

# Opportunities in Political Psychology: Heterogeneities in Theory, Methodologies, and the Production of Knowledge

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Version: May 26, 2023

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The twenty-first century has brought fundamental changes. Politically, there has been a worldwide decline in democracy. In 2012, 42 countries were classified as liberal democracies and in 2021, it was down to 34. Many still democratic countries have moved in an autocratic direction with palpable consequences. In the United States, partisan polarization contributed to a tragic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These national and world events highlight the need for strong social sciences. Concomitant with these transformations has been fundamental change in the social sciences with the embrace of open science practices and increased focus on causal identification. With all of this in mind, how can we better understand and improve the organization of politics and society? How can political psychology best contribute? Druckman argues that one way the field could advance even further involves being more thoughtful about heterogeneities in theory, methodologies, and the production of knowledge. He discusses each of these dimensions, arguing that embracing variations in each will strengthen the power of political psychology.

The twenty-first century has brought fundamental changes. Politically, there has been a worldwide decline in democracy. The Varieties of Democracy project reports that the level of democracy, on average, in 2021 is akin to 1989 levels, meaning the last 30 years of democratic advances eroded (Boese et al. 2022). In 2012, 42 countries were classified as liberal democracies and in 2021, it was down to 34. Many still democratic countries have moved in an autocratic direction with palpable consequences. In the United States, partisan polarization, that the aforementioned report links to erosion (Boese et al. 2022: 33), contributed to a tragic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Partisans divided, collective actions were not taken, and many lives were lost (Gollwitzer et al. 2020). These national and world events highlight the need for strong social sciences: how can we better understand and improve the organization of politics and society?

This has become an even more acute challenge due to another transformation in many countries—that is, vast demographic change due to immigration and varying birth and death rates. Again, the U.S. serves as an example with the projection of the White population becoming a numeric minority by the 2040s (Frey 2018); this has led some citizens to feel threatened, adapt their policy views in an exclusive direction (Craig and Richeson 2014), and perceive a weakening of American culture (Parker et al. 2019). In short, there have been alterations in regimes and populations. Complicating the social science challenge is that they themselves have transformed, with technological advances making data much more available and shifting norms of open science altering approaches and methodologies (Druckman 2022).

With these trends as context, how can political psychology best contribute? There is little doubt that political psychology has a crucial role to play. Indeed, politics involves the study of collective decision making among entities with competing interests who seek power within a

system. This fundamentally involves how people make decisions which, in turn, requires attention to psychology. More than a decade ago, I co-authored a critical essay that argued that political psychology, at least in some domains, had not displayed sufficient cross-field immersion and integration (Druckman et al. 2009). Regardless of the fairness of that critique, the ensuing years have made clear that those who consider psychological processes in political contexts have offered countless insights about social, economic, and political outcomes. One clear indicator comes from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, more than forty authors came together to offer a set of insights for effective response to COVID-19 (van Bavel et al. 2020). More than two years later, the authors along with additional scholars, evaluated the recommendations in the original article (by assessing nearly 750 research studies), finding clear evidence on behalf of 16 of 19 claims (Ruggeri et al. n.d.). Most of the claims involved psychological phenomena occurring in what became a very politicized context. Indeed, the strongest evidence concerns the effects of partisan polarization and misinformation and interventions involving trusted leaders (cues) and social norms. This accentuates the potential power of political psychology.

Of course, demonstrating political psychology's prowess did not require a pandemic—it is clear the field has made substantial strides in advancing the knowledge and practice of democratic representation (e.g., Neblo et al. 2018), political deliberation (Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014), counteracting fake news (Lazer et al. 2018), climate change mitigation and adaptation (Kahan 2015, Raymond et al. 2021), addressing harassment and prejudice (e.g., Paluck and Shepherd 2012, Paluck et al. 2016), conflict resolution (e.g., Fisher et al. 2013), and much more. This is further evident by the chapters in the Handbook that provide a portrait of a progressive field covering coalition formation and inter-personal engagement (e.g., social

influence), normative theory (e.g., capacity, competence), change (e.g., persuasion), as well as novel methodological advances (e.g., genetics).

Yet, is political psychology exploiting its full capacity, particularly in an age of democratic erosion, demographic transformation, and scientific evolution? I argue that one way the field could advance even further involves being more thoughtful about heterogeneities in theory, methodologies, and the production of knowledge. Consider for example the COVID-19 insights concerning polarization. While polarization effects proved fairly robust across national contexts (Flores et al. 2022), there were essential contextual heterogeneities; for instance, in areas with severe outbreaks or where individuals had adverse personal experiences, partisan gaps narrowed or evaporated (e.g., Druckman et al. 2021, Constantino et al. 2022). Further, cross-nationally, the presence of expert sponsored policies played a depolarizing role (Flores et al. 2022). These findings accentuate the contingent nature of partisan identity in driving societal outcomes; in the latter case, they also make clear that, going forward, it is crucial to try to limit the politicization of experts.

In what follows, I move beyond this single example to discuss how increased focus on heterogeneities—that is, variabilities—could benefit political psychology in terms of theory development, methodologies, and the production of knowledge (in that order). To be clear, I do not mean to imply that political psychologists have ignored heterogeneities in each domain. Indeed, large bodies of work focus on individual psychological differences (e.g., Zaller 1992, Bizer et al. 2004, Jost 2021) and some scholarship explores contextual variations (e.g., Soroka et al. 2019, Stark et al. 2020). The field also embraces various approaches including experiments, surveys, interviews, historical analyses, and so on. It also, for many, is a field that privileges the values of equality and justice (Jost 2021: 336-327) and consequently concerns itself with the

plight of marginalized groups. My point, rather, is to emphasize that embracing and prioritizing heterogeneity as a guiding principle would bode well for the field.<sup>1</sup>

### **Heterogeneity in Theory**

This section discusses the need to better leverage the inherent heterogeneity of approaches within political psychology as well as how to integrate the heterogeneity of social science theories (i.e., rational choice and psychological approaches). It then discusses two central sources of heterogeneity (context and actors) and the need to appreciate a broader range of variations within each. The topics explored here, and in the subsequent sections, are not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive.

### ***Heterogeneous Approaches and Foci***

Political psychologists do not uniformly adhere to a set of premises, and this can be seen as a strength of the approach. Yet, it also can undercut integration within political psychology and with alternative approaches, most notably rational choice. I discuss each in turn.

