The Psychology of Politics: Self, Environment and Wild Cards

Ofer Feldman

Abstract

This paper presents, in a highly selected manner, the main features of political psychology as a field of inquiry of individuals' and groups' behavior and attitudes in the public sphere. The paper focuses on the assumptions that (1) people constantly search for and process information about the world around them, make sense of other people and events, relate them to their thoughts and intentions, and make decisions on how to act politically; (2) Decisions related to people's participation in politics are affected by internal (e.g., personality) as well as external (e.g., cultural customs, social norms, communication processes) factors; and (3) Decisions are affected by unconscious, emotional processes, so behavior does not always follow a rational, predictable course. The paper details studies done in Asian countries to illustrate the three assumptions, calling for additional research to further increase our knowledge on this approach that combines psychological perspectives to examine political behavior in cross-national, cross-cultural comparative contexts.

Keywords: Asia, psychology, political behavior, personality, socialization, irrational behavior

Introduction

This article addresses basic approaches of political psychology as a field of research. It explains three aspects at the core of an approach that combines psychological perspectives to examine political behavior (draws on Feldman, 2006; Zmerli & Feldman, 2015): (1) the individual as the object of analysis; (2) inter-dependency between individuals and their environment in the context of social behavior; and (3) non-rational facets of behavior. It draws on studies done in Asian countries to illustrate these various aspects.

To the degree that universal theories of political psychology and behavior are desirable (and feasible), scholarly work done in Asian countries has an important role to play. Such work often indicates that Western models need to be reworked through further investigation, that terms need to be redefined and conceptual bases re-configured, or that different research methods must be used in order to test the validity and reliability of universal hypotheses (e.g. Ng, 2010; Feldman, 2000). It is my intention and hope that this paper will encourage students of political science, psychology, social psychology and communication studies to challenge these assumptions while exploring the manifold sub-areas of political psychology research in various Asian societies.

Psychology and the Study of Politics

Let us first note the obvious: that the public sphere includes active human actors. People willingly search out and process information; they evaluate it, select knowledge that suits them and form values and principles related to social issues and the workings of the polity. People make inferences and judgments based on their ideas of the public good and of justice, argue about essential issues and strive to persuade others of the rightness of their beliefs. People serve in a variety of roles and functions: citizens cast votes for candidates to represent them in legislative processes and join groups to accomplish goals that they hope will improve their lifestyle. Some get involved in violent, aggressive movements. Some seek political office, make decisions for their communities, declare wars, negotiate with foes, and facilitate peace.

Traditional explanations of human political activity often fail to adequately explain some of the most important political actions and decisions people take. In order to do so, analyses of political processes and systems must consider the psychology of the people involved, both as individuals and as participants in groups. Generally speaking, psychology provides knowledge that helps us understand human behavior. Using psychological approaches and terminology to analyze behavior in the public sphere offers perspectives and a complex basis that are necessary for understanding public sphere activities and the bidirectional relationship between individual human beings and politics.

A psychological approach to politics facilitates understanding of the relationships between perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes (the cognitive system), affections and emotions (the affective system), personality, group membership, and the political actions that people take. This approach helps us understand how people process information, adopt political values and beliefs, and make sense of themselves and others in the context of political issues, choices, and conflicts. Furthermore, it helps us explore people's incentives for voting or running for office, decision-making by elites, the emergence of ethnic violence, wars, terrorism and genocide, and the nature, functions and roles of political leadership and public opinion in specific political cultures.

All in all, applying psychological concepts and theories to the examination of political processes and activities makes it easier to identify patterns of thinking, feeling, and judgment among individuals and in society, and to examine the impact of these patterns on the formation, intensity, and implementation of political preferences, interests, and choices. This approach focuses on both examination and explanation of how particular political behaviors evolve (i.e., on *processes* such as voting decisions, follower mobilization, information processing, policy adaptation, coalition formation, consensus building and conflict avoidance or resolution) and on the resulting behaviors (*products or outcomes*). It is therefore not surprising to see, as is shown below, that a growing number of researchers have allotted considerable attention in recent years to psychological considerations that can help explain political behaviors of individuals and groups.

