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# Political Psychology in International Relations: Beyond the Paradigms

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## Abstract

Political psychology in international relations (IR) has undergone a dramatic transformation in the past two decades, mirroring the broader changes occurring in IR itself. This review examines the current state of the field. We begin by offering a data-driven snapshot analyzing four years of manuscript classifications at a major IR journal to characterize the questions that IR scholars engaged in psychological research are and are not investigating. We then emphasize six developments in particular, both present-day growth areas (an increased interest in emotions and hot cognition, the rise of more psychologically informed work on public opinion, a nascent research tradition we call the first image reversed, and the rise of neurobiological and evolutionary approaches) and calls for additional scholarship (better integration of the study of mass and elite political behavior and more psychological work in international political economy). Together, these developments constitute some of the directions in which we see the next generation of scholarship heading.



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## INTRODUCTION

The last review on political psychology in international relations (IR) appearing in the *Annual Review of Political Science* was published in 2001 (Goldgeier & Tetlock 2001). Incisive and influential, this wide-ranging review was framed around the “paradigms,” discussing what psychology can contribute to realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism. Two decades later, its central argument—that many of our theories of international politics rely on implicit psychological microfoundations—continues to resonate. At the same time, however, political psychology in IR looks very different than it did two decades ago, because IR as a whole looks very different: moving beyond the paradigms as its central organizing framework (Lake 2013), moving beyond the causes of interstate war as its central substantive focus, and becoming more analytically and methodologically eclectic (Sil & Katzenstein 2010). Recent developments in psychological approaches to IR—which parallel all of these changes—constitute a microcosm of the broader transformations IR has undergone over the past two decades, making this an apt moment to take stock of how psychological research in IR has evolved and where it might be going in the future.

In this review, we examine the current state of the field, in a discussion that has three parts. We begin, first, by noting the increased interest in psychological work in IR, attributing this growth to a set of developments occurring both on the world stage and in the sociology of the discipline. Second, we offer a data-driven snapshot of the contemporary landscape of political psychology in IR, using four years of author-generated classifications of manuscripts submitted to *International Studies Quarterly* (ISQ)—one of the few leading IR journals to include political psychology as a default manuscript classification—to characterize both the diversity of methodological approaches and substantive questions that IR scholars engaged in political psychological research have tended to address and the topics that remain underrepresented in psychological research as compared to IR as a whole. Since there is little inherent in these questions that precludes the integration of psychological insights, they thus represent growth areas for future research. Third, we focus our attention on six developments in particular. Some of these represent directions in which the field is moving in a much more pronounced fashion than was the case two decades ago: a surge of interest in emotions and hot cognition; a proliferation of work on public opinion in IR (conducted in more psychologically informed ways than before); the development of a new research tradition that we call the first image reversed; and the influx of genetic, biological, and evolutionary approaches. Other developments are calls for future work: for better integration of the study of mass and elite political behavior in IR and for more psychological work in the study of international political economy (IPE). Together, these developments constitute some of the directions in which we see the next generation of psychological research in IR heading.

## WHY A RENEWED INTEREST IN PSYCHOLOGY?

Psychology in IR is experiencing a renewed degree of interest, manifested in, for example, the 2017 special issue of *International Organization* devoted to the topic (Hafner-Burton et al. 2017; see also Mintz 2007). Although earlier psychological scholarship in IR made enormous contributions to the field—it is arguably impossible to think of the study of deterrence or foreign policy decision making, for example, without thinking of psychological work (Jervis et al. 1985, Larson 1985, Levy 2013, Stein 2017)—the past decade and a half has witnessed a surge of interest, including in areas of the field that were historically less disposed to psychological work. This growth likely reflects three developments in both international politics and the discipline that studies it.

First, events on the world stage have presented IR scholars with a series of puzzles that political psychologists have been eager to address. The 9/11 attacks and emergence of a global war on terror not only showcased the relevance of nonstate actors but also renewed IR scholars’ interests

in the causes of terrorism, radicalization, and extremism (e.g., Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009, Horgan 2005). The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq not only ignited theoretical debates about the limitations of rationalist explanations for war (Debs & Monteiro 2014, Lake 2010) but also raised questions about the origins of intelligence failures and limited postwar planning (Bar-Joseph & McDermott 2017, Jervis 2006, Rapport 2015). Brexit and the growing global backlash against free trade and economic integration not only highlighted the importance of public opinion in foreign policy issues but also raised questions about why these preferences seemed to be so weakly correlated with conventional models of economic self-interest (Mansfield & Mutz 2009, Rho & Tomz 2017). In the United States, the election of Donald Trump has left IR scholars frequently reaching for psychological frameworks, usually rooted in personality traits, to explain his behavior, but even before Trump, the long shadow cast by figures like George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Angela Merkel, Osama bin Laden, and Vladimir Putin have raised questions about the ways in which individuals matter in world politics more generally (Byman & Pollack 2001).

Second, and related, there has been a rise in micro-level approaches in IR and political science more generally. Perhaps because of some of the events discussed above, the era of grand systemic theories that tell us only “a small number of big and important things” (Waltz 1986, p. 329) has been supplanted by an interest in micro-level phenomena, partly due to an appreciation of the fact that even macro-level theories rely on micro-level assumptions (Kertzer 2017), partly due to the rise (and falling costs) of survey experiments that have reinvigorated the study of public opinion in IR (e.g., Press et al. 2013, Tomz 2007, Trager & Vavreck 2011), partly due to the renewed interest in leaders (Horowitz et al. 2015, Saunders 2011, Weeks 2014), and partly due to the emergence of a new kind of research agenda that we call the first image reversed, which we discuss below. Since microfoundational approaches rely on mechanistic views of social science (Elster 2007), and since many of the causal mechanisms IR scholars are interested in implicate psychological processes as part of the broader causal chain, the more interested we become in causal mechanisms (Imai et al. 2011), the more attention we tend to pay to psychology.

