

PSYC GU4673
Political Psychology
Spring 2024
4 points

Class venue & time: **Monday 10:10am–12pm; 200C Schermerhorn Hall**

Professor: **Rob Brotherton** (rbrother@barnard.edu)

Office hours & venue: **Friday 10–11am; Milbank 415M**

Bulletin Description

This seminar will explore what psychology (mostly social and cognitive) can tell us about politics. The class aims to provide a broad introduction to ideas and methods in the field of political psychology, as well as a deep understanding of a few specific topics.

Prerequisites

An introductory psychology course and a course in research methods and/or statistics, along with the instructor's permission.

Course Overview

This seminar will explore what psychology (mostly social and cognitive) can tell us about politics. The class aims to provide a broad introduction to ideas and methods in the field of political psychology, as well as a deep understanding of a few specific topics. The class should be useful for those who may wish to study the topic at higher levels in the future. More generally, the class should provide students with tangible, relevant insights into everyday contemporary political phenomena. With that in mind, the focus will mainly be on citizens as consumers of political information. Rather than examining *what* happened in politics (e.g. who won an election, or who voted for whom), we'll be looking at *why* things happen in politics by looking at the psychology of individuals and groups, encompassing such psychological phenomena as ideology and partisanship, attitude formation and change, motivated reasoning, metacognition, persuasion, rationality, intergroup processes, conflict, distrust and conspiracism.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate, orally and in writing, understanding of major theories and research in political psychology and how political psychology ties into and extends upon insights from other subfields of psychology.
- Formulate critical insights, in writing and in discussion with others, into the strengths and weaknesses of particular studies and theories, as well as the socio-political forces that shape the field of (political) psychology and the culture around it.
- Produce a paper, formatted according to the conventions of the field, conveying a novel empirical analysis of existing public opinion data relating to political attitudes and/or behavior.

- Incorporate feedback on written work to refine ideas and improve clarity and precision through a multi-step drafting process.
- Lead and contribute to discussions of psychological research and theory.

Role in the Psychology Department Curriculum

PSYC GU4673 is a seminar open to graduate students and advanced undergraduate students. Senior Psychology and Neuroscience & Behavior majors and students pursuing the Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Psychology program will have priority in registration, followed by juniors, and then non-majors.

- For Psychology majors and concentrators and for students in the Postbac Certificate Program in Psychology, this course can be used to meet the Group 3 (Social, Personality, & Abnormal Psychology) distribution requirements.
- For Psychology majors and for students in the Postbac Certificate Program in Psychology, this course can be used to meet the seminar requirement.

Class schedule & readings

All required readings are available free to you online, most via your Barnard/Columbia institutional subscription. You will NOT have to pay for access to any of the papers. If you are on campus, clicking the links in the digital syllabus should take you directly to full-text access. Off campus, using Google Scholar with the Columbia e-link activated is usually the easiest way to find full-text papers. If you find yourself unable to access the full-text of any required reading after trying all the usual avenues (Google Scholar, the library databases, etc), let me know and I will help.

Week (date)	Topic & Readings
1 (1/22)	<p>Introductions & course overview</p> <p>There is no specific reading for this first class, but I’d like you to think about something you’ve read or heard about recently—maybe a news story, magazine article, study, or just a conversation with a friend—which raises interesting political-psychological questions.</p>
2 (1/29)	<p>Political Ideology, Partisanship, and Policy Preferences</p> <p>Cohen, G. L. (2003). Party over policy: The dominating impact of group influence on political beliefs. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>, 85(5), 808–822. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.5.808</p> <p>* Gries, P. H. (2017). Does ideology matter? <i>Social Science Quarterly</i>, 98(1), 132–143. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12276</p> <p>Dias, N., & Lelkes, Y. (2022). The nature of affective polarization: Disentangling policy disagreement from partisan identity. <i>American Journal of Political Science</i>, 66(3), 775-790. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12628</p>