1. The Individual's Psyche and Activities

To better understand the connections between human beings and political behavior, including people's functioning in political life, we have to focus on the individual as the unit of observation and analysis. The determinantes and consequences of the individual's political behavior are of critical importance. How and why do individuals (e.g., voters, politicians, terrorists) think, feel, and act politically; how do they perceive, interpret, define, and act within their political environments?

Individuals play active roles in politics, for example by mobilizing support for their political ideas (e.g. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in Japan; Inoguchi,

2009), voting in diverse political regimes (e.g. Taiwan, Mongolia, Philippines, Cambodia, and Vietnam, Chang & Tang, 2013), participating in terrorist activities (e.g. in South-East Asia;Chalk, 1998), negotiating and resolving disagreements (in the Philippines, Cambodia, and East Timor; Montiel, 2006),and creating social and environmental movements to achieve particular goals (e.g. in India, Taiwan, Japan, and Thailand; Kalland &Persoon, 1998).

In politics, as in other social activities, people often act as part of a group (e.g. political party, government, rebel body), and their behavior as part of a group may differ from their behavior when they are alone. People often seek to understand the decisions of these groups, but it is individuals (e.g. leaders, committed participants, attentive citizens) who drive decision-making even within groups. Individuals identify and frame the problems faced by the entities to which they belong, they seek positions of influence, select representatives and leaders, and construct ideologies. It is individuals who dispute, make decisions, and take risks when negotiating with rivals or enemies.

Individuals are driven by internal components including personality, cognition, attitudes, beliefs, affect and motivation, and by self- and social identity. They assess their environment and the people within it, and decide what political actions to take based on their assessments.

Personality: At the heart of an individual's internal components is the personality, the engine of political thinking and feeling. Personality is affected and shaped by life experiences, including early interactions with others in the family. Personality influences our internal systems, including cognitive processes, and affects behavior and behavioral tendencies on an ongoing, constant basis, but in an unconscious manner so that people rarely consider the impact that their personality has on their political preferences.

Each individual's personality is unique, although certain personality traits appear in a large number of people. For example, while many people share traits such as open-mindedness or honesty, the precise combination of traits differs. People also differ in the ways they process information, draw inferences, and reach decisions.

Much of the discussion of personality in politics concerns traits that are especially important in shaping political behavior, such as traits that are common to habitual voters, traits that lead people to join a terrorist groups, or traits displayed by rigid and intolerant members of political groups when dealing with a new issue on the public agenda. Attention has been focused on the personality makeup of decision-makers, especially political leaders, and the impact of particular combinations of traits on their leadership styles and performance.

Certain traits--including self-esteem, dogmatism, self-complexity, desire for achievement and power--along with childhood experiences, were identified as affecting political leaders' working styles, attitudes toward members of other political groups and the electorate, decision-making processes in general and foreign policy decision-making in particular. Other traits were associated with the interpretation of political events, the management of international crises and negotiation styles (Feldman, 1999; Feldman & Valenty, 2001). In Indonesia, for example, personal traits of Presidents Sukarno and Soeharto were found to affect their policies and politics. In the case of the former, a feeling of desolation as a core personal preoccupation appears to have led to an obsession with dominance. The latter valued the composure he had acquired through the hardships of his childhood, and this affected his political style, which was based on fear and favor. Likewise, the "authoritarian populist" political style of another Indonesian president, Megawati, is said to have had its roots in family difficulties and complications that she experienced during childhood, and in her interactions with her father (McIntyre, 2005).

The Cognitive System: The second most important internal component guiding individuals' behavior is cognition. In psychology, cognition is central to understanding how people process information and understand the world around them. Cognition is "a collective term for the psychological process involved in the acquisition, organization, and the use of knowledge" (Bullock & Stallybrass, 1977). A cognitive approach explains human behavior by focusing on mental processes and structures. It assumes that people perceive their environment, evaluate, organize, and impose meaning on these perceptions, form beliefs and attitudes about related matters, people, or events, and act according to these perceptions and interpretations.

