

POLS 318: Theories of IR  
Lecture 10 (02.22.2021):  
Political Psychology and IR

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Spring 2021

# Overview

- 1 Quick review
- 2 Introduction
- 3 Prospect Theory
- 4 Beyond Prospect theory
- 5 Extra Material

# Review

## WHAT WE COVERED LAST MEETING?

- Rational choice: a general theory of behavior.
- Is war a rational choice?
- The bargaining range and peaceful settlements.
- Rationalist explanation: private information.
- Rationalist explanation: commitment.
- Extended nuclear deterrence as a commitment problem.
- Public defense pact or deploy troops?

Questions?? Email me!

# The Individual

## BACKGROUND

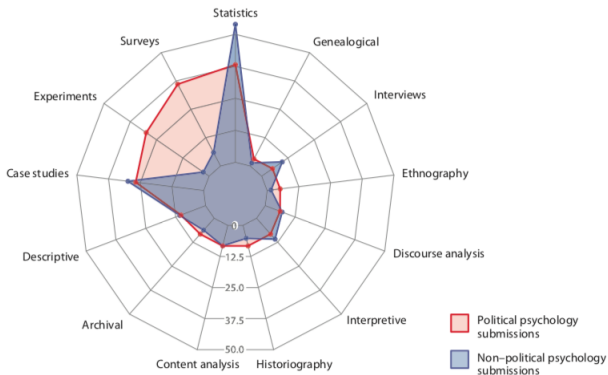
- Why do we care?
- Explain variations under similar structural conditions.

## Research Growth, Why?

- ① Global events and rational choice (9.11 attacks, Iraq war).
- ② Interest in micro-level assumptions and mechanisms.
- ③ Rationality and psychology - complements, not rivals.

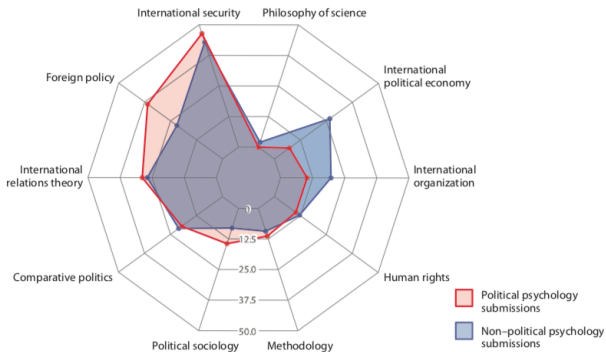
# Political Psychology Research

- Diverse methodologies - measuring individual choices.



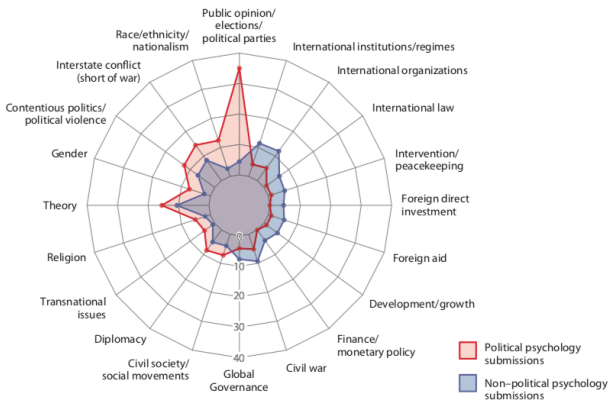
# Political Psychology Research

- Issues: Policymaking and IR theory.

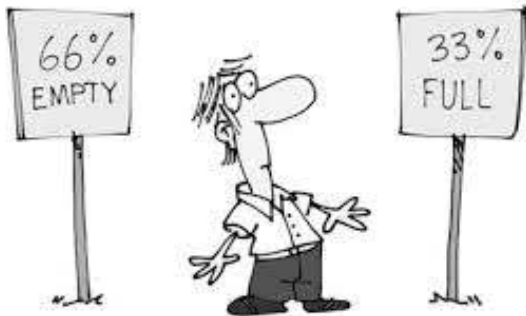


# Political Psychology Research

- Issue area: Public opinion and political violence.



# Prospect Theory



- Decision-making in the face of uncertainty and risk.
- Deviations from rational choice.



# Prospect Theory

## Main Elements

- Reference dependence.
- Gain and losses.
- Loss aversion.
- Status-quo bias.
- Sunk costs

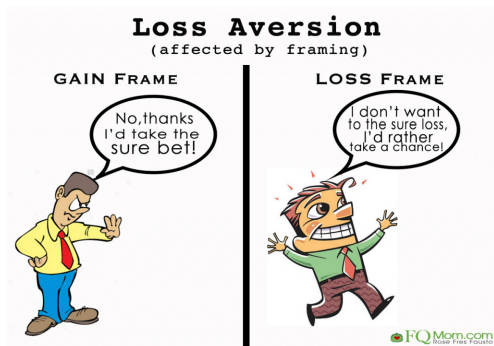
## Political Choices

- Persist in failing policies. [▶ Illustration](#)
- Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

