and aggressive intent. Hence, international relations are severely prone to misperceptions with potentially catastrophic consequences; for example, when a military conflict escalates due to distorted or selective perceptions of the conflict situation. Other factors that have been shown to contribute to conflict escalation are the normative reinforcement of bellicose attitudes in times of conflict and

psychological commitments that prevent individuals and groups deeply involved in the conflict to actively engage in deescalation and conflict resolution. This is the case when worldviews are so strongly built around the conflict that they would be threatened by an end to the conflict.

Racism and Politics

Negative attitudes toward groups – prejudice – is another central group-level topic addressed by political psychologists. This research has its roots in U.S. American race relations that have shaped American political debate since the nineteenth century. The current state of research on the role of prejudice in politics can be traced back to the 1960s, a period during which a number of crucial changes in American race relations have occurred, most notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that outlawed any institutionalized discrimination based on racial criteria. Up to this period, overt and blatant racism against Blacks was largely seen as legitimate, but with the deep changes of the racial relations following the civil rights era, beliefs about biological inferiority of Blacks became more and more unacceptable. Instead, new, more subtle forms of racism emerged, called symbolic, modern, or ambivalent racism that were characterized by the rejection of claims about biological inferiority and instead emphasized value differences between racial groups and value violations by Blacks (e.g., in claims that racial inequality was due to lacking work ethic by Blacks).

It is in this context that researchers have studied the role of prejudice and racism in American politics (see Kinder, 2013). Research has shown that racial animosity played and still plays a central role in many political processes, including party identification, voting, and policy opinions. Identification with the Republican and the Democratic Party closely follows racial divides, following the major political realignment in 1964 that shifted Blacks' identification from the Republican to the Democratic Party in the wake of the parties' starkly opposing positions on the Civil Rights Act.

Racial prejudice may act as a shortcut to political decisions regarding support or opposition to social policies. Many studies have demonstrated that public opinion is shaped by the attitudes citizens hold toward the groups deemed to be beneficiaries or victims of a given policy, in particular concerning measures destined to correct social inequalities (e.g., welfare, employment, and affirmative action policies). Prejudice has been shown to explain widespread opposition to welfare (Gilens, 1999), and the fierce opposition to the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) in 2013 can also be seen as being based on racial resentment. It must be noted, though, that the interpretation of the observed relationships between prejudice and political outcomes is itself hotly debated. For some, the effects are a mere expression of principled conservatism without any connection to prejudice, whereas for others cumulated survey evidence is proof enough that prejudice plays the assumed causal role in these political processes.

Group Identities and Cultural Diversity

The recent focus on issues of social change and political legitimacy has led to an intensified use of theories of intergroup relations and political identities in political psychology. These

approaches conceptualize groups as the link between societal conditions and psychological processes to address issues such as multiculturalism, social inequality, intergroup dominance, and discrimination from the perspective of political psychology. In line with the principle that political thought and behavior is context dependent, many approaches further assume that psychological processes are contingent upon the social position of individuals. Research therefore challenges the idea of universal psychological processes and differentiates analyses of psychological processes between dominant versus subordinate groups, or between ethnic majority versus minority groups.

A key concept in this intergroup approach to political psychology is political identity. Based on different intergroup approaches developed in social psychology (e.g., Social Identity Theory, Realistic Conflict Theory), political identities refer to identification with and meaning attributed to membership in politically relevant groups, including political parties and national, ethnic, linguistic, or gender groups (Huddy, 2013). Research has, for example, shown that individuals who strongly identify with their group are more likely to act on behalf of a group-related cause, to view the political environment in antagonistic terms, and to act defensively in face of group criticism.

Cultural diversity of contemporary societies provides the background to much of group identity and intergroup relations research in political psychology (Green and Staerklé, 2013). The most widely studied instances of (majority) group identity concern different forms of national attachment and identification. Two broad forms can be distinguished: patriotism denotes positive feelings of pride toward the nation and its symbols. It may be accompanied by critical attitudes that invite group members to speak up and criticize the nation when necessary. While patriotism is fundamentally non-comparative, nationalism, in turn, together with its derived forms of chauvinism and blind patriotism, is a comparative form of attachment that asserts national superiority in comparison to other countries, and may in its extreme form question the mere presence of immigrant and other minority groups on national soil.