Individuals constantly receive an enormous amount of information about society, politics, and the world. Sometimes people need to make sense of information, understand, and interpret it although it is dauntingly complex or ambiguous; for example, this might apply to information about a new tax system or international conflicts that affect them. Individuals need to first process incoming information, simplify and evaluate it, and then decide what information is important and relevant and what information can be ignored. Cognitive processes, including knowledge, perception, attention, memory, and thoughts, help people process and filter information, including in the assessment and evaluation of people around them. For example, cognitive processes play a role in the search for causes of others' behavior, involving the attribution of others' behavior to internal situations--like personality--or to external forces--circumstances beyond their control (*Attribution Theory*). Cognitive processes enable individuals to keep their environment, the people in it, and their feelings about it in a coherent and consistent manner (*Balance Theory*). And cognitive processes help people handle inconsistencies between their attitudes and behavior by processing information in ways that reduce inconsistency or by reestablishing consistency in their cognitive system by changing whatever is easiest to change (*Cognitive Dissonance Theory*).

Another way that cognitive processes help people process information efficiently and understand and organize their social and political environments--including people and events--is by facilitating the formation and use of social categories, i.e. the classification of persons and situations into familiar categories. This includes categorizing people into ethnic groups (e.g. Irish Canadians, French Mexicans, *Ainu*), national groups (Malaysians, Indians, Chinese), and religious groups (Christians, Buddhists, Jews). Stereotypes are a particular type of social cognitive category. Stereotypes are beliefs about the attributes of people in particular groups or social categories. In Japan there is a genre of writings on Japanese society called *nihonjinron* (literally "discussions about the Japanese" or "theorizing about the Japanese") that focuses on particular features believed to contribute to the "uniqueness" of Japanese culture, society, and national character. *Nihonjinron*tries to demonstrate that the Japanese are fundamentally different from other groups; that Japanese culture and behavior are exotic and removed from the experience of other societies. It seeks to explain many facets of Japanese society--such as everyday customs and political behavior including voting, political interest and efficacy, and leadership styles, in terms of values considered to be peculiar to the Japanese (Feldman, 2000). National stereotypes provide a useful socio-psychological perspective from which to consider relations between national groups. For example, auto- and hetero-stereotypes of Japan and China were examined to elucidate Sino-Japan relations: Chinese youngsters who regarded past Sino-Japanese conflicts as more important tended to have a more negative auto-stereotype; but Japanese who did so held a somewhat more positive auto-stereotype. Japanese who linked Japan to the Pacific Rim more strongly held more positive

stereotypes of themselves and Chinese, such linkage did not correlate to similar beliefs or stereotypes among the Chinese (Kashima et al, 2003).

Although the word "stereotype" is generally perceived as having negative connotations, stereotyping does not necessarily lead to discrimination, defined as disadvantageous treatment or consideration of an individual based on actual or perceived membership in a certain group or category. Discrimination may be based on age, gender, employment, nationality, language, race, ethnicity, religion, or other factors. Examples include anti-Chinese sentiment in Canada, hate speech in Japan, xenophobic feelings against Kurds, Armenians, and Jews in Turkey, anti-Semitism in Norway, France, and Sweden, and female feticide in India. Another examples are the discriminatory treatment of the Pakistani minority in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) (Crabtree & Wong, 2013) and of AIDS patients or HIV-positive people in India, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines (Paxton et. al., 2005).

Attitudes and Beliefs: Attitudes and beliefs are two more aspects of the cognitive system that can affect individuals' behavior. An attitude can be thought of as a set of thoughts containing a cognitive component (i.e. knowledge) and an emotional response to it (like, dislike etc.). Many important political attitudes are acquired through socialization processes. An individual's attitudes change with the acquisition of new information, through persuasion, exposure to the news media, changes in the political and economic context, and life transitions. On the other hand, socialization, personality, and socio-demographic variables support attitude stability over time.

Attitudes are a focus of attention when we look at voting decisions, political socialization, political culture and ideology, and media effects. For example, in mainland China during the 1990s, the news media negatively affected people's attitudes toward political institutions in general and led people to distrust the government. In other words, the ruling regime's propaganda failed to nurture supportive sentiment in Chinese society in the post-Tiananmen era (Chen & Shi, 2001). Attitudes can include etic aspects that are common to different nationalities, and those that are emic, or indigenous to a particular group of people. In Japan, for example, etic factors include patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism associated with liberal ideology, a high level of media exposure, and knowledge of international affairs, whereas a conservative commitment to the Japanese national heritage appears to be an emic component of Japanese national identity (Karasawa, 2002).