<p>3 (2/5)</p>	<p>Red Brain, Blue Brain?</p> <p>Smith, K. B., & Warren, C. (2020). Physiology predicts ideology. Or does it? The current state of political psychophysiology research. <i>Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences</i>, 34, 88–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2020.01.001</p> <p>Fessler, D. M. T., Pisor, A. C., & Holbrook, C. (2017). Political orientation predicts credulity regarding putative hazards. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 28(5), 651–660. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617692108</p> <p>* Aidt, T., & Rauh, C. (2018). The Big Five personality traits and partisanship in England. <i>Electoral Studies</i>, 54, 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2018.04.017</p>
<p>4 (2/12)</p>	<p>Politicizing Psychology</p> <p>Tetlock, P. E. (1994). Political psychology or politicized psychology: Is the road to scientific hell paved with good moral intentions? <i>Political Psychology</i>, 15, 509-529. https://doi.org/10.2307/3791569</p> <p>Duarte, J. L., Crawford, J. T., Stern, C., Haidt, J., Jussim, L., & Tetlock, P. E. (2015). Political diversity will improve social psychological science. <i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i>, 38. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X14000430</p> <p>Eitan, O., Viganola, D., Inbar, Y., Dreber, A., Johannesson, M., Pfeiffer, T., ... & Uhlmann, E. L. (2018). Is research in social psychology politically biased? Systematic empirical tests and a forecasting survey to address the controversy. <i>Journal of Experimental Social Psychology</i>, 79, 188-199. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2018.06.004</p>
<p>5 (2/19)</p>	<p>Political Knowledge and Understanding</p> <p>Bishop, G. F., Oldendick, R. W., Tuchfarber, A. J., & Bennett, S. E. (1980). Pseudo-opinions on public affairs. <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>, 44(2), 198–209. https://doi.org/10.1086/268584</p> <p>Caplan, B., Crampton, E., Grove, W. A., & Somin, I. (2013). Systematically biased beliefs about political influence: Evidence from the perceptions of political influence on policy outcomes survey. <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i>, 46(4), 760–767. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096513001030</p> <p>Fernbach, P. M., Rogers, T., Fox, C. R., & Sloman, S. A. (2013). Political extremism is supported by an illusion of understanding. <i>Psychological Science</i>, 24(6), 939–946. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612464058</p>

<p>6 (2/26)</p>	<p>Proposal presentations</p> <p>You will present a 2-minute “elevator pitch” of your project proposal to the rest of the class. This will hopefully generate some useful feedback from your peers and Prof. Brotherton, as well as giving you some practice presenting your ideas.</p> <p>***PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE***</p>
<p>7 (3/4)</p>	<p>Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers</p> <p>Flaxman, S., Goel, S., & Rao, J. M. (2016). Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and online news consumption. <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i>, 80(S1), 298–320. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw006</p> <p>Barberá, P., Jost, J. T., Nagler, J., Tucker, J. A., & Bonneau, R. (2015). Tweeting from left to right: Is online political communication more than an echo chamber? <i>Psychological Science</i>, 26(10), 1531–1542. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615594620</p> <p>Garrett, R. K., & Stroud, N. J. (2014). Partisan paths to exposure diversity: Differences in pro- and counterattitudinal news consumption. <i>Journal of Communication</i>, 64(4), 680–701. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12105</p>
<p>(3/11)</p>	<p>SPRING BREAK</p>
<p>8 (3/18)</p>	<p>(Fake) News and Political Persuasion</p> <p>Arendt, F. (2010). Cultivation effects of a newspaper on reality estimates and explicit and implicit attitudes. <i>Journal of Media Psychology</i>, 22(4), 147–159. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000020</p> <p>Diehl, T., Weeks, B. E., & Zúñiga, H. G. de. (2016). Political persuasion on social media: Tracing direct and indirect effects of news use and social interaction. <i>New Media & Society</i>, 18(9), 1875–1895. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815616224</p> <p>Petersen, M. B. (2020). The evolutionary psychology of mass mobilization: How disinformation and demagogues coordinate rather than manipulate. <i>Current Opinion in Psychology</i>, 35, 71–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.02.003</p>

<p>9 (3/25)</p>	<p>Motivated Reasoning and Correcting Misinformation</p> <p>Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2010). When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions. <i>Political Behavior</i>, 32(2), 303–330. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-010-9112-2</p> <p>Wood, T., & Porter, E. (2019). The elusive backfire effect: Mass attitudes’ steadfast factual adherence. <i>Political Behavior</i>, 41(1), 135–163. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-018-9443-y</p> <p>Nyhan, B., Porter, E., Reifler, J., & Wood, T. J. (2019). Taking fact-checks literally but not seriously? The effects of journalistic fact-checking on factual beliefs and candidate favorability. <i>Political Behavior</i>. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-019-09528-x</p>
<p>10 (4/1)</p>	<p>Politics and Social Emotions</p> <p>Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i>, 22(1), 129–146. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034</p> <p>Combs, D. J. Y., Powell, C. A. J., Schurtz, D. R., & Smith, R. H. (2009). Politics, schadenfreude, and ingroup identification: The sometimes happy thing about a poor economy and death. <i>Journal of Experimental Social Psychology</i>, 45(4), 635–646. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.02.009</p> <p>Rosz, K., Stahel, L., & Frey, B. S. (2016). Digital social norm enforcement: Online firestorms in social media. <i>PLoS ONE</i>, 11(6). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0155923</p>
<p>11 (4/8)</p>	<p>Political Losers</p> <p>Craig, S. C., Martinez, M. D., Gainous, J., & Kane, J. G. (2006). Winners, losers, and election context: Voter responses to the 2000 presidential election. <i>Political Research Quarterly</i>, 59(4), 579–592. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290605900407</p> <p>* Curini, L., Jou, W., & Memoli, V. (2012). Satisfaction with democracy and the winner/loser debate: The role of policy preferences and past experience. <i>British Journal of Political Science</i>, 42(2), 241–261. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123411000275</p> <p>Lelkes, Y. (2016). Winners, losers, and the press: the relationship between political parallelism and the legitimacy gap. <i>Political Communication</i>, 33(4), 523–543. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2015.1117031</p> <p>***FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER DUE***</p>