Third, a shift has occurred in how IR scholars, like social scientists more generally, are beginning to understand the relationship between psychology and rationality. Traditionally, psychology and rational choice were understood as theoretical archrivals, with political psychologists expressing deep skepticism about the value of rational actor models that they saw as obviously descriptively inaccurate and rational choice scholars expressing equal skepticism about whether artificial studies from the lab told us anything about the real world of international politics (Kahler 1998, Verba 1961). Although it may be too soon to declare a truce, one reason why tensions have subsided in the past decade and a half is that these debates in IR often took the form of a proxy war between insights from psychology and insights from economics, and economics has undergone a transformation of its own in the form of behavioral economics (Thaler 2016), a subfield defined by “efforts to incorporate more realistic notions of human nature into economics” (Rabin 2002, p. 674; for a review of behavioral economics in political science, see Wilson 2011). Indeed, it is striking that, although much of the earlier psychological work in IR was itself influenced by behavioral economics—work on prospect theory, for example (Boettcher 1995, Levy 1997, McDermott 1998)—its reception at the time by rationalist critics in IR was relatively frosty, even though these points are hardly controversial in economics today. However, as nonstandard preferences have become less exotic in economics—the UK, US, and Australian governments have all recently launched initiatives to apply behavioral insights to policy making—so too have they become more widely accepted in political science, such that Hafner-Burton et al. (2017) chronicle a new behavioral revolution in IR.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In a lexical twist, this behavioral revolution is, of course, the opposite of its homonym in psychology: The behavioral revolution in psychology was a movement that denigrated the study of mental states, whereas the behavioral revolution in IR seeks to

This shift has had two important consequences. First, although old habits die hard, psychology is less likely to be portrayed as a null hypothesis in IR today than it was 20 or 30 years ago, when it was often caricatured as a theory of errors defined only in opposition to a rationalist baseline. Just as many critiques of rational choice are often critiques of particular modeling assumptions rather than of the core notion of actors guided by a particular set of beliefs making choices under a particular set of constraints (Snidal 2002), many critiques of political psychology are really critiques of particular psychological theories or empirical strategies; psychology, like rational choice, is insufficiently monolithic to falsify *tout court*. Moreover, psychology and rational choice are also not as far apart as earlier research often suggested. Indeed, a growing body of work is now attempting to explore the intersection of psychology and rationality by rediscovering rational choice's psychological roots (e.g., McDermott 2004a, Mercer 2005b, Rathbun et al. 2017), turning to economics-style bargaining experiments to test the behavioral implications of formal models (Kertzer & Rathbun 2015; Quek 2017; Reed et al. 2016; Tingley 2011; Tingley & Walter 2011a,b), or incorporating psychological insights into bargaining models or game theoretic work (e.g., Little & Zeitzoff 2017, O'Neill 1999, Streich & Levy 2016). Second, as psychology has become more influential in IR and IR has become less sectarian and more theoretically pluralist (Dunne et al. 2013, Lake 2013), an important swath of contemporary IR research has begun to draw on psychology even without labeling itself as such: Much of the new literature on civil wars, for example, centers on questions about the role of identity and group cohesion in conflict, even as it avoids much of the formal verbiage of psychological studies of intergroup relations (e.g., Cederman et al. 2013, Cohen 2017, Harris & Findley 2014).

## THE LANDSCAPE OF POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Although the growth of psychological work in IR is likely a sign of a healthy discipline more interested in problem-driven research than narrow tribalism, it also makes the lives of review authors more difficult, inviting subjective assessments about what IR scholarship does and does not count as psychological. To characterize the state of the field, then, we choose to let scholars speak for themselves, analyzing the author-selected classifications of all manuscript submissions to *ISQ* from 2013 to the first week of 2017. Analyzing *ISQ* submissions is valuable for two reasons. First, as the flagship journal of the International Studies Association (ISA), *ISQ* represents the breadth and variety of IR scholarship being conducted by members of the ISA, the largest scholarly association devoted to the study of IR. Second, *ISQ* is unique among leading IR journals in that it includes political psychology as one of the default substantive classifications authors can select when submitting manuscripts. By looking at the other methodological and substantive classifications that authors select when submitting political psychology manuscripts and comparing these selections to the overall prevalence of each classification across *ISQ* submissions as a whole, we can systematically characterize the questions that political psychologists in IR are and are not working on and speak more systematically about the current state of the field.<sup>2</sup>

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bring mental states back in. For a discussion of the transition from the behavioral to the cognitive revolution, the reader is referred to Miller (2003).

<sup>2</sup>For purposes of lexical variety, we use the phrase “political psychology manuscripts” interchangeably with work being done by political psychologists, but, of course, we cannot speak to the extent to which the authors of these manuscripts self-identify as political psychologists—only that they identify their work as political psychology. Moreover, because the journal caps the number of classifications for each manuscript, the analysis in this review likely undercounts political psychological work.

