

POSC 274 Political Psychology of Presidential Foreign Policy Making
Weitz 230 Fall Term 2013
1:15-3:00 Tuesday & Thursday

Professor John Sullivan

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Office Hours: 10:00-11:30 Tuesdays
3:30-4:30 Thursdays

In this course, we will examine the intersections of politics, personality and social psychology as they apply to the analysis of how recent U.S. Presidents and their advisors have made historic foreign policy decisions. We will explore scholarly research that relies heavily on psychological theories to analyze foreign policy decisions. We will investigate the role of the individual, of group process, of political and social cognition, and of the political context in this type of decision-making. We will address the following kinds of questions, so as you do the assigned readings, keep them in mind:

****Personality and Political Leadership:*** Skeptics have argued that the effects of personality in politics tend to “cancel one another out” and that historic, aggregate and institutional forces shape important foreign policy decisions in such a way that the personal characteristics of decision makers tend to be “washed out”. The ultimate decisions become inevitable regardless of who is making them. Here, we will explore a number of psychological studies of U.S. foreign policy decision making to see whether evidence to the contrary exists. Do the studies we examine suggest that the personalities of political leaders affect the type and quality of their decision-making? If they do, what kinds of effects do they have? Are certain types of leaders more dangerous than others, what is the nature of this danger, and under what circumstances does this danger emerge? Does our particular electoral process and political context systematically select certain types of people for leadership positions? If it does so, what are the consequences for the kinds of decisions we are examining?

****Group Processes and Elite Decision-making:*** Does the psychology of small group decision making add anything to our understanding of Presidential foreign policy decision-making? What group processes might interfere with good decision-making, and how can leaders adapt decision-making processes to minimize these negative effects? What is the role of a leader's personality/character in shaping and guiding group decision-making? Can group processes enhance good judgment in U.S. foreign-policy decision making? If they can, under what circumstances does this happen? Taking into account both the personality of the leader and the particular group psychology at play, how well can we “explain” the decisions made by recent U.S. Presidents and their advisors?

****Political Cognition and Elite Decision-Making:*** What role do individual differences in social and political perception play in elite decision-making? How do decision-makers employ historical analogies and broader metaphors when they decide the fate of nations? Under what circumstances do metaphors enlighten or mislead decision-makers? What are the impacts of principles of information processing and cognition? What is the role of “ordinary”

cognitive bias in human information processing relative to what we might call “motivated” bias in information processing? What can elite decision-makers do to minimize the role of misperception and bias in their decision making? Are certain personalities and certain types of groups more prone to cognitive bias than others? If so, what factors exacerbate these problems?

***Leadership Applications:** How does one take a specific example of decision-making and apply concepts from individual and group psychology to that particular set of decisions? Are there any patterns that we can discern across multiple situations and multiple decision makers? If so, do these patterns lend credence to some theories of decision making while creating doubts about—or even disproving—others?

We will address these general questions about the role of psychological theory within the context of specific foreign policy decisions. Our case studies include the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War decision making, the Iranian Hostage Crisis, the Iran-Contra Affair, the Gulf War, the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and perhaps now the war in Syria.

The required texts include: **Steven J. Rubenzer & Thomas R. Faschingbauer, Personality, Character, and Leadership In the White House: Psychologists Assess the Presidents**; **Irving L. Janis, Groupthink**; **Mark Schafer & Scott Crichlow, Groupthink vs. High-Quality Decision Making**; **Yuen Foong Khong, Analogies at War**; **Steve A. Yetiv, Explaining Foreign Policy: U.S. Decision-Making and the Persian Gulf War, 2nd edition**; **Christopher Hemmer, Which Lessons Matter? American Foreign Policy Decision Making in the Middle East, 1979-1987**; **Alex Roberto Hybel & Justin Matthew Kaufman, The Bush Administrations and Saddam Hussein: Deciding on Conflict**; and **Stephen J. Wayne, Personality & Politics: Obama for and Against Himself**.

After reading several of these books, we will skype the authors to discuss their theories and to ask follow-up questions. We will organize these sessions as the time nears.

Grades will be based on team reports, essays, class participation and a take-home final examination. There are seven team reports scheduled and each of you is required to participate in one team report. There are four short essays scheduled on the syllabus. Two “final exam” take-home questions will be distributed later in the term. You will be asked to answer one of the two questions in ten pages or less. Team reports, essays and class participation will each account for approximately 20% of your final grade, and the final examination (essay) will account for the remaining 40%.

Course Outline

Tuesday, September 17: Introduction & Overview

Thursday, September 19: Political Psychology & Presidential Personality

Read: Mark Schafer and Scott Crichlow, *Groupthink vs. High-Quality Decision Making*, ch. 2, pp. 18-52.

Tuesday, September 24: Personality & Presidential Style

Read: James David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*, chs. 1-4, pp. 1-122.

Thursday, September 26: Personality Portraits

Read: Steven J. Rubenzer & Thomas R. Faschingbauer, *Personality, Character & Leadership in the White House: Psychologists Assess the Presidents*, Part I Personality & The Presidency, pp. 3-75.

Short Essay #1 Due: Write 3 pages contrasting Barber's approach with that of R&F.

Tuesday, October 1: Presidential Typologies

Skype Rubenzer 2:00 our time.

Read: Rubenzer & Faschingbauer, skim chs. 5-6, 9-12, pp. 83-136, 167-267.

Thursday, October 3: Groupthink & the Bay of Pigs Fiasco

Read: Irving Janis, *Groupthink*, chs. 1-2, pp. 2-47.

