1

Living in Interesting Times

How Behavioral Political Science Can Help Us Understand the Current Political Moment

… a man hears what he wants to hear
and disregards the rest.

Simon and Garfunkel, "The Boxer"

The 2020 election was full of surprises, following four years of unusual politics in the United States. Pollsters underestimated President Trump's support, for the second time, and a larger share of eligible voters cast ballots than in any election in over 100 years. Prior to the election, President Trump began to question mail-in voting and the systems put in place to count votes during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the days and weeks following the election, the President refused to accept the outcome, and his team filed what most legal experts considered to be weak lawsuits in multiple states to overturn the outcome of an election that had been overseen by Republicans, Democrats, and Independents around the country.

By December 2020, many Republican leaders began to publicly worry that the President's effort to delegitimize the outcome of the election he lost by more than seven million votes might backfire, as some conservative voters in Georgia even declared a boycott of the Senate runoff elections that would determine control of that powerful legislative body. Many attorneys refused to argue the cases in front of judges, and some firms withdrew their support in the middle of the process out of fear their reputations would be harmed. The lawsuits were quickly dismissed, even by conservative judges Trump himself had appointed, including the three newest justices on the Supreme Court. By a week after the election, polls showed the majority of Americans believed Trump had lost the election, but many Trump supporters simply refused to accept the result. President Trump's unwillingness to concede and publicly accept Joe Biden's win merely extended the news cycle. One might say, and many did, that these events were "unprecedented" in American history. Unfortunately, several of these tactics were extensions of those deployed in the previous election, and in the intervening years.

The 2016 US presidential campaign had already overturned conventional wisdom from start to finish. While predictive models based on long-run economic and political

trends suggested a competitive race, few predicted Donald Trump could win. Well-regarded theories about how primaries work, and which sorts of candidates are likely to navigate them successfully, suggested an experienced Republican party insider would likely emerge. Trump succeeded despite – or perhaps because of – boorish rhetoric toward a large number of groups including the disabled, Gold Star families, Muslims and other religious minorities, Mexicans, immigrants in general, women, world leaders, sitting federal judges, and the mainstream media.[1] Trump veered from other historical norms as well, refusing to release his tax returns and threatening to jail his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton. He was also dramatically outspent by Clinton. In the end, his victory seemed inconsistent with any number of theories about how candidates win elections in America.

In short, the 2016 and 2020 elections, and many examples and headlines in between, showed that elites, let alone most lay citizens, often behave in ways that deviate from the predictions of rational choice theory (RCT), when it comes to the political arena. However, these strategies can be easily explained by assumptions that are derived from behavioral political science (BPS). The behavioral forces springing from Trump's personality, his willingness to take huge risks when faced with electoral defeat, the effect of his framing tactics on his supporters, and the powerful influence of outrage as a catalyst for risk taking are all places we might look to explain many of these political outcomes. But before we even get to 2020, we might wonder how could such a nontraditional candidate, with few partisan ties and no experience in government or military service, win the highest office in the land in the first place?

In this book, we introduce and use the *Behavioral Political Science* paradigm. This approach can help us understand not only politics in the United States in this historical moment, but also the politics of other countries and in other times. Behavioral Political Science can explain behavior that violates the rules often assumed by a dominant approach to political behavior, rational choice theory.

DEFINING BEHAVIORAL POLITICAL SCIENCE

The most important claim in the book is that a set of ideas from psychology, economics, political science, and communication studies can be combined in a simple way to greatly enhance our understanding of politics. These approaches, which we refer to collectively as Behavioral Political Science or BPS, can help explain the many deviations we see in political attitudes, political decision-making, and political behavior that are often predicted from the dominant, alternative approach to understanding politics, RCT.

What is BPS? One way to define the paradigm is in the negative, carefully listing features that it does *not* include. Therefore, BPS might simply be considered any approach *that does not adopt classical rational choice assumptions about how individuals make decisions*. An even stronger definition, however, is positive: *BPS is an umbrella framework that consists of various intellectual schools that consider the cognitive constraints and diverse motivations that structure human decision-making in the political realm*.

