

Gov 50.08: Psychology & International Politics

Paper Proposal

The final project for this course is an analytical paper that applies one or more psychological theory discussed in class to a problem in international politics. In other words, your goal is to consider an empirical phenomenon or problem in IR and advance a psychological explanation for it.

The paper proposal assignment is designed to encourage you to organize your ideas and start gathering resources early. It is also an opportunity for me to provide low-stakes feedback on your prospective argument and direct you toward other scholarly resources where relevant. The brief description from the syllabus is included below; see the next section for details.

Paper Proposal: 3% of your final grade is allocated to a paper proposal. This proposal should contain 2 things: (1) A 1-2 paragraph description of your proposed topic (no more than 1 double-spaced page), and (2) 5 references listed in the form of an annotated bibliography. More information will be posted in a memo on Canvas. **The proposal is due on Monday, April 29 at 11:59pm. You will submit it to the Canvas assignment box titled “Paper Proposal.”**

A note on deadlines: Proposals will be scored on a 10-point scale, and 1 point will be deducted for each day past the deadline. Moreover, I will grade whatever you submit – please check your submission after completing it to ensure that you have submitted the correct, final document.

At the end of this document, I have included two example proposals from a previous iteration of this class. They are intended just to give you a rough idea of how students have approached the assignment in the past – not as templates for you to precisely replicate.

Preparing your proposal:

While you are welcome to follow your own preferred workflow, I recommend the following steps. My aim in providing these steps is to help put you in a position to write a strong final paper.

1. Peruse the syllabus.
 - a. Take a look at the review pieces listed at the beginning of the reading list, and look at the topics/readings that are upcoming.
 - b. Try to get a complete sense of the additional theories and puzzles that we will cover in the class, as well as the types of questions that political psychologists tend to ask.
2. Identify an empirical puzzle or problem that interests you.
 - a. Choosing a topic can be the hardest task. IR is a big field, and there are many plausible directions you could take for your paper.
 - b. Some things to consider:
 - i. Read the news! Perhaps there is a contemporary political phenomenon you think could be informed by political psychology. E.g., you might be

interested in nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula, tensions between India and Pakistan, or the prospects for deeper cooperation between Mainland China and Taiwan.

- ii. Consider historical events about which you are excited to learn more. For example, perhaps you're interested in Clinton's choice not to intervene in the Rwandan genocide, the use of nuclear weapons to end WWII, or the end of the Cold War. Or perhaps there is a particular foreign policy decision that you find puzzling – e.g., Carter's rescue mission in the Iran hostage crisis, Saddam Hussein's choice to invade Kuwait, or Thatcher's choice to go to war over the Falkland Islands.
 - iii. Finally, if you've taken a lot of IR courses, you've probably studied some cases extensively using other theories. Is there a topic you covered in e.g., International Security or American Foreign Policy that you'd like to take a second look at? The paper for this course must be unique, but analyzing an otherwise familiar case with a new theoretical toolkit is an excellent intellectual exercise.
 - iv. Most political psychology scholarship that we read in this class is at the individual level of analysis – focusing either on leaders & their interactions or members of the public. There are other ways to engage psychology in IR, but you should meet with me if you want to do something that does not entail an individual level of analysis.
- c. Here are a few topics that students have written about in the past:
- i. Contemporary American images of Russia and what that means for the possibility of conflict,
 - ii. Why some Somali refugees prefer repatriation while others prefer to stay in camps (based on their reference points),
 - iii. Kim Jong-Un's shifting reference point as a cause for increasingly risky nuclear policy,
 - iv. How different analogies influenced Clinton's choice to intervene in Bosnia but not Rwanda.
3. Narrow your topic.
- a. Your aim is to ask – and answer – a question using tools from political psychology. Now that you have a broad topic, try to articulate your question in a single sentence.
 - b. E.g., “Why did Kennedy approve the Bay of Pigs invasion?”, “Why did Clinton intervene in Bosnia but not Rwanda?”, or “Why did North Korea accelerate its nuclear program in 2015, despite additional risks?”
4. Identify existing arguments that respond to your question (or comparable questions), and identify the (tentative) psychological alternative that you will advance.
- a. What are the most common answers to your question? For example, are there rationalist theories that explain North Korean nuclear proliferation? Try to avoid just listing arguments, and instead actively organize them. E.g., Duelfer & Dyson might have grouped explanations for the two U.S.-Iraq wars into “rationalist” and “domestic politics” based schools of thought.