12 (4/15)	<p>Political Distrust, Paranoia, and Conspiracy Theories</p> <p>Hofstadter, R. (1964). The paranoid style in American politics. <i>Harper's Magazine</i>, 229(1374), 77-86.</p> <p>* Miller, J. M., Saunders, K. L., & Farhart, C. E. (2016). Conspiracy endorsement as motivated reasoning: The moderating roles of political knowledge and trust. <i>American Journal of Political Science</i>, 60(4), 824–844. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12234</p> <p>* Enders, A. M., Smallpage, S. M., & Lupton, R. N. (2020). Are all ‘birthers’ conspiracy theorists? On the relationship between conspiratorial thinking and political orientations. <i>British Journal of Political Science</i>, 50(3), 849–866. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123417000837</p>
13 (4/22)	Presentations 1
14 (4/29)	<p>Presentations 2</p> <p>***FINAL PAPER DUE***</p>

Assessment

- 15% Class participation
- 10% Leading the discussion
- 20% Project proposal paper & presentation
- 10% Project paper first draft
- 15% Project presentation
- 30% Final project paper

Class participation (15%)

Your contribution to the class discussion is worth 15% of your grade; therefore, you should come to class prepared to participate in the discussion. Please note that it is not possible to contribute effectively if you haven't done the reading or if you're not in class.

As part of your participation, you will generate 3–5 discussion questions prior to each class. The purpose of these questions is to ensure that you've read the required papers, and to help raise issues for discussion in class. **You will post your questions in the relevant discussion thread on Canvas by noon the day before we meet**, so that everyone's questions will be available to that week's discussion leader(s) in advance (see *Leading the discussion* below). You should submit questions whether or not you will be able to attend the class session to which they apply; failing to submit questions will result in a 1 percent point deduction from your final class participation grade for class participation (as will unexcused absences).

Leading the discussion (10%)

For one session (or possibly two), you will take responsibility for leading the discussion (individually or with a partner, depending on class size). This will contribute 10% of your final

grade. Leading the discussion will entail (1) briefly summarizing the gist of the articles for that class period; (2) adding some additional insight, for example by linking the reading to other psychological research you are previously familiar with, or by linking the findings to something from history, the news, or your own experience; and (3) the discussion leaders will have access to everyone's discussion questions as soon as they're posted to the discussion forum—discussion leaders will somehow use them to help orient the discussion. (Note that everyone is responsible for keeping the conversation going and is welcome to steer conversation as they see fit, but having someone throw new balls in the air once the old ones have fallen to the ground and keep the overall discussion on the most productive track is very helpful—this will be the discussion leader's job). The discussion leaders do not need to submit discussion questions for that class period, since they will be aggregating everyone else's questions. Topics will be assigned near the beginning of the semester.

Individual project (60% total: 20% for the proposal; 10% for the first draft; 30% for the final paper)

You will complete a project on a topic of your choice. The project will take the form of a research paper conveying empirical analysis of existing public opinion data pertaining to a question relevant to political psychology. This will require first coming up with an interesting question, motivated by and extending upon existing research and for which you can find relevant data, then performing some kind of statistical analysis and writing it up as a research paper (complete with literature review and discussion).

There are many large datasets available online that contain data relevant to political preferences, demographics, trust, knowledge, media use, engagement, and other related variables. Some datasets along these lines (this is by no means an exhaustive list) are the [American National Election Studies](#); or, if you're interested in making cross-national comparisons, the [Comparative Study of Electoral Systems](#); various datasets from the [Pew Research Center](#); the [General Social Survey](#); or [Gallup](#). [The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research](#) collects many smaller datasets together in one place. For some of those databases you can register a free account to download data; for some access is provided by Columbia using your institutional login.