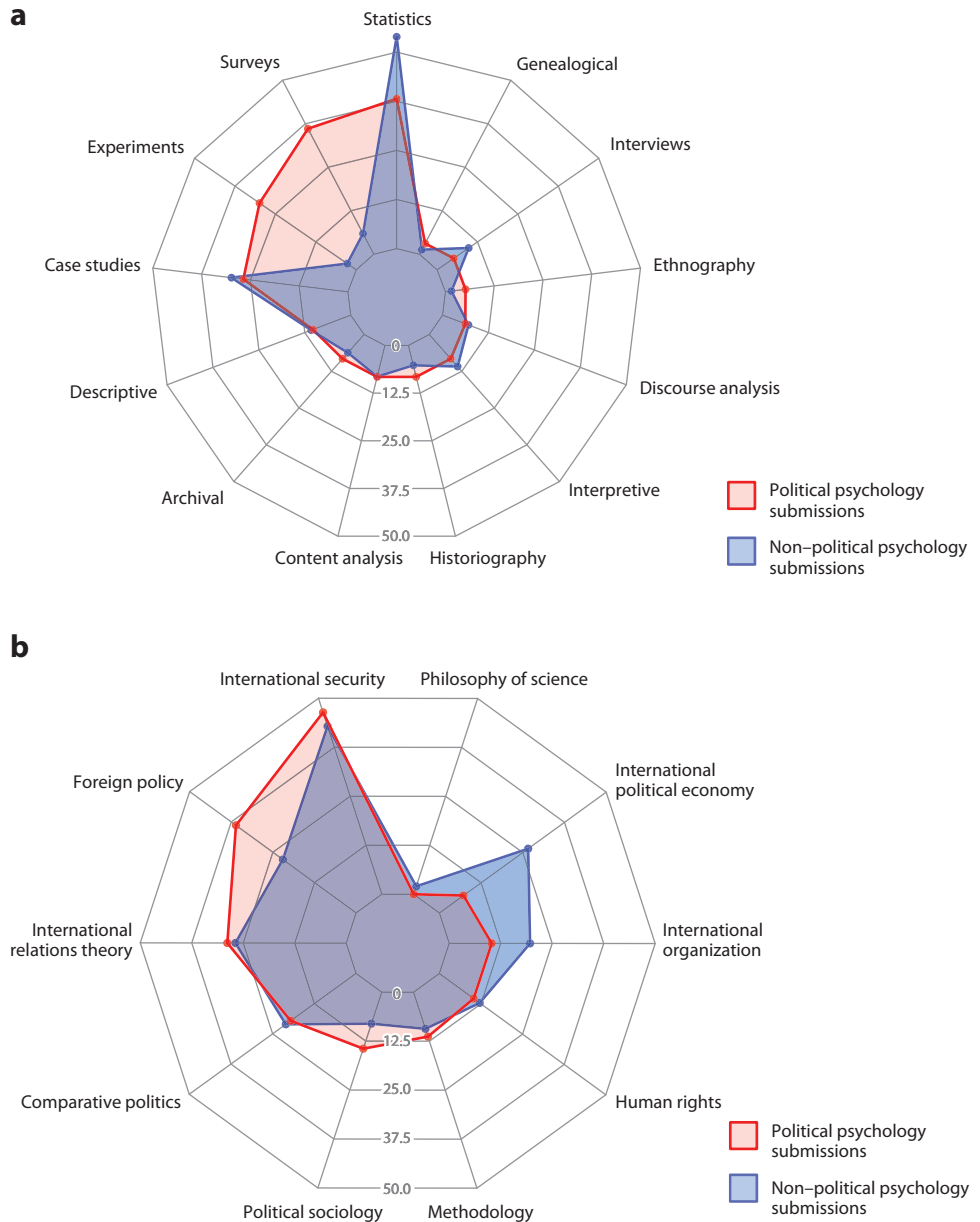
**Figure 1a** is a radar plot that compares the prevalence of methodological classifications for political psychology submissions to *ISQ* with all non-political psychology *ISQ* submissions.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the figure shows that, while IR scholarship as a whole is currently dominated by two sets of methods (either statistics or case studies), political psychology in IR is more methodologically diverse, using survey and experimental methods to a much higher degree than does the field as a whole, but is no less likely to use case studies than the broader field. The popularity of experiments (used by 30% of political psychology submissions to *ISQ* but only 4% of overall *ISQ* submissions) is particularly striking: Although psychological work in IR has long been influenced by experimental findings—many of the social psychological theories Jervis (2017) refers to, for example, were originally developed using experimental methods—it has perhaps been less common for IR scholars doing psychological work to employ experiments themselves. As **Figure 1a** shows, this is no longer the case.

**Figure 1b** similarly presents a radar plot comparing the issue area classifications.<sup>4</sup> The plot shows that political psychology remains overrepresented in the study of international security and foreign policy—perhaps reflecting the long-standing ties between psychology and foreign policy analysis (Hudson 2005, Kaarbo 2015, Snyder et al. 1962). However, it is by no means limited to this traditional area of focus and is also well-represented in work classified as political sociology, IR theory, or methodology more generally. Moreover, consistent with recent work on the psychological underpinnings of support for human rights (McFarland & Mathews 2005), attitudes toward torture (Wallace 2013), and the ways in which activists perceive international law (Hafner-Burton et al. 2015), political psychology also has considerable presence in the study of human rights. The two areas where political psychology is clearly underrepresented are IPE and international organizations; given the extent to which economists themselves are increasingly involved with behavioral work, the paucity of psychological scholarship in IPE is noteworthy and a point to which we return below.