### ***Integrating Heterogeneous Approaches and Foci Within Political Psychology.***

Political psychology typically embraces understanding internal mechanisms of reasoning that include considerations covered in the Handbook such as norms, identity, emotion, physiology, evolution, attitudes, etc. It also addresses the external processes that influence those psychological mechanisms; this includes socialization, networks, deliberation, persuasion/communication, etc. (Druckman and Lupia 2000). These lists reflect substantial

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<sup>1</sup> This coheres with Bryan et al.'s (2021) call for a heterogeneity revolution in behavioral science: "heterogeneity can be leveraged to build more complete theories of causal mechanism that could inform nuanced and dependable guidance to policymakers" (980).

heterogeneity in perspectives, mechanisms, and influences. Yet, there also is siloing among approaches within political psychology.<sup>2</sup>

For instance, in climate change research—perhaps one of the most pressing political challenges of our time—much work looks at the development of climate change attitudes. This includes psychologically oriented work that focuses on norms (Bolsen et al. 2014), contact (Goldberg et al. 2019), deliberation (Dietz 2013), cue-giving (Merkley and Stecula 2018, Bayes and Druckman 2021), framing (Feinberg and Willer 2013), perspective taking (Hart and Nisbet 2012), efficacy (Feldman and Hart 2016), ideology (Hornsey et al. 2016), and experiences (Egan and Mullin 2017). Yet, this heterogeneity has not been integrated sufficiently well. For instance, when does one variable play a larger role than others and among whom do different factors matter? Moreover, scholars in this area have not even coordinated on the crucial outcome variable to study. The modal study documents belief in climate change, or belief in anthropogenic climate change. Other work looks at more consequential variables including opposition and

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<sup>2</sup> Mintz et al. (2022) put forth the behavioral political science paradigm; they characterize it as follows: “The field of Political Psychology consists of various independent and interrelated research programs, theories, and models about the role of psychology in politics and the psychological effects of political events and decisions. Behavioral Political Science integrates these approaches into *one* overarching, comprehensive theoretical framework about what motivates decision makers and how they process information on the way to making political choices” (3, italics in original). They highlight six major schools of thought in their paradigm (cognitive, individual biases, group biases, emotions, nonmaterial goals, and social identity). Their effort coheres with mine – in pushing for more integration among these schools.

support for public policies, international regimes, and behavioral intentions. What levers shape one type of outcome may not influence another. Consider Levine and Kline's (2017) experiment. They provided recipients with a generic message about taking action to address climate change, a public health message about taking climate change action, or a food risk message about taking climate change action (e.g., prevent food shortages). They find that loss frames (emphasizing health and food risk) cause people to believe climate change should be a policy priority. Yet, they also show that these loss frames depress climate-relevant behaviors such as joining a climate advocacy group.<sup>3</sup> Bolsen and Druckman (2018) show that a statement about a scientific consensus on climate change affects individuals' perceptions of the consensus but only indirectly affects their beliefs about climate change or policy beliefs. These indirect effects though do not manifest among high knowledge Republicans. These studies exemplify the heterogeneity in stimuli, outcome, and individuals. The potential to exploit this has been largely missed and requires that scholars focusing on a given variable or group attend to (climate change) political psychology work with distinct foci.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The logic is that, relative to gains frames, loss frames lead people to support preventing the loss (their attitude) but they also make salient personal resource constraints leading people to not act (also see Levine and Kline 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps ironically, too, the psychological processes often posited to underlie the formation of climate change opinions have gone largely unexplored (Druckman and McGrath 2019, Bayes et al. 2020).



Another example is work on support for political violence where scholars have looked at aggressiveness (Kalmoe and Mason 2022), meta-perceptions (Mernyk et al. 2022), norms (Kalmoe and Mason 2022), race and gender (Bardall et al. 2020, Herrick and Thomas 2022a), age (Jahnke et al. 2022), mental health (Baum et al. 2023), anger (Romero-Martínez et al. 2020), conspiracy beliefs (Jolly and Paterson 2020), ideology (Webber et al. 2020), cues (Clayton et al. 2021, Arceneaux and Truex 2022), and (polarization) context (Herrick and Thomas 2022b). As with climate change, there is scant attempt to identify the conditions under which different variables matter. Further, there is a crucial distinction between those who support political violence and those who engage in it (Webber et al. 2020) which has sometimes been confounded in extant work.

These illustrative cases highlight the heterogeneity of approaches that ideally would provide an opportunity for integration. Yet, the tendency to fractionalize into relatively narrow areas (e.g., on norms and climate change opinions or cues and violence) undermines the potential to create linkages and identify conditions. As Bryan et al. (2021: 980) state, it is a “fact that nearly all phenomena occur under some conditions and not others.” Political psychologists tend to focus on main effects rather than conditionalities. The way to change this is increased attention to related ongoing research on the same topic and that from the past. This latter point is important to prevent reinventing ideas (e.g., the study of political violence has greatly expanded in recent years, sometimes with insufficient attention to the sizeable existing corpus of work).

### *Integrating Heterogeneous Approaches and Foci Across the Social Sciences*

Political psychology inherently draws on differing perspectives given its interdisciplinary nature. This is also made clear by some recent developments such as the incorporation of genetics, evolutionary psychology, etc. However, it has often been seen as contrary to another

major approach: rational choice that typically assumes individuals have well ordered (complete, transitive, invariant) preferences over outcomes and act instrumentally to maximize the likelihood of obtaining an outcome consistent with those preferences (e.g., Mintz et al. 2022: 2, 24). While there have been long-standing discussions and debates on the topic, there is insufficient appreciation about heterogeneity in the relevance of one approach or another. The debates have ostensibly dwindled somewhat (but not disappeared), reflecting the less prominent place of rational choice in political science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (with an increased shift towards empirical work, causal identification; Huber 2013), and/or the emergence of behavioral economics and similar approaches that integrate rational choice and psychological assumptions. Yet, there could be more lessons and engagement with the heterogeneity of these approaches. Some thought along these lines leads to two insights that could advance understanding. First, the context of decision-making matters. For example, Riker (1995: 34) long ago critiqued political psychology for not introducing competitive information streams into experiments: “Such dueling is almost universal in the real world but unknown in the laboratory.” Indeed, the incorporation of political context changes outcomes and decision-making processes. Druckman (2001) shows that the classic disease framing effect where individuals tend to opt for a risk-seeking option when framed in terms of losses and an (identical) risk-averse option when framed in terms of gains disappears when parties provide cues of which option to prefer. Similarly, Chong and Druckman (2007) show that people express more support for a hate group’s right to rally when it is framed in terms of free speech rather than public safety. Yet, when individuals receive both a public safety and free speech frame at the same time, they assess the strength of each (e.g., which comes from a more credible source) and act accordingly. Here, the introduction of such competition seems to trigger more deliberate decision-making.

Another example, referenced earlier, comes from work on the COVID-19 pandemic. In the U.S. (and elsewhere), one of the most robust findings concerned conservatives or Republicans being less supportive of public health behaviors and policies (and more supportive of privileging the economy), relative to liberals or Democrats. Part of this stemmed from partisan elites providing cues along those lines and citizens following suit because they found elites credible and/or to signal their partisan identity. Yet, when Republicans found themselves in areas of high cases or had experienced a severe personal negative COVID-19 situation, they exhibited more support the public health perspective. Threat altered their reasoning, triggering more instrumental and less identity-based motives in decision making (Druckman et al. 2021, Constantino et al. 2022).

Second, incentives matter. The prior discussion makes clear that context can shift incentives that then alter processing. More generally, some actors will be incentivized to act with more strategic/instrumental calculations. Fiorina (1995: 88) explains rational choice models “are most useful where stakes are high and numbers low, in recognition that it is not rational to go to the trouble to maximize if the consequences are trivial and/or your actions make no difference...” Satz and Ferejohn (1994: 72) explain “We believe that rational-choice explanations are most plausible in settings in which individual action is severely constrained, and thus where the theory gets its explanatory power from structure-generated interests and not from actual individual psychology. In the absence of strong environmental constraints, we believe that rational choice is a weak theory, with limited predictive power... the theory of rational choice is most powerful in contexts where choice is limited.” They go on to explain that the theory thus has more purchase in explaining party behavior as opposed to voter behavior. This is a context related argument but also has more subtility because it highlights that different actors in the

political system may be differentially motivated—there is heterogeneity among political actors in how decisions are made, contingent on their incentives and menu of choices. For instance, Sheffer et al. (2023) show that when legislators bargain with one another they are much more generous in what they offer each other than what they offer when bargaining with citizens. The authors (13) explain that the findings “help us understand an important feature of legislative institutions: they teach politicians how to work together.” Similarly, Enemark et al. (2016) find office holders display more reciprocity than non-office holders—they offer experimental evidence that the difference in reciprocity stems from the causal effect of institutions on political behavior.

