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Personality and Politics: Introduction to the Special Issue

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ABSTRACT This special issue of *Journal of Personality* brings together 10 original articles addressing the intersection of personality and politics. Articles build on classic traditions in political psychology by presenting both idiographic and nomothetic work on the motivational, cognitive, ideological, attitudinal, and identity correlates of many different aspects of political behavior. This work is used to understand political activism and leadership as well as everyday political behavior. We hope this collection of articles will inspire our readers to explore new investigations in personality and political psychology.

This year's special issue of *Journal of Personality* is devoted to the topic of personality and politics. Personality researchers have a long tradition of interest in political psychology, focusing attention on both idiographic and nomothetic methods. Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford's (1950) *The Authoritarian Personality* combined these two approaches to develop an understanding of how fascism arose across the globe in the 1930s and 1940s. Adorno and colleagues' work described the authoritarian syndrome within individuals, marked by characteristics such as conventionalism, obedience to authority, and punitiveness toward transgressors of social mores. In part because of Adorno and colleagues' (1950) F-scale and through the use of experimental and survey designs, authoritarianism as a nomothetic variable became one of the single most studied topics in personality psychology during the past 60 years.

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Personality psychologists also have a long history of studying the characteristics of political leaders at the idiographic level. For example, Murray's (1943) analysis of Hitler, George and George's studies of Woodrow Wilson (1956), and Erikson's (1969) work on Mahatma Gandhi were early psychobiographical examinations of political figures. In the current issue, Duncan continues this tradition of using psychological theory to better understand the individual case. In particular, Duncan takes well-known theories of collective action and considers how they can be used to understand the lives and activism of U.S. President Barack Obama, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and former neo-Nazi Ingo Hasselbach.

Other personality psychologists have combined case studies with quantitative methods to produce empirically sound and generalizable findings. Studies of this sort rely on personality assessment at a distance (Winter, 1991)—most prominently, motives and cognitive styles. Winter's (1987) content analysis of the motive profiles of the first 34 American presidents showed that motive congruence between presidents and their societies was related to popular appeal but that the power motive of the president (regardless of match with voters' motives) was related to being rated as "great" by presidential historians. Similarly, Tetlock's (1981; see also Suedfeld & Rank, 1976) content analysis of the cognitive and integrative complexity of presidents pre- and postelection showed that successful presidents simplified their rhetoric preelection but then became more complex postelection. In the current issue, pioneers of at-a-distance assessment summarize and extend their own work. Winter addresses a long-standing question for researchers who study the social motives of achievement, affiliation-intimacy, and power. Why does achievement motivation predict success for leaders in business but not in politics? In his analysis, he argues that a person high in achievement motivation requires situational control for success. This kind of control is more likely in business than in a pluralistic political system where individual control is often frustrated or constrained by others. Suedfeld reviews and updates his research on integrative complexity in political leaders. Integrative complexity assesses a leader's cognitive understanding of an issue at a specific moment in time. At that moment, complexity is a function of habitual personal cognitive complexity and external pressures (e.g., danger or time pressure). Suedfeld showcases how integrative complexity can be used by researchers to transcend historical eras, geographical distance, and

political landscapes to study how leaders of all kinds (including military, scientific, and terrorist) make good and poor decisions.

Another area of interest for personality psychologists has been the study of the relationship between individual political attitudes and behavior in more general populations. One behavior of great interest is political activism. What characteristics of people lead them to individual or collective political action? Some of the earliest research on this topic (on 1960s U.S. college students) showed that activist behaviors were correlated with cognitive flexibility, autonomy, and impulse expression (e.g., Block, Haan, & Smith, 1973). Personality psychologists have recently implicated additional characteristics in political activism: personal political salience (Duncan & Stewart, 2007), political self-efficacy (Cole & Stewart, 1996), generativity (Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, & Bauer, 2001), authoritarianism (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997), openness to experience (Curtin, Stewart, & Duncan, 2010), optimism (Galvin & Herzog, 1998), and need to evaluate (Bizer et al., 2004). In this special issue, two researchers continue this tradition. Guided by their Volunteer Process Model (Snyder & Omoto, 2008), Omoto, Snyder, and Hackett examine the dispositional and motivational correlates of community engagement and AIDS activism. They show that extraversion and other-focused motivation predict civic engagement and activism better than other variables. Further, they find that AIDS activism is related to broader-based civic engagement. They argue that involvement in activism for a specific cause motivates individuals to get involved in more general ways in their communities.

