PSYC 447
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Session 6 – How to Use Political Psychology to foster
National Development--Part 1

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UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

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Session Overview

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

- Explain the importance of political tolerance in national development.

- Examine the extent to which attitudes determine political participation.

- Evaluate how interpersonal trust and life satisfaction promote engagement in political activities.

- Discuss how political psychology help in reducing conflicts in societies.

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Session Outline

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

- Political Tolerance.

- Attitudes and Political Participation.

- Interpersonal Trust and Life satisfaction.

- Conflict Prevention.

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Reading List

- McConochie, W. (2010). How to Promote Peace; Do's and Don'ts, based on political psychology research. Politicalpsychologyresearch.com.

- Mehryar, A.H. (1984). The role of psychology in National Development: Wishful thinking and Reality. *Int. Journal of Psychology,* 19, 159-167.

- Moghaddam, F.M., Bianchi, K., Daniels, K., Apter, M.J., & Harré, R. (1999). Psychology and National Development. *Psychology & Developing Societies,* 11, 119-141.

- Sullivan, J. L., & Transue, J. E. (1999). The psychological underpinnings of democracy: a selective review of research on political tolerance, interpersonal trust, and social capital. *Annu. Rev. Psychol,.* 50, 625-650.

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Topic One

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

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Political Tolerance

- In the early 1980s, Sullivan et al (1982) reviewed the conceptual underpinnings of research on civil liberties and public opinion. They argued that, historically, the concept of tolerance evolved from efforts to moderate the harmful and often violent effects of religious conflict.

- The idea of religious tolerance was promoted as a mechanism to allow religions to "put up with," or tolerate, other religions that they disliked or even hated vehemently. So too did the concept of political tolerance evolve as a way to live with one's ideological and political enemies.

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Political Tolerance

- Political opponents need not be eliminated physically or even politically. One need not like or support one's opponents and their ideas, but one ought at least to put up with, or tolerate, them. We were urged to learn to agree about how to disagree.

- Political tolerance therefore is a vehicle that allows the mutual coexistence of groups with diverse orientations. In order to ensure the socio-political development of our nation, we cannot discount or overlook the effects of political intolerance among the citizenry.

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Political Tolerance

- We need, therefore to find out and promote the factors or variables that will make the citizenry put up with the views of others, though they disagree with them. This will to a very large extent reduce the level of conflict, suspicion, and animosity that define political discourses in the country.

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Political Tolerance

Determinants of Political Tolerance

- Given the crucial role of tolerance in a democracy, especially emerging ones such as ours, there is the need to look at the factors that determine its realization in our body politic. An awareness of these factors will help us not only understand its effects, but most importantly devise ways of using it to the benefit of our nation.

- Several studies continue to confirm that political "elites" variously defined are more supportive of civil liberties—and even more generally tolerant—than are ordinary citizens (McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Sullivan et al 1993). Thus one obvious trigger of differing levels of tolerance and intolerance is political expertise and participation (Sullivan et al 1993). But other important factors have been identified, and are discussed below.

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Political Tolerance

Perceptions of Threat

- Many studies find that one of the factors with the strongest direct relationship to levels of political tolerance is threat perception, confirming Stouffer's work which was based on less sophisticated methods and was conducted during a time period that was unique with regard to civil liberties issues (Sullivan et al 1982, 1985; Gibson 1987; Marcus et al 1995).

- More recent work has confirmed both a chronic, dispositional role for threat perceptions, and a short term effect due to the current information environment.

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Political Tolerance

- Some people have a predisposition to be easily threatened and thus are very sensitive and responsive to potential threats in the political environment. They are less tolerant than individuals who are calmer and more easily reassured (Altemeyer, 1988, 1996). For many citizens, information that describes the nature and activities of potentially unpopular groups has a profound impact on their level of tolerance toward these groups and their ideas and activities.

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Political Tolerance

- If the information environment portrays such groups as violating normative expectations with regard to orderly behavior and proper procedures, many citizens—even those not particularly predisposed toward intolerance—will refuse to tolerate the group and its activities.

- If the information environment portrays them as behaving properly and in an orderly fashion, then far more people—often a majority—will tolerate the group and its activities, despite the group's unpopular and/or extremist image (Marcus et al., 1995).

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Political Tolerance

- This means that in order to foster development in our nation, we should ensure that all traces of threat perception by political actors are reduced to the barest minimum if not eliminated. Psychologically, when persons or members in a group see their opponents as friendly, and not a danger to their survival, they are more likely to deal with them in ways that promote healthy coexistence.

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Political Tolerance

Internalization of Democratic Values

- Most citizens expressed a strong belief in democratic values but coupled that belief with an unwillingness to apply these values to groups and ideologies they found most objectionable. Based on this observation, it would be easy and even logical to conclude that the ideas and ideals of democracy operate at a level disconnected from actual practices. In other words, ideas did not guide behavior in this very important instance.