Finally, in addition to these general issue area classifications, *ISQ* also requires authors to select from a more granular list of substantive classifications. The radar plot in **Figure 2** presents the 20 substantive classifications with the largest percentage-point difference in classification rates between political psychology submissions to *ISQ* and non-political psychology *ISQ* submissions, thereby providing a sense of the substantive questions for which political psychological work in IR is the most distinctive. The plot shows that over one-third of all political psychology submissions to *ISQ* focused on public opinion, even though public opinion is the focus of only 6% of all *ISQ* submissions in this time period. In this sense, as we discuss below, the study of mass political behavior looms larger in contemporary political psychology work in IR than it did in previous eras, which were perhaps more focused on elites. At the same time, however, the plot also showcases the diverse range of issues that political psychologists in IR are exploring. Political psychologists continue to be distinctively active not only in questions of interstate conflict and IR theory but also in those of social movements and transnational issues. They are also more likely to tackle questions of identity (Abdelal 2009; K.E. Powers, unpublished book manuscript; E.B. Chung, unpublished book manuscript)—whether racial, ethnic, gender, or religious—than IR does as a whole. Interestingly, consistent with a growing body of work on the psychological microfoundations of successful diplomacy (Hall & Yarhi-Milo 2012, Holmes 2013, Rathbun 2014, Wong 2016), political psychologists are also actively involved in the renaissance of diplomatic studies.

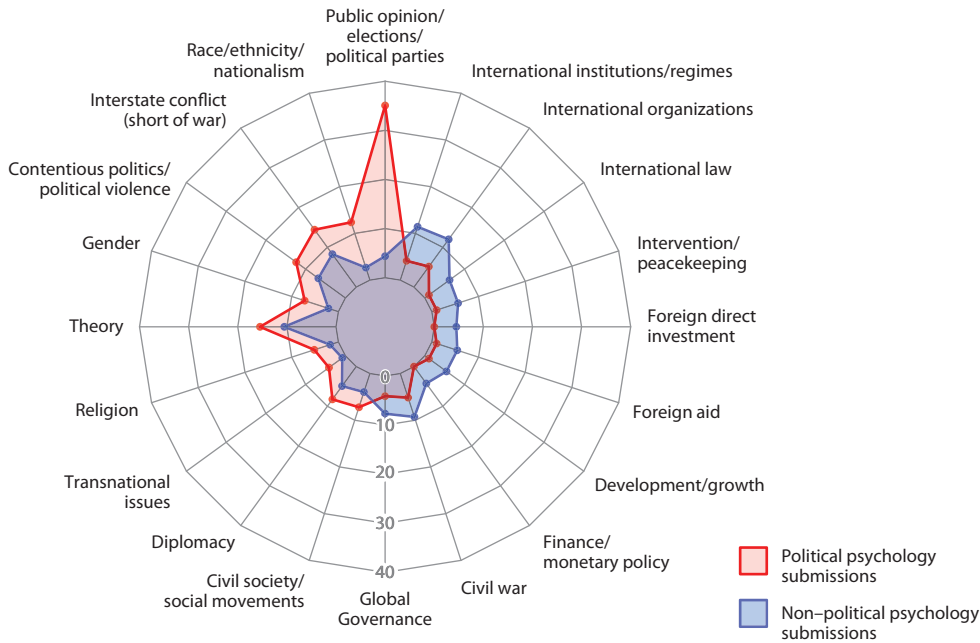
<sup>3</sup>For presentation purposes, only classifications used by  $\geq 4\%$  of the political psychology submissions are shown in **Figure 1**.

<sup>4</sup>Since political psychology is itself one of the issue area classifications *ISQ* uses, we omit it from **Figure 1b** for presentation purposes.



**Figure 1**

The methodological and substantive distinctiveness of political psychology in international relations. (a) Radar plot comparing the methodological classifications of all political psychology submissions to *International Studies Quarterly* (ISQ) (red) with non-political psychology submissions (blue). (b) Radar plot comparing the issue area classifications between political psychology submissions (red) and non-political psychology submissions (blue). Thus, in each panel, the red on the plot shows the areas where political psychology is leading; the blue shows where it is lagging.



**Figure 2**

The questions political psychologists in international relations are and are not working on. The plot depicts the 20 substantive classification rates with the largest percentage point difference between political psychology submissions to *International Studies Quarterly* (ISQ) (red) and non-political psychology submissions (blue).

At the same time, the plot also showcases the substantive issues for which there is much less psychological work. Many of these topics—e.g., international institutions, international organizations, international law, foreign direct investment, foreign aid, international development, finance and monetary policy, and global governance—were traditionally situated in the study of international organizations and IPE, suggesting that more psychological research in IR remains focused on conflict rather than cooperation and on behavior rather than institutions. However, there is little inherent in the study of these topics that precludes more engagement with psychology. International legal scholars, for example, are beginning to sketch out what a behavioral international law (Broude 2015, Van Aaken 2014) would look like. Van Aaken (2014), for example, incorporates behavioral economists' interest in choice architecture into a legalization framework to note how different sources of international law vary in the extent to which states must opt out versus opt in, which has important implications for treaty design. Similarly, Bayram (2017) uses social identity theory to explain the compliant pull of international law, fielding a survey experiment on members of the Bundestag to show that variation in German parliamentarians' sense of obligation to international law is shaped by variation in their social identification with the broader international community. Even international legal scholarship that does not explicitly invoke psychological terminology frequently implicates psychological mechanisms, as in the work of Wallace (2013), Chilton (2014), and Chaudoin (2014), all of whom experimentally study the effects of international legal obligations on public preferences. As we suggest below, then, some of the promising areas of future research involve filling in these gaps, both in substantive terms (i.e., thinking more systematically about the ways in which psychological mechanisms matter in the study of IPE) and



in more analytical ones (i.e., thinking about the role of institutions or social environments more generally in shaping, activating, and screening psychological dispositions).