And in fact, BPS does encapsulate a broad and increasingly rich set of research programs that test and modify traditional assumptions about the processes and motivations structuring political decision-making, including: (1) the role, use, and

influence of heuristics and cognitive biases on decision-making; (2) the effects of message framing on political attitudes; (3) institutional factors and the psychology of group decision-making in policy formation; (4) the role of emotions in political behavior; (5) individual differences in preferences stemming from personality, values, and norms; and (6) the importance of motivation and identity in information processing and reasoning, among other areas of research. A common thread connecting these diverse research programs is that humans regularly fail to live up to at least some of the classical assumptions of RCT.

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 many of 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. At its core, the approach foregrounds heuristics and bounded rationality, and recognizes humans' susceptibility to framing, nudging, motivated reasoning, and other cognitive biases. It integrates a host of motivations that people pursue in politics beyond material self-interest. As such, BPS represents a clear alternative to RCT.

Indeed, scholars have known for some time that political actors often violate many of the core assumptions of rational choice models. The late Herbert Simon, a political scientist and Nobel laureate in Economics, noted more than fifty years ago that we often cannot, and almost always do not, collect and systematically process *all* the information relevant to the decisions we face in the political domain. Simon discovered the concept of *bounded rationality* – one of the key schools of BPS. He was one of the first to systematically consider ways in which standard assumptions underlying RCT fail to capture the processing *abilities* and *motivations* of real people struggling to make choices about candidates, policies, and political actions.

Importantly, however, these deviations from rationality often occur in predictable ways. Exciting new approaches converge around a small and manageable number of modifications to RCT assumptions that can be incorporated into both formal and informal models of political decision-making. Such modifications can greatly enhance our ability to understand heretofore puzzling behavior. In other words, BPS helps systematically investigate the origin, diversity, and heterogeneity of political preferences. It clarifies the imperfect ways in which individuals process information in order to translate these diverse preferences into attitudes and behavior. In this book, we present a framework for understanding the contributions that BPS approaches have made to our understanding of political phenomena. Our central argument is that incorporating empirically grounded BPS assumptions with the formal logical rigor that has typically characterized RCT can significantly improve our understanding of a wide range of political phenomena.

Theories of democracy, and indeed all of politics, begin with two crucial assumptions about the world that are rarely stated and, unfortunately, often do not hold: (1) There must exist a *shared reality* among the governed, and (2) This shared reality must be *tied reasonably closely* to that which actually happens. In other words, most citizens, regardless of their upbringing or partisan viewpoints, must agree about what has happened in the world, and this shared understanding must be reasonably close to actual events.

These two assumptions are necessary in a democracy in order for citizens to hold elected officials accountable for their promises and their behavior once in office. Citizens

must more or less agree on what was promised, and whether the promise was kept. The same argument can be made for nondemocratic regimes, though the key stakeholders might differ (e.g., they might be other political elites rather than the public writ large). So, regardless of regime type, both the rulers and the ruled must have some minimally valid sense of what is happening in the world. These pictures in our heads about what has happened and who is responsible can then guide behavior, whether at the ballot box or in the street. Theories of international conflict also assume some shared and credible information about the state of nature as leaders decide whether to go to war or negotiate peace. These assumptions of shared and valid mental pictures about the real world are so obvious that they often go unmentioned. Unfortunately, these assumptions underlying RCT are often incorrect. This book is about how politics works under such conditions. Before delving into the BPS paradigm in more depth, we first begin with a few examples that illustrate the importance of the approach for understanding the current political moment.

FAKE NEWS

The phenomenon of "fake news" is a primary example. The explosive growth in the number of users of social networks, including such tools as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have enabled millions who were previously unable to participate in the public debate to create and distribute both real and fake news to tens of millions of internet readers around the world. Indeed, in his farewell speech, President Obama warned that fake news constituted a threat to democracy. "Increasingly," Obama said, "we become so secure in our bubbles that we start accepting only information, whether it's true or not, that fits our opinions, instead of basing our opinions on the evidence that is out there." The unmooring of the daily news from events of the real world would create obvious problems for democratic citizens in their attempt to objectively and systematically arrive at good decisions. Examples abound in the current moment, particularly in the wake of the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol, spurred in large part by false claims about election fraud and the proliferation of conspiracy theories by groups like "Q-Anon."

