In this class, we will consider how people think and feel about politics, investigating the psychological underpinnings of the political behavior of both citizens and elites. We will start with an overview of the field of political psychology and some of the ways that questions in this field are answered. Next, we will study the psychological roots of political behavior, and the contributions of influences such as socialization, personality, and genes to how citizens and political leaders make decisions. From there, we will consider the mechanisms of how people construct political beliefs and determine political choices, investigating topics such as emotion, cognition, partisan bias, and persuasion. Finally, we will study political psychology of groups, considering the reasons why people dislike other groups, the psychological roots of political conflict, and the routes to cooperation and compromise.

D2L is your friend

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at learn.colorado.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

reading material

There is no textbook for this course. Instead, the readings include a set of journal articles and book chapters, which can be accessed via the course website. (In some cases, you may be blocked from accessing online journals from off-campus computers. See information from the University Library for remote access from off-site: ucblibraries.colorado.edu/research/offcampusaccess.htm)

expectations

You are encouraged to be an active participant in class! Please feel free to raise questions at any point during class, including matters of clarification, theoretical points, or topics to address in class discussion. You should also keep in touch by e-mail or by visiting office hours if you have any questions about course expectations or the material covered in class.

You are also expected to maintain proper classroom etiquette. This includes respecting the opinions of others even if you disagree, not talking out of turn, putting away newspapers and crossword puzzles during class, turning off cell phones before class, and not disrupting the class if arriving late.
requirements

In addition to the readings, you will be responsible for the following:

PARTICIPATION AND SHORT ASSIGNMENTS (worth 20% of your final grade)
The class is a small honors course that will follow a seminar format. Attending class and participating in
discussion are important to the success of the course as well as your participation grade. We will have a few
short homework assignments along the way that will also count toward this portion of your grade.

RESPONSE PAPERS (each worth 5% of your final grade)
You will be asked to write four short essays (two single-spaced pages) over the course of the semester. I will
provide short paper prompts that can inspire your essays or you could choose to write response papers that
critique and expand on the readings for a week. Expectations and guidelines will be detailed in a separate
handout.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (together worth 10% of your final grade)
For three of the topics we discuss in class, you will be asked to prepare seven discussion questions for the class
in advance of our class meeting and post them to the course website.

RESEARCH DESIGN (worth 30% of your final grade)
In this assignment, you will design your own piece of academic research that could test an interesting question
in political psychology. You do not need to conduct the study itself, but you will develop the other parts of a
research project, such as motivating your question, conducting a review of relevant literature, and discussing
how these questions could be tested. Over the course of the semester, there will be several assignments
designed to help you develop this paper. Further details will be outlined in separate handouts.

TWO EXAMS (each worth 10% of your final grade)
There will be two midterm exams and a final exam. You can choose to take two, or you can take all three and
I will drop the lowest grade from the three.

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services
in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for
more information at disabilityservices.colorado.edu.

some important comments on academic integrity

- Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of
citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the
University Honor Code at honorcode.colorado.edu. Additional information about avoiding plagiarism,
citation style, and writing in political science is also posted on the course website. Academic dishonesty
will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Council for additional non-academic sanctions.

- All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in
another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).
political psychology class schedule

WHAT IS POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY?
Monday, August 25 – Wednesday, August 27
Introduction to the class and the field of political psychology

Friday, August 30: Class does not meet

the psychological roots of political behavior

THE BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL ROOTS OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOR
Wednesday, September 3 – Friday, September 5
Nature versus nurture, parental socialization, genetic explanations

PERSONALITY
Monday, September 8 – Friday, September 12
Citizen personality, authoritarianism, presidential personality

CONFORMITY AND OBEDIENCE
Monday, September 15 – Friday, September 19
Social pressures to conform, obedience
RATIONALITY AND ALTRUISM
Monday, September 22 – Wednesday September 24
Assumptions of citizen rationality, self-interest, altruism

Friday, September 26: Exam 1

the political psychology of decision-making

EMOTION
Monday, September 29 – Friday, October 3
Emotions, affect, physiological responses

POLITICAL COGNITION
Monday, October 6 – Friday, October 10
Learning, memory, information processing

POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING AND HEURISTICS
Monday, October 13 – Friday, October 17
Inference, heuristics, short cuts, civic competence

MOTIVATION AND BIAS
Monday, October 20 – Friday, October 24
Motivated reasoning, bias in decision-making
PERSUASION
Monday, October 27 – Wednesday, October 29
Political persuasion, attitude change

Friday, October 31: Exam 2

the political psychology of groups

GROUP IDENTITY
Monday, November 3 – Friday, November 7
Social identities, in-group/out-group sentiments, nationalism, patriotism

STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICE
Monday, November 10 – Friday, November 14
Political impressions and stereotypes
- Issenberg, Sasha. 2012. “It All Comes Down to Race.” Slate

CONFLICT
Monday, November 17 – Friday, November 21
Understanding the roots of group conflict

Monday, November 24 – Friday, November 28: Fall break – class does not meet.
COOPERATION

Monday, December 1 – Friday, December 5

Social and evolutionary roots of cooperation


GROUP DECISION-MAKING

Monday, December 8 – Friday, December 12

Groupthink, quality of group decision-making


Sunday, December 14: Final exam (7:30 - 10 p.m.)