These results make clear that different actors act differently, and incentives and calculated thinking becomes socialized among elites. Recognizing these types of heterogeneities can be quite powerful as they also encourage theorists to account for the supply and demand of politics. For example, citizens seem to engage more with uncivil rhetoric due to negativity biases and out-group degradation a la basic social identity theory. Politicians strategically (and rationally) consider how to maximize attention and thus they become incentivized to use uncivil rhetoric on social media where reactions are fast and not particularly thought out (i.e., subject to biases). This leads to a loop of increasing incivility—exactly what Frimer et al. (2023) find: members of Congress get more attention when they send uncivil social media messages, and this attention leads to more incivility, etc. That said, Republican/conservative voters are relatively more averse to incivility due to the appeal of structure/order (Mutz et al. 2015, Druckman et al. 2019) and thus, we would expect this loop to be strongest among Democrats, which also is what Frimer et al. find (also see Chang et al. 2023). This reveals how thinking about heterogeneity in

reasoning (i.e., strategic and rational politicians and identity-affirming voters) can lead to an understanding of how political systems work.

To be clear, elites and citizens do not consistently act in particular manners; indeed, elites often exhibit similar decision-making biases as citizens (Tetlock 2005, Sheffer et al. 2018), and citizens sometimes act strategically and instrumentally (Lupia and McCubbins 1998, Eggers and Vivyan 2020). The point is that consideration of varying contexts and actors leads to the application of distinct theoretical paradigms including those more typical in political psychology and those more typical of rational choice: heterogeneity not just within political psychology but across the social sciences.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Sources of Heterogeneity: Context and Actors***

The discussion thus far makes clear that theory needs to account for variation in contexts and actors (individuals). Doing so is not new to political psychology, of course (e.g., Lewin 1951). However, there are various sources of heterogeneity within each that often receive insufficient attention, as I now discuss.

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<sup>5</sup> This could help advance a very long-standing debate on the nature of partisan identification between the instrumental (more rational) and expressive (more psychological) approaches. Huddy and Bankert (2017) in fact make such a call, stating that there “is growing evidence that instrumental and expressive accounts of partisanship may explain vote choice and public opinion at different times, under differing conditions, and among different segments of the electorate... several unanswered questions are worthy of future research... the interplay of instrumental and expressive aspects of partisanship requires closer attention.”

## *Heterogeneity in Context*

The prior discussion makes clear that heterogeneity in context affects how people make decisions (as do the earlier examples concerning COVID-19). Regardless of one's theoretical approach (within or across political psychology), researchers should think carefully about contextual variation. Goroff et al. (2019, 1) state, it “is time to address this context sensitivity problem in social science research. While we do not yet know *how* to solve it, we believe social scientists can make great progress by working together to build an inference engine” (italics in the original). This is particularly true in political science—a discipline defined by its context (Druckman and Lupia 2006). While an impressive attribute of political psychology has been its international focus, there is limited exploration into contextual differences. Here I highlight four avenues (given extant work) that seem promising for future study.

First, political institutions offer an obvious source of contextual variation, and the field of comparative politics has uncovered substantial effects of institutions on political outcomes (e.g., electoral systems, regime type, economic institutions, time pressure, transparency). These factors also influence psychological processes. Consider work on affective polarization—the extent to which partisans dislike those from the other party relative to their like for members of their own party. A sizeable literature studies the causes, consequences, and ways to temper it (e.g., Iyenger et al. 2019, Finkel et al. 2020). The level of affective polarization also depends on the institutional context. Gidron et al. (2020) show that countries with majoritarian electoral institutions tend to be more affectively polarized, presumably because they bifurcate cleavages. Along these lines, Bassan-Nygate and Weiss (2022) document how institutional processes within a system matter. In a study over seven Israeli election cycles, they show that as electoral competition increases so does affective polarization, but the presence of inter-party cooperation

(via coalition building and a possible unity government) depolarizes. Since majoritarian institutions disincentive cooperation, they likely exacerbate affective polarization.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Hobolt et al. (2021) show how the inter-state institutions generate novel affectively polarized cleavage. They show that Britain's 2016 referendum about exiting from the European Union generated affective issue polarization between those for and those against, which cut across parties and equaled the intensity of partisan affective polarization. A distinct example of institutional effects come from Baum and Potter (2015). The authors explore heterogeneity within democracies by characterizing the extent of public access to information (free media) and elite political opposition. Leaders in countries with high levels of both anticipate public reactions more and this leads them to be less likely to go to war. Here the nature of democratic institutions shapes inter-state decision-making.

A second contextual consideration revolves around space. Many political and social interactions occur in a specific space, and so what happens in one space may not affect attitudes and behaviors in another. Mousa's (2020) study of intergroup contact shows that attitudes can change due to interpersonal exchanges. Mousa assigned Christian amateur soccer teams in northern Iraq to randomly receive three additional Christian players or three additional (displaced) Muslim players. Christian players on teams that added Muslims expressed more tolerant attitudes toward training with Muslims or playing on a mixed team in the future. However, they did not become more tolerant of interactions with Muslims not on the teams, in

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<sup>6</sup> Another examples comes from Nir (2012) who shows that electoral institutions shape the amount and nature of interpersonal discussion (e.g., electoral systems that breed greater competitiveness lead to more discussion).

contexts such as attending neighborhood social events or patronizing Muslim businesses. Wiest et al. (2015) find a related dynamic in a study of climate change messaging. Frames focusing on local (state) conditions alter perceptions of the severity of climate change and support for subnational policies. However, the frames do not carry over to influence support for policy efforts at the national or global levels. These types of findings connect to construal theory, which holds that people construe psychologically proximal targets in more concrete terms (Liberman and Trope 1998). The point is that phenomena will vary in terms of how much processes generalize across space.

Third, political interactions vary based on the norms or process of engagement. Politics often involve environments rife with conflict and individualism (Groenendyk and Krupnikov 2021). Yet, another depiction of politics posits a public endeavor of deliberation for a common good (also see Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014). In this latter engage in relatively more open-minded assessments. Using the issue of gun control, Groenendyk and Krupnikov (2021) demonstrate that settings privileging open-mindedness (e.g., linking it to life success) lead individuals to evaluate arguments counter to their standing beliefs in an open-minded fashion. Individuals also arrive at moderate opinions in response to a mix of arguments. In political settings, by comparison, individuals think of conflict and engage in directional (biased) processing aimed to protect their standing opinions or identities. This is particularly the case in the presence of extreme partisan differences (Druckman et al. 2013). Norms of this sort may be of increasing relevance given how politics have spilt over to the marketplace (Druckman and Valdes 2019) and evidence that entertainment settings shape political views (Kim 2023). Norms presumably differ in the market and leisure spheres and so might the processing of politics.