False beliefs and conspiracy theories were not unique to 2020, however. The 2016 US presidential election was notable not only for Trump's surprising victory, but because of the emergence of *fake news*. Conspiracy theories on the fringes of the partisan blogosphere have been common for some time, but in 2016 they began to find their way into mainstream conversations about the candidates, a phenomenon that only accelerated during the COVID-19 crisis and the 2020 presidential campaign. These stories often vaulted onto the front-page in mainstream outlets, which then repeated misleading statements even when they were easily refuted. A few specific examples are helpful to illustrate how this type of "pseudo-reality" can be created.

Pizzagate

During the 2016 campaign, a story circulated on right-wing websites accusing Hillary Clinton and John Podesta, one of Clinton's top aides, of running a child sex ring out of a popular pizza joint in the Washington, DC, area.[2] This fictitious claim began with WikiLeaks' release of emails hacked from Podesta's account in October 2016. Posters on far-right wing message boards began fabricating false connections between the word

"pizza," found in some personal and work-related emails between Podesta and his brother, and child pornography. Then a link was made to a specific pizzeria named Comet Ping Pong, because the owner was friends with Democratic party operatives. The story then spread virally on popular social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, with increasingly outlandish details added each day. Before long, this wildly false and gruesome tale of child rape and torture in the basement of the pizza joint (which does not have a basement) had been shared and viewed hundreds of thousands of times around the country and, indeed, the world. The story was even propagated by individuals with close connections to the Trump campaign, such as Michael Flynn Jr., the son of former Trump National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, who on November 2 tweeted "U decide – NYPD Blows Whistle on New Hillary Emails: Money Laundering, Sex Crimes with Children, etc. MUST READ!"

Did anyone take this fanciful story seriously? It would appear so. On December 4, 2016, an armed man travelled from North Carolina to the restaurant in order to, in his words, "self-investigate" the story. While in the restaurant, he fired multiple shots from an AR-15 assault rifle through the door of a broom closet he thought led to the nonexistent basement. Fortunately, no one was injured. Beyond this dramatic and frightening example, many others were at least *unsure* about the veracity of the story. A national poll taken in the immediate aftermath suggested 9 percent of Americans believed that Hillary Clinton was "connected to a child sex ring being run out of a pizzeria in Washington DC," and nearly 20 percent more were unsure whether the story was true or not.[3] *In just over a month, a story was fabricated and deployed through social media that left nearly 30 percent of Americans either believing or being unsure about a patently fake news story.* The man who opened fire at the pizza shop later told the *New York Times* that he was a regular listener to the right-wing show *Info Wars* and had acted because host Alex Jones told listeners to personally investigate the claims. Eventually Alex Jones apologized for his provocation, admitting that his actions put the pizzeria's owner and many other innocent people at risk. This was not the first time the popular conservative talk radio host had promoted false stories. Jones also gave substantial airtime to a story claiming the massacre of twenty school children and six teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary school in Connecticut was fabricated by gun control enthusiasts.[4] He also promoted another fabricated story that the attacks on 9/11 were carried out by the US government in order to boost domestic support for the war in Iraq.[5] Needless to say, misinformation is both commonplace and consequential.

One of the first to recognize that the pictures in our heads rarely match the world as it really exists was Walter Lippmann, a journalist and communication theorist of the early twentieth century. He posited that citizens do not react directly to events in the real world, but instead respond to a world mostly imagined. In his time, there were plenty of examples of people reacting to events imagined to be true but which bore almost no resemblance to that which was real. He opens his 1922 book *Public Opinion* with a story about happenings on a little island in early September, 1914, populated by a small number of French, English, and German citizens who had not heard news from Europe since the last steamship brought the newspapers a few months earlier. They had not heard that WWI had begun in late July. "For six strange weeks, they had acted as if they were friends, when in fact they were enemies" (Lippmann 1920, p. 3). This example, if it can be generalized to a global social media system rife with misinformation, demonstrates that a fundamental lack of shared reality may have profound political consequences.

These mental pictures, which Lippmann labelled the "pseudo-environment," emerged from bits of public information, news images, televised speeches, and soundbites captured in unique combination by each person's mind. The pseudo-environment is affected by the pace of the news cycle, which in the previous example was once quite glacial, but also by habits of our own mind: What our stereotypes tell us must be true. Lippmann guessed that these imagined worlds were what triggered our behavior, and this is where a lot of interesting politics emerged. Lippmann's guess, one that has held up surprisingly well for nearly 100 years now, was that the explanation for most puzzles in the political world could be found in "one common factor":

> The insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behavior is a response; but because it *is* behavior, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-environment where the behavior is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates. If the behavior is not a practical act, but what we call roughly thought and emotion, it may be a long time before there is any noticeable break in the texture of the fictitious world. (Lippmann 1920, p. 10)

In addition to a shared view of reality, it also matters how closely the pseudo-environment hews to the real world. Citizens need access to new and credible information in order to systematically evaluate political alternatives and make the best choices among candidates, parties, and issues.