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Political Tolerance

- Several studies demonstrate that the internalization of democratic norms can make a considerable difference in determining how tolerant an individual will be when their tolerance is sorely tested (Sullivan et al., 1982; Gibson & Bingham, 1983; McClosky & Brill, 1983; Gibson, 1987, 1992; Marcus et al., 1995). The more completely an individual has internalized and believes strongly in democratic norms, the more likely the individual will tolerate groups and ideas that he or she finds to be obnoxious.

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Political Tolerance

- This therefore underscores the need for our democratic institutions to create the platform or avenue for the citizenry to appreciate, accept, and practice the core values that underpin democratic governance.

- When the citizenry understands the significance and implications of these values, they are more likely to practice them than when they exist as abstract concepts. For example, why is freedom of speech important, why do we have to respect others' political beliefs, and so on?

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Political Tolerance

Personality

- In addition to threat perceptions and democratic norms, one additional potent set of variables that explains citizens' beliefs in democratic values and their levels of applied political tolerance is personality. In his mid-1950s study, Stouffer (1955) found that certain types of individuals—those who believed in stern child-rearing techniques and those who tended to be pessimistic—were much less tolerant of ideological nonconformity than were others, whose child-rearing views were more permissive and who were very optimistic. Gibson (1987) also found that measures of dogmatism and trust predicted levels of political tolerance.

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Political Tolerance

- Finally, Marcus et al (1995) used Costa and McCrae's (1985, 1992) measures and found that neuroticism, extroversion, and openness to experience all predict levels of political tolerance fairly accurately. Individuals higher on neuroticism and extroversion are less tolerant, while those high on openness to experience are more tolerant.

- Openness to experience appears to be the most powerful predictor (Golebiowska, 1996)). Individuals high in neuroticism are most responsive, apparently because of their high level of anxiety, which makes them more sensitive and responsive to perceptions of threat (Marcus et al 1995, p.168–172).

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Sample Questions

- How can psychology be used to promote political tolerance in the country?

- To what extent can attitude influence political participation in the country?

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Topic Two

ATTITUDES AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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Attitudes and Political Participation

- In addition to the importance of citizens tolerating the efforts of opponents to influence the political system, democracies also need relatively high levels of political participation by citizens. For this reason, the comparative study of democracy has been as concerned with mass participation as with tolerance. To promote participation in democratic governance, there is the need to consider the attitudes of the citizenry. The attitude of the citizenry will more or less depend on their perception of certain indicators in the country

Attitudes and Political Participation

- These indicators could include the level of interpersonal trust, the level of pride they have in their political institutions, widespread feelings of competence. The extent to which the citizenry identifies themselves with these indicators, the more likely they would be engaged in the political activities of the nation. For example, most people are more likely to partake in the political activities of a nation if they view the institutions to be credible and fair.

Attitudes and Political Participation

- Individuals derive some form of satisfaction when they are allowed to partake in activities that concern and affect them. Their being part of the "process" provides them an attitude of commitment and dedication to it. Because their views are sought on the issue under consideration, they are more likely to give their all.

- They are more likely to be supporters than saboteurs in achieving a collective goal. When our political system allows majority of the population from all political circles a stake in the political process, it will provide the platform that exhumes the energies of all regardless of one's political orientation.

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Attitudes and Political Participation

- As a result of the psychological implication of one's views to be accepted in a group, our governments must open their doors to majority of the populace, especially those who differ on ideological lines. This approach has the faculty of fostering the socio-economic development of the nation. Political participation is therefore very important, not for a few; but the majority.

Topic Three

INTERPERSONAL TRUST AND LIFE SATISFACTION

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Interpersonal Trust and Life Satisfaction

- Interpersonal trust and subjective well-being (whether people are satisfied with their lives in general) significantly affect the duration and level of democracy. Interpersonal trust is important because it lends credibility to the concept of a loyal opposition.

- When people do not trust their fellow citizens, elections and transitions of power appear to be far more dangerous. Citizens may fear that losing an election will mean losing all access to political power.

Interpersonal Trust and Life Satisfaction

- Without trust, it is easy to imagine that one's opponents would not cede power after losing an election and might even resort to force to stay in power. When one believes that this is the political situation, democratic compromise is a dangerous option.

- Conversely, when people trust their fellow citizens in general, the stakes do not seem to be so high. Losing an election one year does not mean the end of access to political power. Citizens with higher interpersonal trust have reason to believe that their side may be the victor in a later election.

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Classroom Applications of Vygotsky's Theory

- Topic four

CONFLICT PREVENTION

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Conflict Prevention

- The application of psychology for understanding conflict and extreme acts of violence can be understood in both individual and group terms. Political conflict is often a consequence of ethnic disparity and "ethnocentrism" Sumner (1906). On an individual level participators in situations of conflict can either be perpetrators, bystanders or altruists. The behavior of perpetrators is often explained through the authoritarian personality type. Individual differences in levels of empathy have been used to explain whether an individual chooses to stand up to authority or ignore a conflict.

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Conflict Prevention

- In our attempts to foster development in the country by preventing conflict, our leaders—both political and circular have to promote diversity and peaceful coexistence. This could be done by eschewing animosity and hatred towards out-group members, marginalizing out-group members and minority tribes in terms of opportunities available in the country.

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