- b. Next, what do *you* think are 1 or 2 plausible psychological explanations? Identify specific course material that introduces/applies the theory or theories that you think are applicable to your case.
- 5. Gather a comprehensive list of sources.
 - a. Find good, recent academic work related to your topic and the theory that you will apply. You should primarily draw from academic journals (like those we read in class) and university press books for your research.
 - i. There are a lot of IR and political science journals, and some of them tend to publish higher quality work. One (imperfect) indicator of the quality of a piece of work is the number of other scholars who have cited the article. If the article is > 5 years old and has < 10 citations, it might not be the best resource. Highly cited articles are likely of higher quality. GoogleScholar provides this information.
 - ii. You can, and should, engage relevant material on the course syllabus.
 - b. You are looking for at least two types of scholarship:
 - i. Existing IR research (or historical accounts) that speaks to the phenomenon you care about. E.g., if I were interested in the origins of the Gulf War, I'd want to find political science scholarship that deals with this.
 - ii. Research that explains and applies the psychological theory that interests you. The syllabus is a good place to start – the “optional” readings are there to help point you in the direction of more material on the topic – and typing an article title into GoogleScholar will direct you to research that cites one of the assigned pieces. For example, if you are interested in image theory, most current scholarship will cite the 1995 Herrmann & Fischerkeller piece – you can use that to narrow your search.
 - c. Read abstracts to identify 5-10 pieces that you think are *most relevant*. Save these articles and then read them more thoroughly.
- 6. Articulate your tentative argument
 - a. Try to articulate your argument in a single sentence. State clearly and concisely what you want to say in your paper. Your argument might change between the proposal and final product – and that's ok. Your goal here is to get something on paper that you can use as a jumping off point for your actual final paper.
 - b. Try to write an outline that describes each of the following items in 1-2 sentences each:
 - i. What is your paper about – what is your question?
 - ii. What is your argument (and which psychological theory or theories does it engage)?
 - iii. How have other people answered your question (or questions that are similar to yours)?
 - iv. What are the main reasons why you think your psychological argument is persuasive?
- 7. Congratulations! At this point, writing the proposal should be a breeze. Here is what it should contain:
 - a. A 1-2 paragraph description of your proposed topic (no more than 1 double-spaced page)

- i. This description should include a 1-2 sentence description of your research question, a 1-2 sentence description of how other people have tried to answer your question, a 1-2 sentence description of your argument, and a brief description of how you will advance your argument (e.g., the type of evidence that you will bring to bear). This is not a formal research paper – you do not need to collect new data or complete a full case study – but you should reconcile your argument with evidence that is readily accessible such as historical accounts, journalistic descriptions, and official statements. The proposal should include some indication of where you will find this evidence.
- b. An annotated bibliography with 5 sources. Take 5 articles/books/chapters from the comprehensive list of sources that you compiled – including any that are on the course syllabus. List them alphabetically with full citation information, just like you would for a final reference page.¹ Below each source, write a short paragraph that
 - i. Concisely summarizes the central question and main argument of the source,
 - ii. Describes the methodology by which the research was conducted (in just a sentence or so – no need to get into the details), and
 - iii. Explains the relevance of the research to your paper.

¹ Use any reference style you want – e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago – just be consistent. I strongly recommend the [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) as a resource for information on citation practices.

Example Proposal 1²

Why do some Somali refugees living in neighboring countries' refugee camps prefer to stay, while others choose to repatriate? As of 2016, there are nearly 900,000 Somali refugees split between the refugee camps of Kenya, Yemen, and Ethiopia ("Somali Situation 2017" 6). The majority of these refugees have two realistic options, to stay in the refugee camps or to repatriate back to Somalia—the first being less risky than the second (Abdi 11-12). While some people argue that refugees' decisions will be based on whether they are offered sufficient material incentives to repatriate (Valentine 2009), I argue that which option individual refugees choose will likely depend on their reference point.

In this paper, I will present three arguments—all informed by the tenants of prospect theory—about Somali refugees in the refugee camps of Kenya, Yemen, and Ethiopia. First, Somali refugees who were raised in refugee camps are more likely to prefer staying in the refugee camps because they want to maintain the status quo. Second, Somali refugees who were raised in Somalia post-governmental collapse are more likely to prefer staying in the refugee camps because they are in the domain of gain. Third, Somali refugees who were raised in Somalia pre-governmental collapse are more likely to prefer returning to Somalia because they are in the domain of loss. To evaluate my argument, I will draw from existing scholarship on refugee options (e.g., Abdi 2005), case histories and reports from international organizations (e.g., the UN High Commissioner for Refugees), and existing interviews with refugees.

Example Proposal 2

For my final paper, I intend to answer the question, "Why did the United States engage in efforts to end a genocide in Bosnia but not in Rwanda?" While constructivist scholarship would point to the role of humanitarian intervention norms by the 1990s, I hypothesize that American

² Both examples are the intellectual property of the authors, and included with their explicit permission. They have been slightly edited to reflect changes to the assignment description implemented this term.

foreign policy decision-makers undertook efforts to end the Bosnian Genocide because they were influenced by the Holocaust analogy, leading them to believe that the U.S. should adhere to the principle of “never again” by taking action to prevent large-scale atrocities. On the other hand, I conjecture that policymakers did not attempt to end the Rwandan genocide because they were heavily influenced by the Somalia analogy, which led them to believe that humanitarian interventions are risky and dangerous. I intend to use a comparative case study approach to testing this hypothesis, wherein I will analyze the statements and actions (both public and private) of foreign policy decision-makers in order to determine the extent, if any, to which they were influenced by the Holocaust and/or Somalia analogies when deciding how to address these crises. These statements are available from the Presidency Project at UCSB.