Fourth, related to norms, is attention to culture and how it shapes processing and beliefs. For instance, Stark et al. (2020) show that priming evenhandedness alters attitudes. Reminding labor activists of the possibility of labor campaign contributions leads them to be more supportive of business contributions (i.e., they offer more evenhanded evaluations). Yet, this effect is not nearly as strong in countries that have collectivist cultures (e.g., Asian countries) because evenhandedness considerations are chronically accessible. Soroka et al. (2019) study the impact of negative news content in 17 countries across 6 continents. They find evidence of higher attentiveness and arousal during exposure to negative stories. However, these differences do not connect to country-level contextual factors. In this case, there is less evidence of a cultural impact, which itself is intriguing given that prior research had been concentrated in Anglo-Saxon countries.

In addition to considering contemporary culture, scholars would benefit from attending to historic cultural mores and how they shape current political psychological dynamics. Henderson et al. (2021) show that, at the county level, the more lynching of Black people that occurred in the past, the greater the number of contemporary Confederate memorials. Trawalter et al. (2023) show that historic tropes of Africa as a land of depravity and disease carry over to Americans exhibiting great worry about pandemic originating in Africa (versus elsewhere) and more supportive of restrictions towards Africa during COVID-19. This line of work reveals how histories of discrimination shape culture and consequently behavior.

In sum, political psychology, by definition, should provide compelling insights into the effect of (political) contexts on psychological processes. This has not, though, been a central focus. The examples discussed make clear that increased attention to institutions, spatial proximity, norms or processes, and culture would enhance theorizing.

### *Heterogeneity Among Individuals*

I earlier discussed variation between elites and citizens. More generally, individual differences have received an enormous amount of attention in political psychology with studies exploring variations in demographics, personality, values, identities, positionality, sophistication, needs/motivations, etc. Yet, these sources of heterogeneity are sometimes used due to their availability rather than theory. Also, there are some key sources of heterogeneity that have received insufficient attention, and perhaps most importantly, one needs to consider the intersection of individual variation with contextual variation.

With regard to the first point, there is a tendency to focus on available data that often include demographic and political variables. For instance, Coppock et al. (2018) explore individual heterogeneities in 27 survey experiments on persuasion and attitude formation, looking at six variables (age, education, gender, ideology, partisanship, and race) and find none systematically moderate the effects. While they include appropriate caveats in the text, they also (12441) state “the overwhelming pattern that emerges is one of treatment effect homogeneity.” Coppock (2023) goes further, arguing that political persuasion often occurs “in parallel,” meaning that “people from different groups respond to persuasive information in the same direction and by the same amount” (2) (also see Green et al. 2023). While he (65) briefly acknowledges the possibility of other individual moderators, he also expresses skepticism.<sup>7</sup> His

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<sup>7</sup> Coppock suggests that any such variable likely interacts with characteristics of the message and issue; that is certainly reasonable and probably correct. However, that does not invalidate the possibility of what he calls “person-constant” variables. Instead, it suggests the levels of such variables for a given individual will vary across messages and issues.

work is certainly valuable, but it also does not explicitly incorporate sources of individual heterogeneity typically studied in the psychology persuasion literature—most notably knowledge, consistency, self-worth, and social approval that influence motives (Albarracín, et al. 2018, Briñol and Petty 2018). Briñol and Petty (2018: 576) explain that these variables “have been shown to be relevant to attitudes and attitude change.” The authors suggests that variables without clear links to motives (e.g., demographic, skills and abilities, and personality) likely matter more for targeted rather than general persuasion.

To be clear, caution needs to be taken in expanding the search for individual sources of heterogeneity to prevent the proliferation of overlapping constructs. However, more consideration of psychological motivational variables could advance work in political psychology (e.g., Chong and Druckman 2010, Bayes et al. 2020). This needs to be done while also not abandoning attention to trait constant variables such as demographics and personality. For one, these types of factors have become increasingly relevant in an age of targeted communications that aim to exploit individual heterogeneities (e.g., Tappin et al. 2022). Further, work on intersectionality makes clear that the interaction of variables, notably demographic features, matter. For instance, Bonilla and Tillery (2020) show that upon receiving frames for BLM that tie in Black feminist and LGBTQ+ populations—depress overall mobilization, particularly among Black men. They explain, “social movement frames based on subgroup identities can generate segmented public support for those movements” (959).

In addition to motivational and demographic sources of heterogeneity, recent work has accentuated the relevance of developmental and social experiences. For instance, Holbein and Hillygus (2020) show that a primary hurdle for young voters’ participation is self-regulation—that is, the ability to control one’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Life experiences more

generally demand more attention. For instance, Song et al. (2020) find that minorities and low-income respondents perceive several human-oriented issues as environmental. Relative to White people, Black and Hispanic individuals are significantly more likely to identify poverty, unemployment, diabetes, and racism as environmental issues. Those with lower household income are significantly more likely to identify unequal access to education and racism as environmental issues. Presumably, social experiences shape understanding of what constitutes an environmental issue (also see Lewandoswky et al. 2022). Marsh (2022) demonstrates how experiencing a traumatic event (e.g., arson attacks, mass shootings, natural disasters) typically decreases voter turnout, although some events mobilize Black voters who have high levels of Black social identity.

Finally, political psychologists have begun to account for the effects of health on political outcomes. Landwehr and Ojeda (2021) show that, across four countries, depressive symptoms substantially reduce the probability of voting by diminishing political motivation and physical energy (also see Ojeda 2015, Ojeda and Pacheco 2019). This limits participatory inclusiveness. Baum et al. (2023) show that depression when combined with conspiracy beliefs and/or participatory inclinations correlate with increased support for political violence.

Attention to individual variance has long been central to political psychology. However, theoretical development has been slow, partially due to continued focus on a limited set of variables. It has become increasingly clear that non-political, non-demographic features shape individual responses in the domain of politics.

### **Heterogeneity in Research Methodologies**

In this section, I turn to heterogenous methodologies. To be clear, as mentioned, political psychology has a relatively strong record of employing different approaches including

observational data, experiments, interviews, archival work, media data, etc. It also has long appreciated the role of methodological triangulation (Campbell and Fiske 1959). Nonetheless, there are heterogeneities in measurement, stimuli, levels of analyses, and timing that warrant additional attention. The issue lies not so much in general approach as much as in appreciation of variation within and across studies.

### ***Heterogeneity in Measures***

Psychologists often spend considerable time with scale validation. This is an area where political psychologists have not done nearly as well, often using single items without recognizing the need to use multiple items to increase reliability and ensure capturing the full content validity (variability) in measures.

An initial challenge concerns the habit of employing prior measures to capture concepts rather than starting with the concept and deriving an appropriate measure. This undermines basic construct validity. Consider ideological constraint or consistency, often defined as the extent to which individuals' positions on a range of public policies correlate with one another (Converse 1964, Kalmoe 2020). That voters tend to lack such constraint is widely studied and a starting point for several research programs. Yet, consider that this definition assumes that citizens adopt the issue positions put forth by elites across a wide range of policies and in a polar manner (i.e., being liberal indicates being not conservative). Jost (2021) argues this approach is backwards insofar as ideology emerges from individual psychology and not a superstructure imposed by elites. This more psychological approach to ideology suggests that individuals experience affinities to ideological ideas that mesh with their personalities and lifestyles. Their characteristics differentially cohere either with liberal ideas (that advocate social change and the reduction of inequality) or conservative ideas (that advocate tradition and order). The emphasis is

not on logical policy position consistency in accordance with elite positions but rather the development of preferences that reflect left and right understanding (i.e., inconsistencies in policy positions does not imply a ideological innocence).