Beliefs are associations that people create regarding an object and its attributions. Beliefs may concern right versus wrong or a sense of an individual's personal identity. A person's unique experiences lead to the formation and adoption of beliefs that in essence constitute the set of an individual's representations of the world. These beliefs, in turn, serve as determinative factors in further perceptions, interpretations, and evaluations of incoming information. Beliefs are related to such political notions as ideology, values, tolerance, and principles. Individuals vary widely in the political views that they endorse. They also differ in their styles of thinking about political issues. Some people rely on a few broad principles or generalizations in interpreting events, reject inconsistent evidence, and have little tolerance for alternative viewpoints. Others interpret events in a more flexible, multidimensional way, and attempt to develop perspectives and integrate a wide range of information and values specific to the problem at hand. In either case, beliefs and attitudes play important roles that affect how individuals perceive and interpret their environment. This is especially true regarding stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination against others perceived as being different.

The Affective System: Whereas cognitive processes, driven by the need to simplify contradictory and complex environments, are at the focus of examination

of the relationships between people and politics, affective forces, motivations, and emotions also play important roles. Affect is viewed as "a generic term for a whole range of preferences, evaluations, moods and emotions" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991: 410). Affect can be positive or negative, i.e. it includes preferences and evaluations that may be pleasant or unpleasant. Motivation refers to internal desires, needs, concerns, and goals (Pittman, 1998). Emotion is a "complex assortment of affects, beyond merely good feelings or bad to include delight, serenity, anger, sadness, fear and more" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991: 411). The emotional systems of the human brain, along with other systems that do not present in consciousness, play crucial roles in initiating and affecting all aspects of behavior including political behavior (Marcus, 2013, Ch. 5).

Emotions and motivation are always at work. Political attitudes, political values, and identities have emotional components, and people express emotions including fear, anxiety, anger, love, guilt, shame, sympathy, pity, and jealousy in response to political principles and ideas, political issues, political actors, and events. Emotions matter in politics. Driven by anger and frustration, an Israeli assassinated his country's prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, in 1995; motivated by anxiety and disappointment, a million Egyptians assembled in *Tahrir Square* in 2013 and toppled a repressive regime. Charismatic leaders, including the leader of the Indian independence movement in British-ruled India, Mahatma Gandhi, Indonesian president Sukarno, and president Barack Obama of the U.S., use emotional words, metaphors, symbols, and slogans to motivate followers. Emotion affects their success at establishing trust, forging compromises and resolving conflicts between ethnic groups and countries. Emotions can inspire people to help others even at the risk of their own lives.

Emotions often influence feelings and beliefs about specific policy issues. Citizens who feel angry are more likely to support risky and confrontational policies than those who feel anxious or fearful, and they are also less willing to compromise on policy issues. After the September 11th terrorist attacks, American citizens primed with anger in response to the attacks perceived a lower risk of being hurt in the future, whether in a terrorist attack or other danger such as being a victim of a violent crime, compared to citizens primed with fear. Anger-primed study participants were also less likely to endorse precautionary actions like screening mail for suspicious materials than were fear-primed participants (Lerner et al., 2003; MacKuen et al., 2010).

Affect, emotions, and their intensity influence individuals' perceptions of and behavior toward people both within their own group and outside of it. Positive, favorable feelings are most often associated with in-groups(groups one belongs to). These include emotions that are important in politics such as happiness, respect, and pride in the achievements of one's group, community, or country. In contrast, negative emotions like anger, frustration, and hostility are most closely associated with out-groups (groups one does not belong to) and can lead individuals to engage in violent activities or cause normally rational individuals to behave irrationally--sometimes to dehumanize others or incite mass violence. Fear, stress, and anxiety are examples of emotions that affect ethnic violence. Fear or anxiety in response to perceived threats to an individual's or group's identity may trigger dehumanization of the enemy or resurrection of historical myths in order to justify violence against the other.

