

PSYC 444

PSYCHOLOGY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Session 4 – Why Study Psychology and Politics?

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Session Overview

At the end of the session, the student will be able to

- 1.justify the reasons for studying political psychology.
- 2.Establish the goal of political psychology.

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Reasons for Studying Political Psychology.
- What is Political Psychology?
- The Goal of Political Psychology.



Reading List

- Caprara, G., & Vecchione, M. (2009). Personality and Politics, In P. J. Corr & G. Mathews (Eds.). *The Cambridge Handbook of Personality Psychology*, pp. 589-607. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cottam, M.L., Dietz-Uhler, B., Mastors, E., & Preston, T. (2010). *Introduction to Political Psychology*. New York: Psychology Press.



Topic One

REASONS FOR STUDYING POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY



Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- At times it is very difficult to comprehend the behaviours and actions of peoples in politics. For example, why do some political actors or political figures stir up conflicts in order to win political power? Why do majority of certain ethnic minorities vote for certain political parties and not others? How do we explain the motivations of Osama Bin Laden in triggering the 9/11 attacks on the United States? Why did the Kokomba and Nanumba conflict happen?
- These and many other questions that continue to confront us and engage our attention demand some form of explanations. Whether we are affected directly or indirectly by the consequences of these behaviors, the need to understand the reasons and motivations behind the worthy of consideration.



Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- In fact, in order to ensure the development and attainment of a successful country, the actions of politicians and the electorate are worthy of consideration.
- Over the years, especially in the 20th century, and within the first decade of the 21st century, several wars have been fought which turned out to be pointless in the end. The invasion of the United States in Iraq is a classic example of an unjustified war when considered after hindsight.
- The wars in Liberia, Sierra Leon, and recently in Ivory Coast that claimed the lives of thousands of people question the motivations of some political leaders.

Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- As a matter of fact, unless there is a conscious and deliberate attempt in finding out the psychology behind the decisions of the leaders involved to act in these circumstances, we would be making little progress towards understanding the triggers of those actions. In order to understand the reasons behind the behaviours of politicians and the electorate, we cannot rely on their views alone.
- Again, the concepts, theories, and principles of political science alone would be inadequate if we want to fathom the dynamics within our political arena. Political science can tell us or explain to us the consequences of the actions of politicians, but will not be able to accurately tell us the reasons or thinking behind those actions.

Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- But an understanding of the psychology—the personality, thinking patterns, emotions and motivations-of persons engaged in political activities provides a unique and necessary basis for understanding those activities.
- This is the very reason why psychology is very crucial in the understanding of human behaviours in politics. The use of psychological interventions in the analysis of politics or political activities more or less helps us to better understand and appreciate politics.

Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- There are a lot of psychological processes that affect the actions of individuals who are involved in politics. It has been widely held that individuals act in politics rationally as a result of the pursuance of their self-interest. This argument that hinges on a set of assumptions in political science, fails to appreciate the numerous empirical studies done by psychologists.
- Although, some persons assume that psychology uses a common sense orientation in the understanding and explanation of behavior as a result of the rationality and predictability of behavior, years of research by psychologists show that behavior is not always common sense.

Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- The bottom line is that behavior is not always rational. If behavior were always rational, why would a man defile his/her daughter? According to Cottam, Dietz-Uhler, Mastors, and Preston (2010, p1), the motivation to expect behavior to be rational hinges on two basic needs.
- “First people have a need to make sense of-to understand-their world. Second, people have a need to predict the likely consequences of their own and others’ behavior. To the extent that behavior is perceived as rational, these two needs become easier to fulfill.”

Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- However, as political players, human beings do not always act rationally; instead, they are driven or motivated by certain psychosocial variables such as personality characteristics, values, beliefs, emotions, and group affiliations. When people are making decisions, in most cases, the above psychological and social variables influence their trajectory of thinking and not necessarily rational thought.

Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- People sometimes engage in activities that are seemingly at variance to their own interests, values, and beliefs. For example, it is irrational to kill, but because of winning political power, some politicians will even go the extreme by killing their political opponents. Nonetheless, by understanding the complexities of political psychology we would be able to explain behavior that usually appears irrational.

Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- In general, political psychology has been triggered due to the urgent political problems of the day, particularly those with actual or potential egregious consequences on society, whether maniacs in high office, the rise of totalitarianism, anti-Semitism, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, genocide, or the transitional problems in postcolonial countries.
- Again, apart from finding out the reasons behind the actions of political actors, the study of politics and psychology should be able to provide us with the principles and concepts that are needed to transform our economies in terms of development.

Reasons for Studying Political Psychology

- We need to use politics and psychology in this day and age to stimulate and foster national development. This is because development—political, social, emotional, economic, and so on is the essence of knowledge acquisition.



Sample Questions

1. Analyze the reasons behind the study of political psychology.
2. Explain the goal of political psychology.



Topic Two

WHAT IS POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY



What is Political Psychology?

- Political psychology has sprung out as an essential field in both political science and psychology that helps us to explain several facets of political behaviors or actions, whether it be seemingly pathological actions such as the systematic elimination of a group of minorities such as the Tutsis in Rwanda or Jews in Nazi Germany or normal everyday decision making practices that are sometimes successful but at times failures.
- Political Psychology essentially is a marriage between two disciplines: Psychology and Political Science, but also engages other disciplines, consisting of sociology, anthropology, international relations, economics, philosophy, media, journalism and history.



What is Political Psychology?

- According to Cottam et al. (2010), it involves explaining what people do, by adapting psychological concepts so that they are useful and relevant to politics, then applying them to the analysis of a political problem or issue.
- According to The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology, political psychology is "an application of what is known about human psychology to the study of politics" (Sears, Hurdy, & Jervis, 2003, p.3).
- It can also be defined as an interdisciplinary academic field that uses psychological concepts, principles, and theories in the understanding of politics, politicians and political behavior.

What is Political Psychology?

- It aims at fathoming the reciprocal linkages that exist between individuals and contexts that are influenced by beliefs, motivation, perception, cognition, information processing, learning strategies, socialization and attitude formation.
- Political psychological theories and approaches have been applied in many contexts such as leadership role, domestic and foreign policy making, behavior in ethnic violence, war and genocide, group dynamics and conflict, racist behavior, voting attitudes and motivation, voting and the role of the media, nationalism, and political extremism (Cottam, Dietz-Uhler, Mastors, & Preston, 2010).

Topic Three

GOAL OF POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY



Goal of Political Psychology

- The goal of political psychology is to establish general laws of behavior that can provide the basis for the explanation and prediction of events that happen in diverse occasions and settings. The method that is used in the explanation and prediction of behavior is known as the scientific method.
- It is called the scientific method because it relies on the scientific framework or procedure in conducting research. This method is a four step cyclical approach that is used by researchers in their attempt at understanding, explaining, and predicting behaviour.



Goal of Political Psychology

- Observation—This is the first step and involves making systematic and unsystematic observations of behaviour under investigation. Here a researcher starts their observation by painstakingly watching the likely factors or variables that influence the behavior under observation.
- Formulation of hypothesis—The second step involves coming out with tentative explanations of the behaviour under consideration. This is the stage where the researcher makes predictions about the nature of relationship between or among the variables. For example, presidents who are democratic are more likely to excel than those who are autocratic.

Goal of Political Psychology

- Testing the validity of the hypothesis—The third step entails making further observations and experiment. This is to ensure the realization of the formulated or stated hypothesis.
- Reformulation of the hypothesis—On the basis of the observations made at the third step, the researchers refine and retest the explanations. This eventually results in the reformulation of the hypothesis. This might comprise exploring the limits of the phenomenon, ferreting out causes of the relationship or expanding the relationships discovered.

References

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