False or misleading information that alters the public's perceptions, choices, and behavior may, to use the Founders' words, produce a system that *fails* to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty. For example, following the 2016 election in the United States, and despite the empirical fact that Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by almost three million ballots cast, only 52 percent of Republicans believed this was true. Even after Biden won the popular vote by more than seven million votes in 2020, and captured 306 Electoral College votes in the process, many Trump supporters refused to accept the outcome. Dozens of failed lawsuits in swing state courtrooms were thrown out summarily.

These false beliefs have consequences. The insistence that the election had been stolen led to the riot at the Capitol that killed at least five and injured more than a hundred. At the same time, encouraged by politicians who undermined faith in the country's own medical experts, many Americans insisted to pollsters they would not vaccinate themselves against COVID-19, risking severe illness and even death. This stubborn refusal to accept reality was not simply a Republican problem, of course. Democrats also believe false claims about Republicans, and reject favorable information about the opposition that is demonstrably true.[6] How does this happen, and how can we understand the public's behavior as a result? Behavioral Political Science has some answers.

Election Results

The 2020 and 2016 elections also demonstrated that political *elites* could behave in ways that violate rational choice assumptions. For example, when high-ranking US intelligence officials presented credible proof Russia had attempted to influence the outcome of the 2016 election, Trump replied, "I mean, it could be Russia, but it could also be China. It could also be lots of other people. It also could be somebody sitting on

their bed that weighs 400 pounds, OK? You don't know who broke into the DNC." He also questioned the validity of the election tally itself, claiming that widespread voter fraud by illegal immigrants explained why he had lost the popular vote. This pattern repeated following the 2020 election.

In both cases, Trump seemed to reject demonstrable facts because they contradicted the narrative that his electoral college victory represented the will of the majority of Americans. In the former case, Trump committed a *type II* error – not believing something that actually happened (e.g., Russia interfering in the election). In the latter case, it was a *type I* error – believing something that actually did not happen (e.g., large numbers of illegal immigrants voting). To explain this behavior, one needs to consult BPS approaches about framing, priming, and nudging, among others. For example, Trump's claims are consistent with BPS assumptions about how complex internal motivations such as preserving self-esteem impact information processing (see Chapter 8).

The current political moment is challenging for any standard explanation of elite or mass behavior. At the very least, it seems that credible and consensually accepted political information is harder to come by than during the previous media era, when the "Big 3" broadcast outlets -NBC, ABC, and CBS- dominated the US nightly news environment. On the elite side, many of the decisions of the Trump administration seemed to undermine its public image and strategic goals. Needless to say, the available information is not just incomplete, it is sometimes fabricated, and when strategic elites exhibit incoherent and inconsistent policy preferences, democratic accountability breaks down. In this moment, we need new tools for understanding how citizens, leaders, parties, institutions, and states behave. This book is an attempt to organize and explicate such tools under the BPS umbrella to understand a wide variety of puzzling political phenomena.

The COVID-19 Crisis

During the 2020 COVID-19 crisis in the United States, the president often downplayed the pandemic and its medical implications, while refusing to encourage the public to wear masks, advocate mass social distancing, or order lockdowns in communities experiencing high rates of infection.

President Trump's resistance to masks and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, even in the face of overwhelming evidence that these efforts reduce infections, can be explained by rational choice models. However, there is no doubt that BPS can greatly enrich rational choice explanations by highlighting the underlying psychological factors shaping Trump's motivations and actions. Moreover, BPS also unpacks the cognitive processes en route to these decisions. For example, using a two-phase poliheuristic calculation (see Chapter 5), it can be shown that the president first rejected policy alternatives such as a national lockdown because they were likely to damage his reputation in the short run. Only then did he choose from among the "surviving alternative" strategies – such as downplaying the pandemic even in the face of more than 300,000 COVID-19 related deaths by late 2020 – to maximize his net gain (his benefits minus costs). Many pundits from both sides of the aisle believe Trump could have saved thousands of lives, and easily won reelection, if he had taken COVID-19 much more seriously.