You may use several variables from a single dataset to investigate a question about differences between groups, correlations between variables, or predicting attitudes/behavior. Or you may analyze changes in variables over time—perhaps even incorporating data from more than one dataset into your analysis; e.g. something like comparing the [Global Terrorism Database](#) with data from elsewhere on public perceptions of terrorism to see how perceptions align with reality. Note that in the class schedule, an * asterisk indicates a paper that relies on analysis of existing public opinion data, like your project will. These papers may serve as particularly useful inspiration for the kind of forms your project might take (though your project need not be as statistically sophisticated!).

You will submit three pieces of written work: First a project proposal (due Feb 26th); then a first draft of your paper (due April 8th); finally, your finished paper (due April 29th). Deadlines are 5pm.

The purpose of dividing the work up like this is 1) to spread the workload across the semester and 2) to give you feedback that you can use to refine your work along the way. For the project proposal, you will write a 6-8-page (double-spaced) paper describing your thinking about the project you hope to complete. This should include a preliminary literature review, identify the data you will be examining, and make a case for why this is an important project.

The purpose of the assignment is for you to demonstrate the ability to think quantitatively as well as interpreting and conveying existing research in a broad and integrative way. You should draw upon as much background research as you can, and you should write a paper that is thought-provoking and logically sound. There will be no specific word minimum/maximum, but final papers will probably be between 15–20 pages of text (double-spaced). They should be written in APA format. You will receive feedback and a grade from me on each assignment. I'll be looking for evidence of (a) comprehension of the kind of empirical and conceptual material that we cover in class; (b) effective and thoughtful use of empirical data in an effort to answer a question about political psychology; and (c) careful, integrative, and creative thought. More specific guidelines on style and content will be provided in due course.

Presentation (15%)

Near the end of the semester you will give a presentation on your project to the class. Your presentation will be around 10 minutes, including some time for class discussion.

Other Information

Final grades

At the end of the semester, cumulative numeric scores will be rounded up or down to the nearest whole number and letter grades will be determined according to the boundaries:

Letter grade:	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	F
Numeric score:	97	93	90	87	83	80	77	73	70	60	<60

Workload

Seminars require work outside of class than do lectures. As a general rule for the amount of time students should expect to commit to classes, the college suggests three hours per week in and/or outside of class *per credit*. For a 4-credit seminar, that means 12 hours total. Since we'll meet for two hours a week, you should expect to spend around 10 hours outside of class doing readings, preparing your questions and ideas for class, and working on your individual project.

Late submission of work

Weekly discussion questions, posted to the Canvas discussion areas, are due noon the day before we meet, so that Discussion Leaders have time to collect and organize them. Failure to submit your questions by this time will result in a 1 percent point deduction from your final class participation grade.

The Proposal, Draft paper, and Final paper should be uploaded to Canvas by 5pm on the date listed in the class schedule. For each day (or part thereof) an assignment is overdue, I will reduce

the grade by one interval. For example, if a paper is A+ quality but is submitted 2 days late, it will receive a grade of A-. This policy is intended to incentivize timely submission while easing the stress of genuine emergencies and unexpected circumstances. However, you should realize that you may not receive timely feedback on late work, and since the project is designed to build cumulatively towards the final paper, getting behind on the proposal and draft will likely impact the quality (and grade) of your final paper.

Academic Accommodations

If you are a student with a documented disability and require academic accommodations, you must visit the Office of Disability Services (ODS) for assistance. Students requesting eligible accommodations in their courses will need to first meet with an ODS staff member for an intake meeting. The procedures for registering with ODS can be found here:

<https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>. Once registered, students are required to visit ODS each semester to set up new accommodations and learn how to notify faculty.

Accommodations are not retroactive, so it is best to register with ODS early each semester to access your accommodations. If you are registered with ODS, please see me to schedule a meeting outside of class in which you can bring me your faculty notification letter and we can discuss your accommodations for this course.

Academic Integrity

As members of this academic community, we are responsible for maintaining the highest level of personal and academic integrity: “[E]ach one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.... The exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited. In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others’ ideas in all of your research papers and projects... [and] you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent” (from the Columbia University Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity).

Wellness

Your health and wellbeing should take priority over completing work for this class. If you find yourself unable to complete work for this class on time for any reason, to the extent that you can communicate with me I will be better able to work with you and help you to complete the work to the best of your ability.

The University has many resources to support your health and wellbeing; see <https://wellbeing.columbia.edu/>