Groenendyk et al. (2022) raise a distinct measurement issue with ideology consistency measures. They argue that ideological consistency across issues captures, at least partially, an injunctive norm: partisans know what policy positions should go with what policy positions, but they often chose to not hold such stances due to their own pragmatism. The authors present compelling evidence that policy consistency is as much a measure of adherence to norms as it is the holding of meaningful ideologies. This highlights the importance of interrogating measures and asking whether they gauge the underlying construct. My point is not to take a stance regarding ideology per se, but rather to use it as illustrative of ensuring measures cohere with constructs and considering measures from multiple angles.

Measures of attitudes about democratic principles reveal similar challenges. These measures have proliferated in recent years and are wide ranging. For instance, measures include those focused on a large list of concrete democratic practices (Carey et al. 2019), a moderate list of abstracted ideals (Kingzette et al. 2021), a small set of anti-democratic actions (Bartels 2020), the choice of undemocratic candidates (Graham and Slovik 2020), support for democracy over other regimes (Magalhães 2014), and so on. None are wrong, but also none necessarily have broad content validity, meaning capturing all the dimensions of democracy. (Of course, part of the challenge is the lack of consensus on “democracy”). One can imagine two dimensions (contestation/competition, participation/inclusiveness) (Dahl 1971) and possibly including the protection of civil rights as a third distinct dimension (or as enveloped in the others). Then across these dimensions exist at least four types of behaviors that would violate democratic practice:

violations of law (e.g., forging ballots, violence), violations of democratic norms (e.g., flouting court ruling, election overrides by state legislatures), violations of ideals (e.g., rejecting compromise, constraints on civil liberties), and power-consolidating changes to institutions (e.g., reducing ballot access, gerrymandering) (Ahmed 2022). Then across these two (or three) dimensions and four behaviors, one needs to identify precise behaviors or attitudes. Clearly, this is complex and requires consideration of multiple approaches to measurement.

One last measurement example concerns the use of various measures even when the construct is clear, such as voting turnout. Historically, a common question asked “Looking forward to the November election, do you intend to vote?” Yet, questions like this contain considerable bias such that respondents overstate the extent to which they vote, sometimes by more than 20% (e.g., Burden 2000). One solution involves normalizing the question to make respondents feel less pressure to mis-report a normatively preferred behavior, such as asking “In talking to people about elections, we often find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they are not registered, are sick, or they just don’t have time. How about you? Do you plan to vote?” This question generates less bias (e.g., Belli et al. 2006, DeBell et al. 2018). That said, using this normalized item makes comparisons with other studies that use the older measure difficult, if not impossible (Druckman 2022). It also still has bias which has led some to rely on administrative voting records. Those though also can be ridden with errors; for example, Berent et al. (2016) report that using administratively validated turnout figures ends up being as inaccurate as survey self-reports (even though the sources of inaccuracy differ). There are

heterogeneous measurements—whether multiple approaches should be used or which of the several depends on the researcher’s goal.<sup>8</sup>

Political psychologists should assess any measure with some skepticism and consider varying approaches. Recognition of heterogeneity in measurement even when it comes to considering long-standing items will increase validity and accuracy.

### ***Heterogeneity in Stimuli***

A distinct design-based area that deserves greater attention is the stimuli used. In a strict sense, this refers to experimental stimuli. Mutz (2021: 222) aptly describes the challenge, “Generalizability of treatments means *not* how often this particular stimulus happens in the real world, but whether the same effects occur when that same independent variable is altered in alternative ways, using different forms of treatment... this means it is important to induce variation in the independent variable in multiple ways” (italics in the original). Studies specify a theoretical construct as an independent variable—such as a social norms message or a negative campaign advertisement. The modal study employs a single operationalization. Doing so limits insight since one cannot know if the results expand beyond that operationalization; that would

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<sup>8</sup> Another example concerns measures of media exposure. It has long been acknowledged that self-reported measures of media exposure may be biased, leading some to employ behavioral measures such as web-browsing data. For instance, Wittenberg et al. (2023) find these distinct measurement approaches lead to different conclusions with the survey measures suggesting the possibility of persuasion by cross-cutting sources while the behavioral measures suggest very limited attitude change. To be clear though, behavioral measures are not inherently more valid insofar as they typically capture only exposure and not consumption (Green et al. n.d.).



require using heterogeneous stimuli, which can be done in a single study. For example, Block et al. (2022) implement an audit study that asked members of the general public whether they would take a survey, requested (randomly) from either an ostensibly Black sender or White sender. They find, on average, the public is less likely to respond to emails from people they believe to be Black. They employ the widely used technique of using stereotypical names to signal race. However, unlike many audit studies, the authors recognize that if they use a single name for a Black sender (e.g., Andre Jefferson) and a single name for a White sender (e.g., Nicholas Austin), they would not know if the results reflect idiosyncrasies of those names. They thus randomly employ five distinct names for each race, using this heterogeneity in stimuli to ensure generalizability.<sup>9</sup>

Another example comes from Kim (2023) who explores how reality television shows that feature non-celebrities who compete against one another for an economic prize affect attitudes about the American Dream. For stimuli, she randomly exposed those in the treatment condition to one of four such shows (e.g., Shark Tank, America's Got Talent). This was not part of the experimental design (i.e., not a condition per se) but rather a way to ensure that her finding that exposure increases belief in the American Dream stands for any such show (i.e., the results were robust to heterogeneous operationalization). This importance of heterogeneous operationalization is perhaps made most strongly by Landy et al. (2020) who show that different research teams tasked with testing the same hypothesis on a given question (across various topics moral

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<sup>9</sup> They also piloted the names to confirm perceptions and took several steps to preclude the potential confound by perceptions of socio-economic standing.

judgment, negotiation, and implicit cognition) take very distinct approaches and arrive at very different results.

A related form of heterogeneity concerns the topic on which to design a study. Work on policy opinions often focuses on a given issue or a few issues. Yet, ideally one would attend to a heterogeneous set of issues (unless the focus is literally on a particular policy). To see why, consider two examples. First, many experiments on public opinion suggest instability in opinions because they choose topics on which individuals do not have strong standing beliefs (e.g., campaign finance, urban sprawl, fictitious political candidates). Such issues contrast with the salient topics that appear in many national polls (e.g., the economy, national defense, partisan candidates with long histories) where opinions appear more stable (Druckman and Leeper 2012b). Ideally, one would consider issues that vary based on their accessibility and salience. Second, studies suggest the effect of party cues on policy opinions range from 3% to 43% of the policy opinion scale (Bullock 2011; also see Bullock 2020). Tappin (2022) explains that such variations reflect huge differences across the policy issues used, that he captures by looking at cue effects across 34 policies. He (878) concludes that “a majority of existing between-study variation in party elite cue effects could potentially be explained by existing studies’ often small and idiosyncratic samples of policy issue” (also see Clifford et al. 2023).<sup>10</sup>

### ***Heterogeneity in the Level of Study***

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the above discussion of context and individuals and this discussion of measurement and stimuli shows the central role of attending to all the dimensions of external validity (Druckman 2022, Egami and Hartman 2022).