Furthermore, Trump and members of his administration extensively used another BPS concept, framing, in order to distract from the danger of the disease by referring to it as the "Chinese Virus," and claiming that rival Joe Biden "caves to the pandemic." As

we will show in this book, a host of explanations that belong to the BPS paradigm that can explain this type of behavior and enrich our understanding of politics.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

At one level, this is a book about a theoretical framework, BPS, that consists of several research programs, and centers around a simple but timeless question: In politics, why do both elites and the mass public often make decisions that, from the outside, seem to undermine their own interests? At another level, the book is about what we term "beyond rationality" – the contemporary political moment– where such questions seem much more pressing than usual.

In recent decades, the world economy has grown substantially, unemployment in many developed countries is at historic lows, inflation is under control, life expectancy is up, infant mortality down, and over a billion people have been lifted out of poverty. At least until the upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States economy had recovered from the 2007 housing crisis and subsequent recession. By November, 2018, unemployment sank to 3.7 percent, lower than the unemployment rate prior to the recession.[7] In many ways, people around the world have been substantially better off than they were just twenty years ago.

Nonetheless, over the same period, far-right populist parties in Europe have gone from fringe to powerful minority, and some even control ruling coalitions. Far-left parties in countries like Venezuela have also captured power. In June of 2016, the British people shocked the world, and most political experts, by voting to withdraw from the European Union. Then, in November of that same year, Donald J. Trump was elected. He and the Republican House majority immediately began to dismantle the Affordable Care Act (ACA), roll back environmental protections, and threaten international trade agreements whose benefits economists had touted for years. These momentous policy shifts were unexpected in part because they had no simple or obvious catalyst: In the absence of a severe economic downturn or military threat, why would so many people, in so many democracies, vote to put such progress at risk? Furthermore, the people taking the risks often appeared to have the most to lose. In the case of the ACA, most estimates of the negative impact of repeal fell squarely on those areas of the country that had voted most enthusiastically for Trump. In France, support for the far-right anti-immigrant party was strongest in economically vulnerable, rural areas with few immigrants, and weak in places like Paris where most of the terrorist attacks had actually occurred.

Why would publics endorse such drastic shifts in policy when, on average and compared to many other historical moments, things were going well? Why would large segments of society choose candidates who explicitly endorse policies that would make them materially less well off? This book organizes several approaches that can help explain the Trump phenomenon and other dramatic and puzzling political trends. Our goal is the same as most of political science: to understand human political behavior. To do so, we present the BPS framework. By integrating insights from behavioral models with rational choice models of decision-making, we think we can better explain political decisions and behavior than either model can alone.

For instance, one key puzzle springing from RCT that BPS helps to solve involves the meager ability of most humans to calculate the best political alternative in many common situations. One of the main problems that leaders encounter in international

affairs is the daunting task of incorporating all relevant details available about their nation's strategic situation into a decision to wage war or negotiate peace with hostile adversaries. Scholars have repeatedly found that, to navigate such choices, leaders focus on a very narrow set of alternatives and dimensions while using rules of thumb and cognitive heuristics – decision-making short-cuts (Chapter 3). Often, these heuristics can help individuals optimize decisions when time is itself a valuable resource. However, in some situations, these same heuristics lead individuals to make mistakes. One famous example of how these shortcuts can impact choice was articulated by Kahneman and Tversky (1979) in *Prospect Theory*, which describes how individual decisions are affected by whether a choice is presented, relatively speaking, as a loss versus a gain. Specifically, humans' aversion to loss is far more powerful than their desire for identically sized gains (Kahneman & Tversky 1979), and this is critical to the decisions of leaders, groups, and coalitions (Levy 1996).

This theory undercuts another key assumption from RCT – that a person's preferences in the political world, say between one policy and another, are not affected by "framing effects"– trivial differences in the way those policy alternatives are described. However, prospect theory, and a large body of other work, has shown this assumption to be invalid. For instance, the way the media frame a problem, prime certain decision criteria over others, and trigger specific emotional reactions can profoundly affect the process whereby people formulate their preferences and then translate them into political behaviors (Nincic 1997).