Team #1: Read the Appendixes in Rubenzer & Faschingbauer, summarize them orally for the class, and lead a class discussion evaluating their methodology.

Tuesday, October 8: Good and Bad Decision Making & the Cuban Missile Crisis

Read: 1) Irving Janis, *Groupthink*, chs. 5-6 and 8, pp. 97-158 and 174-197; 2) Mark Schafer & Scott Crichlow, *Groupthink vs. High-Quality Decision Making*, Part I, ch. 3, pp. 53-78.

Thursday, October 10: Groupthink, High Quality Decision Making and the Role of Advisors

Skype Schafer at 2:00 our time

Read: Schafer & Crichlow, *Groupthink vs. High-Quality Decision Making*, Part III, chs. 6-7, pp. 157-208.

Tuesday, October 15: Analogical Reasoning & Vietnam War Decision Making

Read: Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies At War*, chs. 1-6, pp. 3-173.

Short Essay #2 Due: Write 4 pages assessing which author (Barber, Janis or Khong) presents the “best” explanation of LBJ’s decision to escalate the Viet Nam War. Explicate your criteria of “best”.

Thursday, October 17: Cognitive Processing and Heuristics

Read: Khong, chs. 7-8, pp. 174-250.

Team #2 Read about dual processing models from social psychology (e.g., skim Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Part I). Report to the class on the two dominant cognitive processing systems and lead a discussion of a) the strengths and weaknesses of the two systems and b) how the two systems likely operated during the Cuban Missile Crisis and the decisions to escalate the Viet Nam War.

Tuesday, October 22: Risk Perceptions and Prospect Theory in the Iranian Hostage Crisis

Skype McDermott at 2:00 our time.

Read: Rose McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics*, chs. 2-3, pp. 15-76.

Thursday, October 24: Read: Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment*, chs. 1-3.

Team #3: Read Tetlock, chs. 4-5. Lead the class in a discussion of a) the different approaches taken by foxes and hedgehogs, b) the success of the two approaches and c) the implications for our analysis of foreign policy decision making.

Team #4: Skim Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Part IV and report to the class on the role of risk perceptions and lead a discussion of a) risk aversion and risk acceptance in foreign policy decision making, b) personality factors in risk acceptance and c) institutional factors in risk acceptance.

Tuesday, October 29: Groupthink & Analogical Reasoning in the Iranian Hostage Crisis

Read: 1) Schafer & Crichlow, pp. 81-91; 2) Christopher Hemmer, *Which Lessons Matter?* chs. 1-3, pp. 1-90; 3) Rubenzer & Fschingbauer, ch. 11, pp. 206-234.

Thursday, October 31: Groupthink & Analogical Reasoning in the Iran-Contra Fiasco

Read: 1) Hemmer, ch. 4, pp. 91-144; 2) Paul 't Hart, *Groupthink in Government*, ch. 14, "Hostages, Arms Sales and Contra Funding," pp. 215-269; 3) Schafer & Crichlow, pp. 92-102.

Essay #3 Due: Write 4 pages assessing **either** 1) which author (McDermott or Hemmer) presents the "better" explanation of Carter's decision-making in the Iranian Hostage Crisis **or** 2) how to integrate the two theoretical approaches to explain this decision-making.

Tuesday, November 5: The First President Bush and the Gulf War

Read: 1) Steve A. Yetiv, *Explaining Foreign Policy: U.S. Decision-Making and the Persian Gulf War*, chs. 1-10, pp. 18-213; 2) Thomas Preston, *The President & His Inner Circle*, ch.6, "George Bush and the Gulf War," ch. 6, pp. 190-218.

Team #5: Read on the topic of emotion and decision making (e.g., James N. Druckman & Rose McDermott, "Emotion and the Framing of Risky Choice," *Political Behavior*, 2008, pp. 297-321; Nasir Naqvi, Baba Shiv & Antoine Beehara, "The Role of Emotion in Decision Making," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 2006 vol. 15, pp. 260-264, etc.). Lead the class in a discussion of the role of emotion in foreign policy decision making generally and more specifically in the case of Bush I.

Thursday, November 7: Genetics and Environment: The Bush Administrations & Iraq

Skype Yetiv at 2:00 our time.

Read: Alex Roberto Hybel & Justin Matthew Kaufman, *The Bush Administrations and Saddam Hussein: Deciding on Conflict*, chs. 1-3, pp. 1-62.

Tuesday, November 12: More on Iraq War and Bush II

Read: 1) Yetiv, chs. 11-12, pp. 214-254; 2) Rubenzer & Faschingbauer, ch. 14, pp. 299-308; 3) Hybel & Kaufman, chs. 4-6, pp. 63-154.

Team #6: Read about the role of intuition in decision making (e.g., chs. 1-6 of David G. Myers, *Intuition: It's Powers & Perils*). Summarize the main points for the class and lead a discussion of how intuition might guide presidential decision making. For better or worse?

Thursday, November 14: Obama's Character & Style

Skype Hybel at 1:00 our time

Read: 1) Wayne, *Personality & Politics: Obama For and Against Himself*; 2) Hybel chapter on Obama.

Essay #4 Due: Write 4 pages evaluating the "single theory" approach of Barber, Janis, McDermott and Khong compared with the eclectic approach of Yetiv and Hybel & Kaufman.

Tuesday, November 19:

Telephone Wayne at 1:30

Team #7: Read extant materials on Obama's foreign policy decision making and lead a discussion of the Obama Administration's foreign policy decision making processes.

Take-Home Final Examination: Due November 25 at 1:00 by email.