## **NEW DIRECTIONS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

The latest wave of psychological work in IR differs from its predecessors in a number of ways, but we focus our discussion in the following sections on six substantive directions that either are areas where psychological work in IR has experienced particularly important changes over the past two decades, or represent nascent developments that we see as constituting particularly promising areas of future research.

### **A Shift from Cold to Hot Cognition**

Traditionally, political psychologists in IR were heavily influenced by the cognitive revolution, which emphasized the study of information processing (Miller 2003); much of the psychological work in IR was thus grounded in the study of cognitive limitations that impair decision making, most notably manifested in a surge of work from the heuristics and biases tradition applying prospect theory to a host of substantive problems in IR (see Levy 1997, McDermott 2004b, and Mercer 2005a for reviews). Although work in this area continues, psychological approaches in IR are increasingly concerned with emotions, whether in the study of ethnic conflict (Petersen 2002), nuclear proliferation decisions (Hymans 2006), or bargaining and diplomacy more generally (Hall 2015, Renshon et al. 2017). A similar movement has taken place in agentic constructivism, which has become especially interested in what Kahneman (2011) calls “System I” processing, whether in the form of habit-based or nonreflexive logics of action (e.g., Bially Mattern 2011, Holmes & Traven 2015, Hopf 2010, Pouliot 2008) or the study of affect more generally (Crawford 2000, Hall & Ross 2015, Mercer 2010).

In some respects, both constructivism and political psychology are moving in similar directions, such that it is often hard to substantively distinguish the two research programs except by their divergent citation networks. For example, both are increasingly going beyond general levels of emotional arousal or positive and negative valence to study the distinct effects of discrete emotions like anger and anxiety (Bleiker & Hutchison 2008, Halperin et al. 2011, Hutchison 2016, Kertzer & McGraw 2012, Zeitzoff 2014), and both are beginning to wrestle with questions of how emotions are manipulated by strategic elites (McDoom 2012). Yet important differences remain (Jervis 2017, p. xxix; Shannon & Kowert 2011). Consistent with their long-standing interest in holist and idealist ontologies (Wendt 1999), constructivists generally tend to be more sympathetic to accounts of group-level emotions than many political psychologists would be [see, e.g., the discussion between Mercer (2014) and McDermott (2014)]. Much of the constructivist research agenda on ontological security (e.g., Kinnvall & Mitzen 2017) is more directly influenced by psychoanalysis and social theory than by experimental social psychology. Furthermore, although some constructivist scholarship explicitly draws on advances in social neuroscience (Holmes 2013), other scholarship tends to interact much less with recent psychological work, occasionally treating psychology more as a metaphor than as a body of scholarship with contributions of its own. A deeper engagement between these intellectual communities will likely prove beneficial for both.

### **A New Look at the Study of Public Opinion in Foreign Policy**

In stark contrast with psychological work in US politics—which has predominantly focused on the political behavior of the mass public, rather than that of political elites (e.g., Kinder 1998)—historically, the political psychology that loomed the largest in IR focused on elites rather than



on the masses (e.g., Herrmann 1985, Jervis et al. 1985). As the radar plot in **Figure 2** illustrates, however, public opinion research now occupies a relatively prominent place in psychological work in IR. Although there is a long tradition of research on public opinion of foreign policy issues (e.g., Holsti 1979, Rosenau 1965, Wittkopf 1990), this research has often been largely disconnected from work in political psychology and even the study of political behavior more generally: For example, the reason why political scientists originally settled on general foreign policy orientations as the causes of specific foreign policy attitudes was the belief that partisanship told us much less about foreign policy attitudes than their domestic counterparts. Public opinion research in IR and in US politics not only studied different dependent variables, but frequently used different independent variables, as well.

Based on an analysis of graduate syllabi, Colgan (2016) finds evidence that IR is increasingly moving away from political science, but within political psychology, at least, the two are increasingly moving together. Not only is the study of public opinion in IR now much more integrated with the study of public opinion in US politics (e.g., Baum & Potter 2015, Berinsky 2009), it is also starting to become more closely integrated with cognate work in psychology. For example, Hurwitz & Peffley (1987) proposed a hierarchical model in which more specific policy attitudes (e.g., support for a particular conflict) are rooted in more general orientations, but they chose to ground the model in orientations specific to the foreign policy domain, like militarism and ethnocentrism.<sup>5</sup> New research has instead rooted foreign policy attitudes in more general orientations from psychology, influenced by a similar turn in the study of values in domestic politics. Thus, Cohrs et al. (2005), Bayram (2015), and Rathbun et al. (2016) turn to the Schwartz (1992) personal value framework to show that the same personal values that predict everything from consumption decisions to the majors that students choose in college also predict foreign policy preferences. Liberman (2007) shows how individual differences in punitiveness predict foreign policy preferences, while Gries (2014) and Kertzer et al. (2014) show that the moral foundations framework proposed by Graham et al. (2009) shapes foreign policy preferences, as well. Prather (2014) shows that variation in individual support for foreign aid can be explained by variation in whether individuals externalize their domestic beliefs about the welfare state; charity, then, begins at home. Altogether, these studies suggest that foreign policy attitudes are partially prepolitical, shaped by the broader belief systems that guide our choices outside of IR.