Emotions also affect voting behavior. Emotions influence what information individuals attend to, acquire, and use as a basis for their candidate evaluations. Fear and anxiety, for example, serve to direct individuals' attention to threats and increase careful processing of information in an attempt to manage or resolve a threatening situation. Fear and anxiety are associated with increased attention to political information and increased learning (Brader,

Marcus & Miller, 2011).

Lastly, emotions and motivations interact with cognitive mental processes in shaping people's political judgments, beliefs and actions. Cognitive phenomena, such as information processing, stereotypes, prejudicial or discriminatory thinking and intolerance, also involve affect and emotion. For example, individuals become much more politically involved in issues that are particularly relevant to them; the more imminent the problem is to them, the more actively they will search for related information and join other people in entities dedicated to addressing the topic (Marcus & MacKuen, 1993).

Social Identity: Finally, behavior is also affected by social identity, which has both cognitive and emotional associations. Social identity relates to how people identify themselves in relation to others, i.e. how they group together with others on the basis of shared features. People may identify themselves according to ethnicity, nationality, religion, social class, political affiliation, gender, vocation, etc. Identity can be flexible in the sense that people may change their vocation, nationality (and recently even gender), and thus change their social identity. Social identity has many implications, both for persons who claim a particular identity and for others who view them as members of a particular category. For example, ethnic identity is stronger than national identity in Malaysia, particularly among Malays in Malaysia. National identity is strongest among Chinese in Malaysia, followed by Chinese in Singapore. Compared to Singaporeans, Malaysians attach more importance to ethnicity than to national identity (Liu et al., 2002). Compared to Chinese and Indian citizens in Malaysia, members of the dominant Malay group tended to exhibit a higher in-group indispensability, more strongly endorsed an inclusive national representation, harbored stronger ethnic and national identifications, and made stronger associations between both identifications (Verkuyten & Khan, 2012). And in China, the ethical and relational origins of traditional Chinese social identity dictate the way Chinese people manage cultural diversity and international relations today (Liu, Li & Yue, 2010).

Social identity can provide an individual with a means of self-definition that promotes self-esteem, and with a framework for socializing and interacting with others who share his or her values and goals. By providing reference group orientation and shared activities, social identity helps people define themselves in contrast to others who belong to different groups, and position themselves within a larger community. In the Middle East, for example, an individual might identify with Arabs or Israeli Jews; in Northern Ireland with Catholics or Protestants; and in the former Yugoslavia, with Serbs, Croatians, or Bosnians. Gender is also an important aspect of social identity (Eagly et al., 2012).

Identification with any of the ethnic groups mentioned above is generally associated with a strong affective element that underlies cognitive aspects such as personality traits, social and political attitudes, and memories connected to identity-related events.

Group identification has important motivational consequences, and the identifications that one is assigned or chooses lead to related actions in a variety of domains, from volunteering for an organization to participating in social or political protests, running for political office or supporting candidates for election. Not surprisingly, people who more strongly identify with a particular group are more likely to carry out actions that support that group.

Social identity influences both how people view themselves and how other people treat them, and predisposes people to certain behaviors such as harboring stereotypes or acting in discriminatory or ethnocentric ways.

2. Individuals and the Environment: Beyond Stimulus-Response Models

Clearly, individuals do not function independently of the environment in which they live. There is a total inter-dependency between individuals and their surroundings in the context of social behavior. Key aspects mentioned especially often by social psychologists as relevant in this sense include social perceptions, social cognition, social motivation, interpersonal relations, group behavior, and social influence. All these distinguish the attitudes and behavior of individuals as they are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence and behaviors of groups and significant others--socialization agents including parents and teachers, and opinion leaders and political leaders--in various domains, situations, and settings, including the political context.