Most political psychology work focuses on the micro-level such as individual decision-making or opinion formation. Yet, ultimately, scholars often want to make statements about larger units such as social groups, institutions, or polities. The divide between micro, meso, and macro perspectives in the social sciences has long been discussed, with most acknowledging the inherent challenge of connecting these levels of analysis (e.g., Eulau 1996). An intuitive approach might be to explore micro-foundations and then attempt to aggregate up: for instance, studying voters, arriving at a conclusion about voters, and then making an inference about the health of a political system. I suggest the opposite approach may be more useful; this is akin to Al-Ubaydli et al.'s (2017) approach to scalability. They suggest instead of starting with micro-studies and scaling up to policy interventions that one instead should start at the macro (policy) level: imagine “what a successful intervention would look like fully implemented in the field, applied to the entire subject population, sustained over a long period of time, and working as it is expected because its mechanism is understood” (Al-Ubaydli et al. 2020: 21).

For instance, consider the prior discussion about public opinion stability; rather than starting with micro-level studies that suggest instability and trying to understand why macro-opinion appears stable, begin with the stability of macro opinions and identify what factors might lead to it. This is what Druckman and Leeper (2012b) do, arguing macro stability stems from low measurement error (aggregate data have less error since they merge multiple measures), a focus on issues on which people have stable preferences (salient issues, as mentioned), and ecologically valid rhetorical environments (exposure to competing arguments that cancel out the effects of one-sided communications). They then study these ideas at the micro level, finding those factors generate stability despite being absent from the modal micro level study of opinion formation.

Another illustration comes from work on democratic backsliding. The starting point here is that systems erode, at the macro level. Yet, a burgeoning research agenda focuses on citizens' opinions about democratic transgressions (see above discussion). This has led to some apparent inconsistencies. For instance, Orhan (2022) shows that across 53 countries and more than 170 election surveys higher levels of country-level affective polarization correlate with more democratic backsliding (as measured by the Varieties of Democracy project) (also see Boese et al. 2022: 33, Flores et al. 2022). These results contradict Broockman et al.'s (2022) individual level study, within in the United States, that suggests no relationship between affective polarization and accountability, democratic norms, and various related outcomes. They (20) state "attempting to reduce affective polarization... may not be the most effective way to reverse these [anti-democratic] trends." Voelkel et al. (2022) arrive at similar conclusion in their paper entitled "Interventions reducing affective polarization do not necessarily improve anti-democratic attitudes."<sup>11</sup> Even if these latter papers are accurate, it is entirely possible that affective polarization influences backsliding through alternative routes such as lowering the likelihood of cross-cutting cleavage protests to protect democracy (e.g., partisans cannot be mobilized by those from the other party), policy extremity that provides autocratic elites leeway, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ahmed (2022) also points out that individuals how hold anti-democratic attitudes or support anti-democratic candidates may not recognize their beliefs as anti-democratic.

<sup>12</sup> Frederiksen (2022) suggests that effects may depend on the amount of democratic experience. He finds that, across 43 countries and more than 50 years, that undemocratic incumbent behavior decreases incumbent approval when democratic experience is low (but not when it is high).

The challenge of scaling from micro data to macro claims about the political system has been recognized since early political science survey projects. In his review of *The American Voter*, Key (1960: 55) offered a scathing polemic, in discussing survey research generally:

neither the particular findings nor the generalizations about these microscopic situations tell us much about either the political order observed or political orders in general. It is, one must concede, a truly formidable task to build a bridge from observation of the atoms of the political system to the system itself. It may even be impossible to bring into significant relation to the macroscopic political order much of the knowledge of the behavior of individual electors, for there may be no relation, significant or otherwise. Yet the assembly of the pieces into the whole cannot well proceed until the pieces are defined and studied against some conception of the whole rather than as isolated individual behavior that happens to stir our curiosity.<sup>13</sup>

To be clear, I am not advocating for the dismissal of micro level studies; instead, I suggest an initial consideration of the system which leads one to consider many levels of relevance. In the case of backsliding, there exist at least three. First, erosion occurs most directly due to actions by elite actors including elected officials, candidates, non-elected government officials, and the judiciary (Bermo 2016, Bartels 2023). These individuals can violate laws, norms, or ideals or alter institutions to their advantage. Second, it depends on meso level actors such as social movement organizers, interest groups, campaigns, and opinion leaders who can assert pressures on officials, and/or mobilize voters including stimulating protests. Third, citizens matter as they vote for an undemocratic candidate, can engage in transgressive activities (e.g., breaking laws, violence, spread misinformation), or normalize democratic transgressions. Each of these levels can then be studied and, in every case, political psychology would offer crucial insights. For instance, various psychological biases may contribute to problematic elite behavior such as a status quo bias, discrimination, miscalculation of opportunity costs. The same is true

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<sup>13</sup> I thank Rune Slothuus for drawing the connection between this discussion and Key's review.

for social movement organizations where dynamics like over-confidence, organizational assimilation, and intersectional biases could matter, and citizens where anti-establishment beliefs, group threat, and motivated reasoning could contribute to backsliding actions. The point is to start from the system level and work backwards, recognize connections between levels and draw on political psychology to inform understanding at each level.

### ***Heterogeneity in Timing***

A given study occurs at a specific point in time. Whether the same result will hold at a different time is always unclear. There are at least three ways to exploit variation in timing into political psychology research. The first concerns consideration of what occurs prior to the study (e.g., pre-treatment/pre-measurement) and what occurs after a study (e.g., post outcome measure). For instance, Druckman and Leeper (2012a) show that, among engaged individuals, arguments for a public-funded casino—either pro-arguments focusing on economic benefits or con-arguments focusing on social costs (e.g., addiction)—failed. They failed because these individuals previously had been exposed to the economic argument and had formed strong opinions in favor of the casino. Hearing the economic argument yet again did not matter and they had already formed strong opinions and rejected the con argument. Such pre-treatment effects make clear that one often must attend to conditions over-time to grasp the effects at a given moment (Gaines et al. 2007, Slothuus 2016). Druckman et al. (2012) show how early arguments can set opinions in place, leading individuals to seek out confirmatory information, and making them more resistant to later arguments. In their study, those exposed to an initial argument for universal healthcare to minimize inequality, subsequently chose to read articles with that framing, and then when exposed later to opposing arguments concerning economic costs, they

rejected them. In other circumstances, more recent arguments may win out, particularly among individuals who are averse to elaboration (Chong and Druckman 2010).

The flip side of “what happened before” is how long a given effect lasts: a topic considered since Hovland and Weiss’s (1951) sleeper effect hypothesis (e.g., people initially discount a message due to a non-credible source but later adjust their attitudes in the direction of the message), but far from settled (Albarracin et al. 2017). More generally, exploring the durability of treatment effects or of attitudes more generally has increasingly received attention; a recent paper by Tappin and Hewitt (2023) find that party cue effects on policy issues persist at about 50% three days after exposure (also see Coppock 2023). Recognition of how time contextualizes any finding is a useful advance, consistent with long-standing work that takes time seriously (e.g., Pierson 2004). The next step is to more carefully consider the heterogeneity in the pre- and post- timing context. That is, how features of what happens before or after generate differential findings. For instance, Kalla and Broockman’s (2018) meta-analysis identifies how variation in timing shapes whether a campaign has an effect: effects occur when campaigns contact voters long before an election day, although even then, the effect decays.