## **Bridging the Gaps in the Study of Leaders**

Following Byman & Pollack's (2001) call for IR scholarship to more seriously consider the ways in which individual leaders matter in international politics, IR scholars have become increasingly interested in the study of leaders (e.g., Jervis 2013, Yarhi-Milo 2014). An earlier tradition in psychology in IR studied leaders in an idiographic way—most notably in the form of research on the cognitive maps, operational codes, and psychological profiles of individual leaders (e.g., Axelrod 1976, George 1969, Walker 1990). While some work in this tradition continues (e.g., Dyson 2006, Herrmann et al. 2001, Renshon 2008, Schafer & Walker 2006), much of the newer work on leaders in IR is both more nomothetic and less explicitly psychological, focusing on how leaders matter in IR more generally (e.g., Horowitz et al. 2015, Saunders 2011, Weeks 2014) and focusing less on cognitive properties. Because of their divergent approaches, the two waves of work occasionally talk past one another. Whereas the former tradition studied leaders dispositionally

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<sup>5</sup>For applications of ethnocentrism to the origins of trade and immigration preferences, the reader is referred to, e.g., Mansfield & Mutz (2009) and Hainmueller & Hiscox (2010).

[e.g., showing how the characteristics of Gorbachev shaped his foreign policy decisions (Stein 1994)], the latter often studies them situationally—either because leaders face different incentive structures due to differing institutional environments (e.g., McGillivray & Smith 2008) or because leaders possess different military or political experiences that shape their behavior (e.g., Fuhrmann & Horowitz 2015, Horowitz & Stam 2014). The two strands of literature could benefit from further engaging with one another, exploring the interaction between situational stakes and dispositional traits (Kertzer 2016). Cuhadar et al. (2017), for example, use machine-coded content analysis to test how the personality profiles of Turkish leaders change as they assume different institutional positions with different sets of constraints, finding that leaders' traits are fairly stable despite these contextual changes.

Similarly, it is striking that the study of elite political behavior in psychology in IR remains somewhat disconnected from the study of mass political behavior. That the study of the two populations should be methodologically distinct is not surprising, given the difficulties of hauling elites into a lab. Elite decision makers have hectic schedules and little incentive to agree to be placed under the psychological microscope. At the end of the day, Brody's (1969, p. 116) lament about the challenges of access ("How can we give a Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale to Khrushchev during the Hungarian revolt?") continues to ring true. That the two bodies of scholarship should continue to be theoretically distinct, however, is more puzzling. For example, whereas studies of personality in mass political behavior are built around commonly used frameworks from personality psychology, like the Big Five (e.g., Gerber et al. 2010), political psychologists studying elite behavior tend to use other frameworks (e.g., leadership style; see Keller & Yang 2008, Shannon & Keller 2007), perhaps out of the assumption that the underlying explanatory frameworks for foreign policy decision making must be specific to foreign policy itself (although see Gallagher & Allen 2014). One promising development, then, is the rise of elite experiments in IR (Bayram 2017, Friedman et al. 2017, LeVeck et al. 2014, Mintz 2004, Renshon 2015, Renshon et al. 2016), which not only allow IR scholars to study elite behavior using the same tools they use to study mass political behavior but also allow scholars to use the same theoretical frameworks, testing the same cognitive-interactionist theories (Herrmann et al. 1999) in both groups.

Elite experiments are no panacea. These studies are unlikely to involve real-time crisis scenarios; elites in certain types of political systems are less likely to be amenable to experimentation, and by definition, the more elite the sample, the smaller its size. Nonetheless, elite experiments are helpful in bridging two divides: not only the divide between idiographic and nomothetic approaches to the study of leaders but also the divide between the study of elites and the study of the masses that they govern. To the extent that the goal of some of the early psychodynamic work on leaders (e.g., George & George 1956) was the impulse to learn lessons from a small number of exceptional individuals, some of the scholarship on leaders in IR is not only idiographic but also hagiographic. It is not coincidental that Byman & Pollack's (2001) entreaty to study leaders in IR was titled "Let Us Now Praise Great Men." One of the consequences of studying leaders idiographically is that it reifies this "mythos of Metternich," leading to an automatic assumption that decision makers in world politics are systematically different from the citizens they govern—and, by implication, from the kinds of subjects who more routinely participate in psychological lab experiments (Kertzer 2016, p. 160). Ultimately, however, the question of whether elite decision makers rely on a fundamentally different cognitive architecture than their citizens is an open question that should be tested empirically (Hyde 2015, p. 407; Tingley 2017) rather than assumed axiomatically; blind skepticism is no more reasonable than blind faith. One of the striking findings from recent experimental work comparing elite or quasi-elite samples with mass public ones is that, although the two groups often differ in a number of observable characteristics [e.g., elites are higher in feelings of power (Renshon 2015) or levels of strategic skill (LeVeck

et al. 2014)], they often respond to treatments in much the same way. Indeed, as long as the characteristics in which elites and masses differ are not ones we expect to significantly interact with our experimental treatments, the two samples should perform relatively similarly (Druckman & Kam 2011).

## In Search of Psychology in International Political Economy

As the radar plots in **Figures 1** and **2** illustrate, although psychological work in IR is well represented in the study of conflict and security, it remains relatively underrepresented in IPE. Yet recent scholarship has begun to make important inroads into this intersection.

Some of this work focuses on the origin and nature of preferences for particular economic policies. Within this tradition, some scholars appeal to theories of social identity that emphasize in-group–out-group distinctions (Sumner 1906)—such as ethnocentrism—to explain preferences in trade (Guisinger 2017, Mansfield & Mutz 2009), immigration (Hainmueller & Hiscox 2010), and outsourcing (Mansfield & Mutz 2013). Another preference-focused tradition imports concepts from behavioral economics about the nature of individuals’ utility functions. For example, Lü et al. (2012) examine the relationship between inequity aversion and protectionism, while several studies emphasize the role of loss aversion in IPE (e.g., Elms 2008, Weyland 2002). Other work falls cleanly within the heuristics and biases tradition, such as the work of Poulsen & Aisbett (2013) on bounded rationality and bilateral investment treaties or that of Brooks et al. (2015) on heuristics used by investors in sovereign debt markets. In general, much of this work tends to focus on cold cognition rather than the role of emotions or affect (although see Sabet 2014).