Similarly, McFarland reviews the literature that links individual difference characteristics to support for international human rights. He finds that globalism, identification with all humanity, principled moral reasoning, benevolence, and empathy are positively related to support for human rights, and that ethnocentrism, social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Altemeyer, 1988) are negatively related. McFarland presents and tests a structural model that shows that ethnocentrism and identification with all humanity mediate the relationship between authoritarianism and human rights commitment.

In the current issue, researchers also demonstrate how individual differences relate to other aspects of politics. Van Hiel, Onraet, and De Pauw focus on the relationship between objective measures of

cognitive style and political attitudes. In their meta-analysis, they report moderate relationships between sociocultural right-wing attitudes and behavioral-type measures of intolerance of ambiguity and (lower) cognitive ability. The relationships between right-wing attitudes and measures of rigidity, complexity, and field dependence are more mixed. Van Hiel and colleagues' work complements the work of Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003), who reported more uniformly positive relationships between conservatism and self-report measures of cognitive style.

Peterson and Zurbriggen take the classic construct of authoritarianism and demonstrate how this very political variable can be used to organize nonpolitical attitudes. They review the literature on authoritarianism and gender and generate specific hypotheses regarding the way men and women think about gender, cross-gender relationships, and sexual behavior. Peterson and Zurbriggen show that women and men high in authoritarianism live in rigidly gendered worlds where female and male roles are defined in narrow ways. Authoritarianism is related to support for traditional gender roles, desire for traditional relationships, and support for adversarial sexual beliefs. Although not traditionally considered a political domain, research on gender roles and sexuality can have far-reaching political implications.

In recent years in political psychology, the strict distinction between personality and social psychological variables has blurred, and many researchers in the field take approaches that consider individual differences in characteristics of the person within various situations. In the current issue, Leach adds to the ongoing meta-theoretical discussion on this topic by considering particular ways in which a clear view of "the person" is absent in much of social psychological research on political attitudes and behavior. Using his own work on political emotion as illustrative, Leach describes a number of strategies that researchers can use to illuminate individual differences and arrive at a deeper, more complex, and more accurate understanding of the political processes under investigation.

Complicating the distinction between personality and ideology, Duckitt and Sibley argue that authoritarianism and SDO are best considered sociopolitical variables rather than personality characteristics. In their article, Duckitt and Sibley continue to sharpen a dual process motivational model that makes sense of how personality dispositions and socialized worldview beliefs influence ideological attitudes such as authoritarianism and SDO. Their model makes

logical predictions about how authoritarianism and SDO are activated and made relevant for different kinds of political actors.

Distinctions between attitudes, ideology, and identity have also become increasingly important for researchers to make. In this issue, Zucker and Bay-Cheng demonstrate this clearly, finding that support for feminist attitudes and ideology does not necessarily translate into willingness to identify as feminists. Additionally, the willingness to take on the feminist label is predictive of a host of outcomes, including increased political activism.

As a field of inquiry, political psychology cuts across disciplinary boundaries to encompass a variety of fields, including history, political science, psychology, and sociology. The articles in this special issue highlight the importance of personality psychology for this interdisciplinary mix. Personality and individual differences play a fundamental role in the formation, maintenance, and expression of political attitudes and ideologies. They can help us understand the actions of political leaders, activists, and dissidents, as well as ordinary men and women. They illuminate the driving forces behind such diverse behaviors as volunteering with AIDS patients, embracing (and then rejecting) neo-Nazi ideologies, and succeeding (or failing) as political or military leaders. Personality psychology will continue to play an important role in our understanding of political events and processes. This special issue showcases some of the best such work to date and will, we hope, spur new investigations among our readers.

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