A second type of time heterogeneity is simply whether a finding at one point in time occurs at another—the time and the concomitant cultural atmosphere may lead to distinct results. For example, Burden et al. (2017) report a list experiment to isolate the percentage of Americans who would be upset with a women president in 2016, replicating a prior experiment from 2006. They find 13% report being upset, down from 26%. If the experiment had replicated, it would have been odd given the gains, even if limited, women had made in terms of obtaining elected office during that time (also see Valenzuela and Reny 2021). This type of heterogeneity is

analogous to the aforementioned theoretical cross-cultural variation but in this case, it involves with-in country changes reflected in the time at which the method (measurement) is deployed.

Third, there exists heterogeneity in timing not from the perspective of the researchers or the study but rather for the units or individuals. This is most bluntly captured by age and/or cohort effects. For instance, socialization processes play a role in generating affective polarization. Older people, with longer partisan histories, tend to have a higher level of affective polarization (Boxell et al. 2017), but, at the same time, younger people are entering the electorate with more polarized attitudes than prior cohorts (Phillips 2022) that reflects an earlier acquisition of animosity due to parental influence (Tyler and Iyengar 2022).<sup>14</sup> This latter effect coheres with the fact that married couple and parent-to-offspring partisan agreement has increased over time, with spousal selection occurring on political grounds (Iyengar et al. 2018). The role of family socialization is particularly notable as it portends more polarized generations to come (see Klofstad, McDermott, and Hatemi 2013). Put another way, measurement in the case of affective polarization needs to account for both heterogeneity in the respondent's age and, going forward, their cohort.

A similar cohort effect could emerge among women in politics. Bos et al.'s (2022) theory of gendered socialization suggests children come to learn that politics is a masculine domain; they show that girls exhibit substantially less political interest and ambition than boys. This coheres with Fox and Lawless (2014) who show a dramatic gender gap in political ambition among high school and college students. They find significantly more women view working for

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<sup>14</sup> Frederiksen (2023) looks at age and undemocratic behavior, finding that young people are less likely to sanction undemocratic behavior than older people.



a charity as the best way to pursue change whereas significantly more men view running for office as the best way to do so. While participation gender gaps in the U.S. have diminished or vanished in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women continue to be relatively less interested in politics, less likely to follow it, and more pessimistic about their ability to influence it (Schneider and Bos 2019, Wolak 2020). That said, as the number of women office holders grows, role modeling effects could alter these socialization patterns (e.g., Wolbrecht and Campbell 2006, Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018), leading to cohort heterogeneity. More generally, young adulthood is a crucial point of political socialization (Prior 2018). Thus, as contexts transform over time so do the political perspectives of those who are forming their political identities at the moment.<sup>15</sup>

A methodological implication of heterogeneity in timing is that panel data (or at least time series data) could prove especially useful to track cohort and age development. This would facilitate theory construction as ultimately heterogeneous timing should become more of a discussion of theory than methods.

### **Heterogeneity in the Production of Knowledge**

A final opportunity for political psychology to leverage heterogeneity concerns who does the work and how they do it. The former topic has received substantial recent attention with the

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<sup>15</sup> Another example comes from Desposato and Wang (2020) who show that those just in college during the 1989 pro-democracy social movement in China (led by college students) express more support for democracy (presumably due to socialization experiences) than those who were not yet in college. The effect was particularly notable for those who went to one of the four universities most connected to the movement.

emphasis on correcting historic exclusions from academia. The latter has been more subtle and involves researcher-practitioner relationships and team-based research.

### ***Heterogeneity in Researchers***

The last decade has seen a substantial focus on demographic diversity. Higher education has historically underrepresented students and faculty from racial and ethnic minority groups. Even with widespread Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, in the U.S., the current pace of inclusion makes reaching parity with the general population extremely unlikely (Matias et al. 2022). The lack of diversity is even more acute at the faculty level and in leadership; it also extends to other groups such as women. For instance, only about 30% college presidents are women (Moody 2018). This is similar in number to the 31% of full-time female faculty members in U.S. higher education (Kelly 2019). Addressing these trends and ensuring increased diversity has at least two rationales. First, academia privileges the production and dissemination of knowledge. There exists a moral imperative to work towards ensuring these processes occur in a just and equitable manner (Jost 2021: 334-338). This requires consideration of cultural and institutional barriers, as well as path dependencies that they generate. Second, a sizeable literature suggests that diversity enhances innovation and work quality (Swartz et al. 2019, Yang et al. 2022).

Efforts to enhance heterogeneity can occur at the individual, institutional, and cross-institutional levels. Scholars and teachers can contextualize historic contributions to knowledge (e.g., Blatt 2018) and ensure diversity of contemporary readings and opportunities to highlight trajectories and possibilities. A common retort to diversification is that it could undermine rigor and/or meritocracy. This is a false dichotomy, however, as rigor or merit must be understood not at the level of individuals at a moment in time but rather of research programs and pedagogical

trajectories over-time. That dynamic process, in turn, can be sped up by concerted efforts to ensure broad socialization to the hidden curriculum of academia—that is, the unspoken or implicit norms and messages transmitted in educational contexts (Elliot et al. 2020). This matters not only to ensure common knowledge about practices that will be more familiar to some than others, but also plays a crucial role in ensuring scholar well-being. Social identity threat occurs when a stigmatized social identity generates psychological (or other health) distress (e.g., Steele et al. 2002). Stigma depends on context (Crocker 1999) and those who are unfamiliar or less represented in a given context could be stigmatized. Put another way, those from groups not historically represented in academia will experience psychological depletion (e.g., Johnson 2011, Jury et al. 2017). While combatting that experience is far from straightforward, one partial (small) antidote is to ensure norms (e.g., in class, at colloquia, at conferences, in research) are explicitly and broadly taught and discussed and biases are recognized (e.g., the exclusion of many groups from academic disciplines) (Behre et al. 2022). There also should be an appreciation that the types of support that sustain those from more stigmatized groups differ from those from other groups (Chen and Miller 2013). A positive externality from such efforts could be to address the social network inequities that occur and affect the likelihood of success including publication (Carrell et al. 2022).

Efforts of individual scholars can only go so far and institutions—including universities and professional organizations—need to complement diverse opportunities with efforts that combat the aforementioned challenges faced by those who may be less familiar with academia. This includes mentoring programs, research assistant possibilities, and a diversity of speakers, invitations and faculty. This last activity is particularly important as those from less represented groups excel more when they have role models to whom to look (Bitar et al. 2022). Resources

also matter; for instance, scholars are more likely to pursue projects proposed in a failed grant application when they have access to research funds and time via childcare support for parents (Moniz et al. 2023).

Cross-institutional initiatives also are needed as the current structure of many DEI efforts makes them susceptible of having the same subset of scholars from underrepresented groups having many opportunities (a Matthew effect of sorts). Inter-university coordination could address this. Further, investment in pathways to leadership is vital.<sup>16</sup> Organizational cultures that lack diversity create dissonance for those from underrepresented groups as they negotiate their group and professional identities (Miscenko and Day 2016, Druckman and Sharrow 2023). The result can be inadequate opportunities for group members to advocate for change on behalf of their group. This, in turn, can stall adaptation of expectations and standards (Settles et al. 2020).

While I have focused on race/ethnicity and gender, it is important to recognize other forms of diversity that require more proactive consideration due to systemic inclusion. This includes socioeconomic standing, parental education, disability, and their intersection (Druckman, Levy, Sands 2021).