As Goldgeier & Tetlock (2001) argue, however, even work that is not self-consciously psychological often rests on psychological microfoundations. In the context of IPE, a long-standing tradition focuses on the role of ideas and beliefs. Some of this work dismisses a psychological perspective. For example, Goldstein & Keohane (1993, p. 7) contrast their approach with a psychological one because they are interested in the effects of ideas rather than their underlying causes and because (at least at the time) psychological approaches were understood as a theory of errors focusing on “misinterpretations of human environments.” However, we argue that, in fact, much of this work is implicitly founded on psychological frameworks. For example, operating from a bounded rationality perspective, Rho & Tomz (2017) study not only how information deficits distort trade preferences, but also the role of social preferences like egoism and altruism (Kertzer & Rathbun 2015). Morrison (2016, p. 184), who focuses on the influence of individual decision makers in IPE, discusses how ideas can both serve as constraints in “limiting the range of options [leaders] consider” and open up new opportunities via discovery through experimentation. Not only is this scholarship consistent with the broader resurgence in the study of leaders in IR described above, but it also implicates what political psychologists call problem representation and the study of cognitive schema and mental models more generally (e.g., Sylvan & Voss 1998), even if it never formally adopts this language. To the extent that information-based or ideational theories arise in IPE, there are rich literatures in psychology that could serve as microfoundations. While the international economics literature has been slow to adopt a more psychological foundation, several of the previous studies help provide examples for IPE scholars.

## The First Image Reversed

In a seminal synthesis of IR and domestic politics, Gourevitch (1978) turned the traditional focus on levels of analysis on its head by threading together a diverse array of scholarship united by its common interest in what he called the second image reversed, looking not at the impact of

domestic politics on IR (the traditional focus of the second image), but rather at the impact of IR on domestic politics. In a similar spirit, one important development in psychological approaches to IR in the past decade has been a body of work that we might call the first image reversed: studying not the impact of individuals on IR (although the aforementioned work on leaders fits into this category) but rather the effect of IR on individuals.

One strand of this research focuses on the effects of combat on individual attitudes and characteristics. Excombatants, for example, are more likely to participate in politics (Blattman 2009); display greater organizational skill (Jha & Wilkinson 2012); are less supportive of negotiation with rivals (Grossman et al. 2015); and, at the leader level, are less likely to initiate conflict (Horowitz & Stam 2014). Another strand of research focuses on exposure to violence more generally: Individuals in communities affected by violence display more prosocial motivations (Gilligan et al. 2014), display different risk preferences in response to primes (Callen et al. 2014), and are more supportive of retributive justice (Hall et al. 2017). Even the threat of violence is politically consequential (Berrebi & Klor 2008, Getmansky & Zeitzoff 2014). Interestingly, these effects display significant downstream effects: Trauma from the Holocaust and other acts of mass political violence has intergenerational effects (Canetti et al. 2018, Lupu & Peisakhin 2017, Wohl & Van Bavel 2011) such that communities subject to political violence are politically distinctive decades if not centuries later (Nunn & Wantchekon 2011, Rozenas et al. 2017).<sup>6</sup>

Although much work needs to be done to aggregate disparate findings, many of which focus on particular geographical and historical contexts, into a coherent research program with clearly specified causal mechanisms, this burgeoning body of scholarship is particularly valuable because of the extent to which it subverts predominant approaches in both IR and political psychology. For IR, the first image reversed inverts the substantive focus of the discipline from the causes of war and conflict (Waltz 1959) to their effects. The study of conflict has remained central to IR scholarship precisely because of the gravity of conflict's consequences; better understanding of what these consequences are—not just “from the third-image heights of systemic pressures,” but in terms of “the everyday and the quotidian of global politics” (Solomon & Steele 2017, p. 268)—is thus of great importance. For political psychology, the first image reversed inverts the analytic focus of the subfield from micro–micro causation to macro–micro causation: from the effects of actor-level characteristics or individual differences on attitudes and behaviors to the effects of environmental forces on actor-level characteristics. This produces more causally satisfying explanations than is sometimes the case when one attitude is used to explain another without clear theoretical reasons as to why the former should be considered causally prior to the latter (see Fordham & Kleinberg 2012); it also highlights the importance of contextual features for the study of psychological mechanisms (e.g., Tingley 2017). In pointing to the situational origins of dispositional features, the first image reversed may also serve as a stimulus for additional psychological research in those quadrants of IR—such as the study of international institutions—where psychological work is currently underrepresented.

### **Genetic, Biological, and Evolutionary Approaches**

Perhaps the most distinctive change in the study of psychology in international politics in the past two decades has been the rise of neurobiological and evolutionary approaches. McDermott et al. (2009), for example, draw on behavioral genetics to study the origins of aggression, using

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<sup>6</sup>This tradition thus builds on earlier psychological research in IR on the effects of stress on decision making (Holsti & George 1975).

laboratory studies to show that participants who carry the low-activity allele of the monoamine oxidase A (*MAOA*) gene who also experienced traumatic events in their early lives are more likely to respond aggressively to provocation. Rosen (2005) draws on work in evolutionary biology to explore how our biological inheritance interacts with environmental features to shape conflict behavior and decision making: The relationship between high base levels of testosterone and dominance behavior may explain leaders' zealotry to fight for reputation, for example. Holmes (2013) draws on social neuroscience to explain how face-to-face diplomacy reduces uncertainty about the intentions of others, and Tingley (2014) examines how facial features influence the choice of a mediator tasked with building trust between disputing parties. Johnson & Toft (2013) suggest that we cannot understand the extent to which territorial disputes are often treated as indivisible issues without understanding the evolutionary origins of territoriality.