Among these domains are the social structure, political system or culture in which one lives; the practices, values, preferences, and aspirations that are at the heart of this social system; socialization processes; the structure and roles played by formal and informal social units or groups that are politically relevant to the individual, including groups that people identify as in-groupsand out-groups;and particularly the news media. As people are limited in the time and attention they can devote to politics, they rely upon the media to identify issues that are important to them (*Agenda Setting function*) and furthermore to identify which components of these issues must be attended to, ultimately affecting citizens' evaluations of public figures and parties (*MediaPriming role*). By focusing on specific elements, values, or facts related to a given issue, the media defines the elements that receive public attention, and the resulting debate revolves around the particular definitions, interpretations, and evaluations the media promotes for these elements rather than other issues (*Framing Effect*).

Despite the powerful influence exerted by the environment, it is rarely possible to be satisfied with simple stimulus-response models that see human behavior in terms of learned responses to a set of stimuli that exist in the environment (e.g. social structure, culture, other people, the media) and ignore how people create their own realities. Instead, there is a growing recognition that the power of each situation and context-specific factors play a crucial role in shaping political behavior and decisions. This follows Lewin's (1936) observation that each behavior is determined by the total situation (referred to as *'life space'* organized by interdependent forces) in which it occurs. Lewin (1936:216) argued that, "Every psychological event depends upon the state of the person and at the same time the state of the environment, although their relative importance is different in different cases." In Lewin's (1936: 216) classic formulation, the life space was defined as the "totality of facts which determine the behavior (B) of an individual at a certain moment. The life space (L) represents the totality of possible events. The life space includes the person (P) and the environment (E). B = f (L) = f (P, E)". This formula binds the person and the environment together; because of the principle of interdependence, neither person nor environment is independent.

Thus, it is not only the social (and political) situation but also the individual's interaction with the environment that influence the outcome of behavior. Any assessment of or attempt to understand a particular human behavior requires knowledge of people at specific times and in specific situations. How individuals and groups behave under certain circumstances--including culture, societal structure, stressful times etc.--depends on how they perceive, interpret, and evaluate things as they are affected by these circumstances. Political leaders who share common goals but find themselves in different societal or cultural circumstances will not necessarily respond in the same manner even if they face identical dilemmas.

Because different individuals perceive and evaluate the same situation in different ways and exhibit different behaviors in response to their circumstances, disregarding an individual's environmental features at any given time will result in imperfect analysis of that individual's behavior. Hence, decision makers in one country must assume that even if their counterparts in another country pursue the same objectives, they may still have to follow different values and practices as they function in different political settings. In other words, changes in the environment may affect people in different ways and result in different behavior.

Methodologically speaking, this of course makes it difficult to formulate rules predicting how individuals will act as situations vary, and limits the ability to predict general political behavior and attitudes.

3. Irrational Behavior: Unconscious Biases and Self-Interest

A third approach that combines various psychological aspects in the examination of political behavior differs from the rational choice or interest-based theory of political action. It challenges the traditional notion that, as actors in politics, individuals' behavior is directed toward maximizing a utility or value as part of a rational search for self-interest. In fact, this approach tries to explain behavior that is not overtly instrumental or materially self-interested.

Many share the belief that human beings' behavior (their own and others) is generally rational and predictable. The expectation that behavior will be rational is based on two essential requirements that people have: a need to understand their environment and a need to predict the likely outcomes of their own and others' behavior. To the extent that behavior is perceived as rational, these two needs are more easily met.

In politics, rational choice claims that political actors (e.g. politicians, government officials, and voters), are motivated by rational calculations of their personal utility (self-interest) identified in terms of a single, uniform variable (e.g. Chang &Tang, 2013). 'Utility' for politicians is defined in terms of maximizing votes in order to get elected or re-elected, and rising in the ranks of their political party and career track. The suggestion that politicians are significantly concerned with the common good, 'public service', the 'public interest', or that they are guided by fundamental ethical precepts (including principles, beliefs, and ideology), is generally dismissed.

However, studies by psychologists suggest that much of human behavior is not rational. People in general are motivated to act in line with their own personality characteristics, values, beliefs, and associations with groups. They process information imperfectly as they struggle hard to understand the complex world in which they live. When deciding how to act, people employ logical but often incorrect perceptions of their environment. Emotional aspects also affect their interactions in the social world. Likewise, as mentioned in the first section, different individuals may reason differently under the same conditions. In contrast to the rational choice theory that assumes that every individual has the same conception of the common "good," the psychological approach to political behavior sees individuals as having different understandings and different perceptions of the value of goals to be attained.