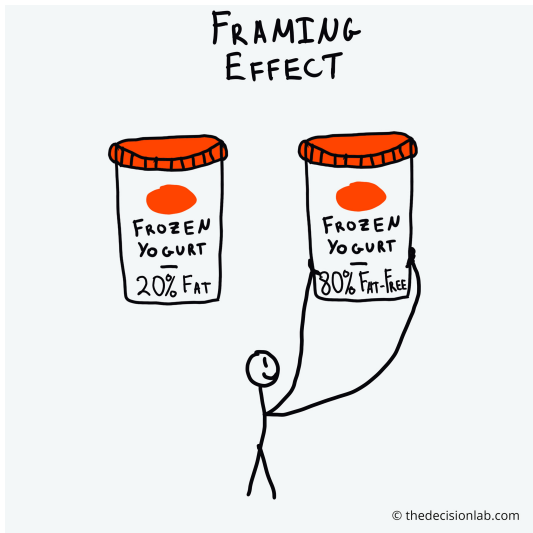
# Prospect Theory

## Risk Preferences

- Reference → the status-quo.
- Gain → *risk aversion*
- Loss → *risky action* ▶ Egypt



# Prospect Theory



# Prospect Theory

## Framing

### Asian Disease Problem

Imagine that the US is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the consequences of the programs are as follows.

**Program A:** If Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved.

**Program B:** If Program B is adopted, there is  $1/3$  probability that 600 people will be saved, and  $2/3$  probability that no people will be saved.

*Which of the two programs would you favor?*

**Program A:** If Program A is adopted, 400 people will die.

**Program B:** If Program B is adopted, there is  $1/3$  probability that  $1/3$  probability that nobody will die, and  $2/3$  probability that 600 people will die.

*Which of the two programs would you favor?*

# Political Psychology

## Emotions

- Shift from cold → hot cognition.
- Emotional reactions and political choices.
- Discrete (negative) emotions: anger, anxiety, fear.

## Emotions in IR

- Anger → aggression → drones use.
- Terrorism, emotions and policy preferences.
- The civil liberties - security dilemma.
- Bio-chemistry measures of emotions.

# Political Psychology

## Beliefs - Misperceptions

- Perception of environment shapes beliefs.
- Misperception: heuristics, analogies, cognitive dissonance.
- Statistical inferences.

## The "Availability" Heuristic

- Dramatic events → easier to remember.
- Ignore base rates of rare events.
- How likely am I to be a terrorism victim?

# Political Psychology

## Experts predictions

*"If there's a 1 percent chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al-Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty" (VP Cheney, 2001)*

- Experts vs. novices.
- Overestimation of threats.
- Misperceptions: capabilities, overconfidence.

# Political Psychology

## Individual - Society

- Individual preference  $\neq$  societal preferences.
- Non egoistic behavior.
- Social concerns  $\rightarrow$  deviate from rational self-interest.
- Social identity - national attachment.
- Economic policy preferences  $\rightarrow$  sociotropic views.
- Knowledge and education.

▶ Dictator



# Political Psychology

## Challenges & Limitations

- ① Aggregation problem:
  - Individual to state behavior?
  - Solution - unitary actor assumption.
  - Citizens views and public policy.
- ② External Validity:
  - Limited, convenient samples.
  - Public to elite decision-makers?
  - Requires clear theory, random assignment.
  - Relevant to "any decision-maker".

# New areas of research

## Resolve, Conflict and individual preferences

- Time preferences and resolve in conflict.
- Resolve and patient individuals.
- Risk preferences and resolve.

# New areas of research

## Emerging fields of research

- **(1) First image reversed.**
- Conflict exposure and individual preferences.
- Violence and political behavior (voting).
- **(2) Evolutionary approaches:** genetics in IR.
- Evolutionary biology → reputation, uncertainty.
- **(3) Process analysis:** not a simple, rational process.
- Select alternative: order, size, complexity.
- Leads to sub-optimal choices.

# New areas of research

## Emerging fields of research

- **(4) Political Economy:** ethnocentric and out-group views.
- Trade and immigration policy preferences.
- **(5) Experience:** political, diplomatic, military.
- More experience → strategic and rational reasoning.
- FP experience, small-group decision structure and Iraq wars.
- Bush (1991) vs. Bush (2003).

## Recommended readings

More studies on Political Psychology in IR:

- 1 Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman. (1974). "Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases." *Science* 185, 4157, 1124-1131.
- 2 Fisk, Kerstin, Jennifer L. Merolla, and Jennifer M. Ramos. "Emotions, terrorist threat, and drones: anger drives support for drone strikes." *Journal of conflict resolution* 63, 4 (2019): 976-1000.
- 3 Joshua D. Kertzer and Brian C. Rathbun. (2015). "Fair is Fair: Social Preferences and Reciprocity in International Politics", *World Politics* 67, 4, pp. 613-655.

# Loss Aversion



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# Risk taking and War



# Social preferences