A related strand of research is concerned with the ways majority members of receiving societies react to the presence of migrant groups, often based on analyses of perceived symbolic and material threat evoked by immigrants and of various forms of intergroup contact. New developments include the widespread use of multilevel techniques to examine the role of political and ideological contexts (assessed with macro-level measures at the national or regional level, e.g., strength of political parties) in explanations of hostile attitudes and behaviors toward immigrants.

Even though group identities are important for both majority and minority groups, their role in political processes has often been studied with minority groups, in particular ethnic or migrant groups. Strong minority group identities increase, for example, the likelihood that group members define their (material) interests according to the collective interests of the group rather than as a function of their individual self-interest. Highly identified minority group members develop a sense of common fate with other group members that leads them to express claims and grievances in

the name of the group and to defend their own and fellow group members' interests.

Other research has examined subjective migrant experiences within receiving societies from a discursive perspective, focusing on the active construction of intercultural identities and everyday practices of intercultural interactions. Studies have, for example, shown that while ethnic identities involve beliefs in commonality, shared kinship, and ancestry, they also capture processes of ongoing negotiation of ethnic boundaries, both within the migrant group (e.g., regarding the maintenance of cultural traditions in the receiving society) and between the migrant group and the receiving society (e.g., the nature of assimilation).

Social Change and Collective Action

Research on civic participation and collective action in political and social psychology has increased significantly as part of the new interest of researchers in issues of social change and contestation. This increase goes hand in hand with the rise of social movements all around the world during the past two decades. Collective action research is concerned with movement politics as opposed to party politics, that is, with active participation in mass demonstrations, protest events, occupations of public sites, boycotts, blockades, riots, and the like (Klandermans and van Stekelenburg, 2013).

Early approaches to collective action in the 1950s and 1960s explained protest by high levels of discontent experienced by individuals, followed by resource mobilization and political process theories that claimed that aggrieved people engage in collective action when the necessary organizational resources are available. Within these structural approaches, participation in collective movements was explained with rational choice models according to which individuals evaluate the costs and benefits of participation.

In the early 1990s, new social constructionist approaches to protest began to emerge in response to the dominant structural approach. These new approaches attempted to move away from static, decontextualized explanations of protest to more dynamic and contextualized models. These new models highlighted processes of social interaction and negotiation among participants, opponents, and bystanders, and analyzed the role of collective emotions and subjective definitions of the situation to explain collective action. In line with earlier theories, grievances, opportunities, and resources were still required, but grievances were understood as more nuanced responses to illegitimate inequality (assessed with judgments of distributive justice and group relative deprivation), suddenly imposed grievances (e.g., new roads or buildings) and violated principles (e.g., betrayed trust).

Moreover, since grievances are ubiquitous in contemporary society, the more important question now was to examine the circumstances under which grievances do actually give rise to actual protest movements. To answer this question, the various contemporary theoretical frameworks on collective action converge on the key role played by two factors: first, a politicized collective identity is a crucial component of engagement in collective political action. Many studies have shown that the more individuals identify with a group involved in a protest activity, the more likely they are to participate in that activity.

Movements offer indeed the opportunity to act on behalf of one's group and to celebrate the collective identity with symbols, rituals, marches, and songs. The second factor is efficacy as the belief that the movement will be able to redress grievances effectively. In addition, ideological motivations and intergroup emotions (in particular anger) have also been identified as key antecedents of collective actions.

Once these elements are in place, organizational processes involved in the mobilization of protesters explain collective action. Mobilization processes turn sympathizers into active participants and transform grievances into political claims. Through them, movements attempt to disseminate their analysis of the situation, create moral outrage among participants, and point out targets. Discursive approaches highlight identity functions of mobilization discourse: political communicators may attempt to regroup a heterogeneous audience into a single rhetorical entity ('we are the 99%') or to present a political program as an instantiation of the dominant norms and values of a given identity category ('we all welcome foreigners in our community'). Finally, researchers now recognize the importance of virtual networks and social media such as Twitter and Facebook in shaping 'connective action,' but the actual workings of these new forms of mobilization leading to coordinated collective action are currently far from clear.

See also: Emotions and Intergroup Relations; Immigration: Social Psychological Aspects; Intergroup Relations; Racism: Social Psychological Perspectives; Representations, Social Psychology of; Social Constructionism; Social Dominance Orientation; Social Identity in Social Psychology; Social Movements: A Social Psychological Perspective; Social Psychology; Stereotypes in Social Psychology.

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