Framing effects appear over and over in the political world (as we will describe in Chapter 4). For example, when news media describe a rally by a local hate group as a blatant display of racism, citizens are justifiably far less supportive of the group's right to demonstrate than when the same rally is described as a triumph of freedom of speech (Nelson, Oxley & Clawson 1997). The group is the same in either case, and an individual's trade-off between free speech and public safety is assumed to be fixed. How can such minor changes in frames so dramatically shift opinion? BPS argues that this is because the *ways a message is conveyed,* not just what information the message contains, systematically affect how people react to that information.

These framing effects – and other cognitive and information processing biases – are common not only among lay citizens. The dynamics of information processing in the realm of gains versus losses also affect elite decisions as important as whether a state goes to war or bargains for peace (McDermott 2001). For example, a *poliheuristic* bias leads decision makers to exclude some alternatives from consideration when faced with negative implications on a political dimension, even if these alternatives might offer a better solution (Chapter 5). Cognitive biases also emerge in group settings, such as leader–advisor interactions, where social dynamics influence decisions quite profoundly. For example, symptoms of *groupthink* and *polythink* may result in the manipulation of information, censorship of criticism, and overly restricted choice options (Janis 1982; Mintz & Wayne 2016). Given these nearly universal tendencies, it is easy to see how leaders might make suboptimal decisions for themselves and their countries. And if highly motivated, politically sophisticated leaders can make these types of mistakes, then most lay citizens also certainly could.

Another contribution of BPS is to break down the traditional distinction between reason and emotion in decision-making (Chapter 6). Rational choice models of behavior typically assume that reason and emotion stand at opposite ends of a decision-making spectrum, but work in BPS has demonstrated that emotions can be a double-edged sword

for political reasoning. On the one hand, they can, at times, bias information processing and negatively affect individuals' ability to engage in cold calculation of the best choices to maximize their self-interest. However, often, emotions are in fact central to helping individuals maximize their utility and may also actively shape individuals' preferences. Factoring emotions into people's utility calculations can thus help us better appreciate a broader concept of utility than simple material self-interest and more accurately portray the ways in which individuals make decisions and engage in political behavior.

Along these lines, work in BPS has also begun to question RCT assumptions about how people formulate preferences – and how this might vary over time and across individuals. For example, individual personality, moral values, and societal norms have all been found to impact political choice, often above and beyond material considerations (Chapter 7).[8] This finding is similar to another branch of BPS called motivated reasoning theory (Chapter 8), whereby individuals possess not only accuracy motives (e.g., wanting to make the "right" decisions), but also directional ones that align with their preexisting beliefs or group identities. Leaders, for example, may discount information that contradicts their preferred course of action (Levy 1997), leading to a wishful-thinking bias in foreign policy decision-making. Partisans may choose to believe rhetoric that validates the policy positions of their partisan group (Republicans or Democrats) even in the face of evidence to the contrary (Redlawsk 2002) in order to maintain a positive group- (and self-) image.

Despite the steady stream of evidence that many rational choice assumptions do not reflect the reality of how individuals make decisions, RCT is very influential across subfields of political science: American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political economy, and public policy and administration. There are good reasons for this. Rational choice approaches offer a relatively straightforward and parsimonious approach to understanding political phenomena, as we explain in more detail in Chapter 2. However, it is not only possible to integrate findings from behavioral studies into these decision-making models, doing so may drastically improve their explanatory power and predictive validity.

Like RCT, BPS is a generic framework for understanding political phenomena in the domestic and international arenas and, so, is broadly relevant across political science subfields (see Figure 1.1). To use Thomas Kuhn's terminology, BPS changes the study of politics not by discounting the power of rational choice approaches, but rather by identifying the specific assumptions underlying rational choice models of politics, empirically examining them, and revising them to provide a more complete, accurate explanation of human behavior. Therefore, while BPS is a stand-alone paradigm, it also complements and augments RCT.

We argue that BPS augments and improves standard rational choice models in two distinct ways: First, it methodically examines the (in)ability of actors to process information necessary to maximize utilities. Second, it more fully explores the diversity of political motivation – the ground from which political preferences spring.

THE TWO DIMENSIONS OF BEHAVIORAL DECISION-MAKING: ABILITIES AND MOTIVATIONS

We organize this framework along these two main dimensions of distinction between the RCT and BPS schools. First, each approach makes very different assumptions about the