Political actors often do things that are seemingly contrary to their own interests, values, and beliefs. In some cases they perpetrate dehumanizing, brutal and indiscriminate violence involving large numbers of civilian casualties in diverse locations such as Algeria, Bosnia, Rwanda, Libya, Egypt, or Syria. Individuals participate in political activities even when they have little hope of achieving a desired outcome: for instance, Japanese continue decade after decade to hold demonstrations for the relocation of American bases from Okinawa.

A psychological approach to political behavior may seek to explain behavior that seems irrational at first glance. For example, it is commonly believed that people vote in accordance with self-interest. As rational theorists see things, voters calmly consider new information based on prior preferences: when they receive negative information they lower their estimation, and upon receipt of positive information they raise their evaluations (Gerber & Green, 1999). According to the psychological view, the process of updating existing evaluations may be subject to a variety of unconscious biases designed to support prior preferences, rather than to a rational updating based solely on facts. For people who are motivated by such biases, candidate evaluation may be more about reinforcing existing emotions toward candidates than adjusting them in the face of new information (Lodge & Taber, 2013).

Political leaders are sometimes motivated to act on principle rather than self-interest, and to make decisions that the psychological approach will explain in terms of both personal self-interest and consideration of the collective good (which violates the self-interest requirement). An example of 'irrational' behavior not based on unconsciousness is Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's single-minded devotion to pushing an unpopular consumption tax hike (from 5% to 10%) in 2012. Noda apparently had multiple motivations, contradicting the 'single uniform variable' requirement of the rational choice: he was convinced that raising the tax was the right thing to do for Japan's economy, he wanted to demonstrate strong and decisive policy leadership and he wanted to go down in history as the politician who had the guts to raise this tax.

As such, this approach makes it possible to address questions that the rational choice theory leaves unanswered, including those related to consistent biases in reasoning or to less predictable emotional effects on behavior. The chief weakness of this approach, especially in contrast to the rational choice theory, is that it requires detailed information--which is often difficult to acquire--about how individuals reach decisions, execute them, and react to the attitudes and behavior of others.

Conclusions

The psychological approach toward examining and explaining behavior of individuals and groups in the public sphere rests on the following assumptions: (1) Individuals constantly search for and process information about the world, make sense of significant others and events, relate them to their ideas and intentions, and make decisions on how to act politically. (2) Decisions related to an individual's involvement in politics are affected by internal components of the psyche (personality, beliefs, identity) as well as interactions between these components and the individual's circumstances, i.e. the milieu in which an individual lives and experiences--family encounters, social norms, morals, events, communication processes, cultural customs, etc. (3) Decisions are affected by unconscious, emotional processes, so behavior does not always follow a rational, predictable course.

Since individuals may apply diverse aspects of their distinct personality to a particular activity, researchers must make a detailed examination of individual political actors, the components of their internal psyches, and the environments in which they function during a specific time period in order to track and explain their political activities. Moreover, the fact that individuals behave differently under different circumstances and the wild-card possibility of irrational behavior limit the potential accuracy of any general rules concerning political behavior and attitudes.

Nevertheless, the difficulties of this approach are outweighed by its utility in monitoring and analyzing human behavior in Asian politics. As scholars increase

their knowledge of relevant aspects of political psychology, we will be able to gain better cross-national, cross-cultural understanding of people's performance in the public sphere.

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Bio Note

Ofer Feldman is Professor of Political Psychology and Behavior at *Doshisha University*, Kyoto, Japan. He holds a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the *University of Tokyo*. He is the author, editor, and co-editor of 14 books and monographs in English, Japanese, and German, and the author of more than 80 journal articles and book chapters, and more than 100 encyclopedia items, in the fields of political psychology/behavior, communication studies, and Japanese politics. He is the co-Editor-in-Chief of a book series entitled ***Political Psychology: Issues, Challenges, and Prospects***, *Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft*, Baden-Baden, Germany, and the Chair/President of the Psycho-Politics Research Committee (RC29) within the *International Political Science Association*.