Work in these traditions is vast (for excellent reviews, see Lopez et al. 2011, McDermott & Hatemi 2014), but four points are of particular importance. First, much of this neurobiological revolution (McDermott & Hatemi 2014) on questions of war and peace is occurring outside of political science. Evolutionary psychologists, for example, have found that, because of the centrality of physical strength—particularly upper body strength—to experiencing lower costs of conflict, male biceps circumference is positively associated with belief in the efficacy of using force to settle international disputes (Sell et al. 2009); anthropologists have similarly found that male chest compression strength is negatively associated with assessments of a target's formidability (Fessler et al. 2014). More generally, the overlap between the questions that IR scholars are interested in and what scholars in these cognate fields are exploring is striking. For instance, the very phenomenon that makes war so interesting from a rationalist perspective—the fact that conflict is costly but recurs nonetheless (Fearon 1995)—also makes it important from an evolutionary perspective (Kertzer et al. 2016). The same models of costly signaling that scholars use in IR also exist in animal game theory (Maynard-Smith & Harper 2003, Searcy & Nowicki 2005). There are thus rich opportunities for scholars in IR to look beyond disciplinary lines to bring new perspectives to familiar questions.

Second, work in these traditions offers not only new theoretical frameworks but also new methodological approaches. Renshon et al. (2017), for example, introduce skin conductance measures into laboratory bargaining games to show the physiological mechanisms through which participants experience changes in bargaining power. Thus, in addition to the qualitative and survey-based evidence familiar to many political psychologists, psychological approaches to IR can also draw from new types of evidence—hormonal, neurological, or physiological—to answer their questions.

Third, in contrast to the reductionism of earlier attempts to incorporate human nature into political science, genetic, biological, and evolutionary work often combines and inverts levels of analysis, similar to the first-image-reversed scholarship discussed above. The workhorse of behavioral genetic research, for example, is gene  $\times$  environment interaction models. Rather than simply showing that political behavior has genetic origins, scholars demonstrate how environmental factors activate genetic predispositions (Caspi & Moffitt 2006). Social neuroscience explicitly focuses on how the neural level and social environment interact (Berntson & Cacioppo 2004, Holmes 2018). Evolutionary political psychologists focus on evolved psychological mechanisms designed by natural selection in response to adaptive problems in ancestral environments, which manifest themselves in an interaction with present-day environmental cues (Lopez et al. 2011).

Finally, one of the appeals of evolutionary political psychological approaches is the extent to which they offer a unifying framework, promoting a psychology that is explanatory rather than simply a descriptive assortment of empirical regularities. Evolutionary psychology suggests that, rather than consisting of an assorted array of heuristics and biases, many of these biases in fact serve

functional purposes (Petersen 2015); rather than viewing prospect theory as a documentation of deviations from rational models, for example, evolutionary psychology seeks to explain its origins (McDermott et al. 2008).

## CONCLUSION

We argue in this review that recent developments in psychological approaches to IR mirror broader changes in the discipline. Many of these changes—the demise of food fights between psychological and rationalist approaches, for example—are arguably for the better. So too is the sheer diversity of substantive questions and methodological approaches with which psychological insights are being applied. Psychology in IR is not just about why decision makers make mistakes anymore. Indeed, we identify above a wide range of areas of research—the surge of interest in emotions and hot cognition, the rise of more psychologically informed theories of public opinion in IR, a nascent research program we dub the first image reversed, and neurobiological and evolutionary work—where psychology in IR looks quite different than it did several decades ago. Even IPE, where psychological work has historically been underrepresented, is beginning to develop an interest in what goes on in between the ears.

However, we end on two points of caution, one involving how we import psychological insights and the other involving whether we export them. First, although political scientists have become adept importers of psychological insights, psychology is an active and multivocal discipline; importing selectively risks fostering the impression that far more consensus exists in psychology than may actually be the case. Similarly, many propositions or paradigms that were once well entrenched in social psychology—and continue to be viewed that way by many political scientists—are now less so, including groupthink and the fundamental attribution error (Malle et al. 2007, Turner & Pratkanis 1998). IR scholars should obviously continue to import psychological insights—but critically (e.g., with respect to groupthink, see Horowitz et al. 2017, Mintz & Wayne 2016).

Second, if IR was perhaps once defined by an interest in anarchy, political psychology was once defined—perhaps more by its critics than its proponents—by an interest in pathologies of foreign policy decision making. Neither definition holds true today. Yet just as there are concerns about what holds IR together in an era when the discipline has let a thousand theoretical flowers bloom (Dunne et al. 2013), the panoply of psychological approaches discussed above poses a similar dilemma. There are very few ontological and epistemological assumptions shared between the behavioral revolution and the neurobiological revolution, for example. At the same time, however, psychological work in IR is better positioned than ever before to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge outside of the narrow confines of political science. Rather than simply importing psychological theories into IR [what Krosnick & McGraw (2002) call psychological political science], IR scholars conducting psychological work should seek to export insights to other fields, as they are starting to do with evolutionary and neurobiological research. Behavioral work in IPE should similarly be able to offer insights for behavioral economics more broadly. Many of the most important theoretical developments in IR have come from scholars expressing a willingness to engage with scholarship across disciplinary boundaries; continued engagement can only further enrich our understanding of international affairs.

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