### ***Heterogeneity in How Work Is Done***

In addition to heterogeneity among researchers, political psychology would benefit from increased recognition (and conversation) about how work is done. Two examples include work with external partners, and work in research teams. Political psychologists have ostensibly increased interest in the study of targeted populations (e.g., racial minorities, Indigenous people,

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<sup>16</sup> Importantly, though, in changing leadership structures, it is critical to be cautious to not overburden individuals from under-represented groups.

young people, immigrants, those with lower socio-economic status) and in carrying out applied interventions. These efforts often benefit from partnering with individuals who are a part of, represent, and/or work with the targeted communities to ensure the soundness of study methods (e.g., survey questions are understood by respondents and the inclusion of response options that accurately capture attitudes and behaviors). Community members and/or boundary-spanning organizations can provide appropriate context and insight into relevant constructs. Research-practitioner-community partnerships can be leveraged, not just for data collection (e.g., to establish legitimacy), but also for providing data to researchers, public entities (e.g., librarians, museums), and the communities themselves. This type of data collection partnership re-defines common roles that typically involve researchers who collect and analyze data, and boundary-spanners who communicate, translate, and mediate to target populations (Safford et al. 2017). Here, the design and implementation would bring together these groups into partnerships to maximize the impact and usage of a targeted population data set. Establishing these partnerships is a time-consuming and nuanced activity but there is increasing availability of guidance on how to develop relationships to the mutual benefit of researchers, practitioners, and communities (e.g., Levine 2021). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the concomitant challenge of aligning academic incentives (e.g., tenure/promotion) for pursuing such work, one positive step would come from diversifying institutional leadership to represent and reflect the experiences of more heterogeneous populations, and recognize the efforts taken by researchers in pursuing partnerships. Another fruitful step is for scholars who test interventions to provide relevant information in their work; indeed, Premachandra and Lewis (2022) find that more than 35 percent of psychological intervention papers do not provide the necessary information for carrying out the interventions.

A distinct emergent research practice involves in political psychology involves the construction of sizeable research teams, that span disciplines and institutions. This may seem “natural” in political psychology; yet, such cross-fertilization is less frequent than one may expect (e.g., Druckman et al. 2009). Benefits include the melding of distinct perspectives to address substantive problems on a large scale, and increased investment in intellectual and non-intellectual resources. On the flip side, costs include developing understandings of responsibilities and authorship, the possibility of unaccountable leaders, path dependency, sizeable errors, and the potential exclusion of less networked scholars from such teams (Jones 2021, Forscher et al. 2022). Careful consideration of these tradeoffs (and norms) is needed as more projects take this approach.

In sum, diversity is a means by which to enhance the creation and sharing of knowledge. This is true both in terms of who has access to academic opportunities as well as the practice of research. Accounting for variable opportunities and different research practices presumably increases the impact of political psychology in advancing knowledge and impacting the world. This requires increased recognition of and appreciation for the heterogeneities just discussed.

## **Conclusion**

In Table 1, I provide a summary of my argument. The bottom line is that recognition of heterogeneous theories, methodologies, and the production of knowledge would be beneficial to political psychology. This is of course easier said than done, but increased recognition of the types of variations discussed is a starting point. For instance, returning to work on democratic erosion: understanding that process would benefit from more varied theories that link elites and citizens, methods that consider many measures of erosion and multiple levels at which backsliding occurs (e.g., the role of elites, social movements, citizens), and researchers with a

range of experiences and input from practitioners who are working at strengthening democracy.

In some sense, the social sciences are at a crossroads. The rise of big data and open sciences have demanded considerable attention and surely contributed to new insights. Yet, as demographic and technological trends alter the trajectory of politics across the globe, political psychology also needs to appreciate heterogeneous theories, methodologies, and ways to produce knowledge.

**Table 1: Heterogeneities in Political Psychology**

Type of Heterogeneity	Example(s)
<b>Theory</b>	
<p><i>Integrating heterogenous approaches and foci within political psychology</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the conditional relevance of various theories of climate change opinion formation including those that focus on norms, contact, deliberation, cues, framing, perspective taking, efficacy, ideology, partisanship, and personal experiences.</li> <li>• Explore the conditional relevance of various theories of support for partisan violence including those that focus on aggressiveness, meta-perceptions, norms, race and gender, age, mental health, anger, conspiracy beliefs, ideology, cues, and (polarization) context.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Connecting heterogeneous approaches and foci across the social sciences</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the conditions under which people make rational (more deliberative/accuracy motivated) choices. They seem to be more apt to do so in the presence of competitive information streams and/or personal threat (e.g., threat of COVID-19 leads to more rational reasoning).</li> </ul>
<p><i>Heterogeneity in context</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolate how political institutions influence evaluations, such as how party systems affect affective polarization; in multi-party parliamentary systems, coalition partnership reduces affective polarization (between partners).</li> <li>• Consider how the process of interaction influences reasoning: politically conflictual settings prompt directional (biased) processing while more deliberative settings prompt more open-mindedness.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Heterogeneity among individuals</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how individual variables interact with context (e.g., persuasion with targeted messages) and with other variables (e.g., intersectionality).</li> <li>• Account for non-political/non-demographic variables that receive little</li> </ul>



	attention such as depressive symptoms that, among other effects, lead to a decline in political participation.
<b>Methods</b>	
<i>Heterogeneity in measures</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Derive measures from theoretical constructs, recognizing the need for construct and content validity (e.g., is consistency across issue positions a measure of ideology? Is it a measure of social norms?).</li> <li>• Recognize tradeoffs of different measurement approaches; survey measures of turnout overestimate while administrative measures of turnout misestimate.</li> </ul>
<i>Heterogeneity in stimuli</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employ several stimuli to capture the same construct such as using multiple rags to riches entertainment television to generalize that genre.</li> <li>• Account for variation in topics such as exploring the impact of party cues on different public policies (e.g., they may have stronger effects on more difficult issues).</li> </ul>
<i>Heterogeneity in the level of study</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There may be more opinion stability at the macro level (relative to the micro level) due to less measurement error, a focus on more salient issues, and a more realistic rhetorical environment.</li> <li>• Studying democratic backsliding requires consideration of macro level elites, meso level social movements, and micro level citizens.</li> </ul>
<i>Heterogeneity in the timing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider what has happened in the past as it can condition current responses such as when an individual had previous exposure to an argument about the economic benefits of a casino and so does not react to it again.</li> <li>• Consider when a finding such as opposition to a woman president</li> </ul>

	<p>generalizes (or not) across time given within polity cultural changes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how the timing of political socialization affects attitudes and behaviors such as the those being socialized into politics during highly polarized times become more polarized (through their lives).</li> </ul>
<b>Researchers</b>	
<i>Individual heterogeneity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextualize historic contributions to knowledge, ensure diversity of contemporary readings and opportunities to highlight trajectories and possibilities, and explicitly address hidden curriculum.</li> <li>• Invite speakers with different demographic backgrounds to professional events to ensure opportunities and provide role models.</li> <li>• Cross-institutional initiatives to coordinate efforts.</li> <li>• Create (realistic) pathways to leadership for members of underrepresented groups to alter organizational culture.</li> </ul>
<i>Heterogeneity in work style</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the value of researcher-practitioner partnerships (in the assessment of researchers' records/productivity).</li> <li>• Establish norms for the conduct of research teams, accounting for credit and resource allocation.</li> </ul>

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