In this class, we will consider how people think and feel about politics, investigating the psychological underpinnings of the political behavior of citizens. 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.

reading assignments

Course readings will be drawn from several texts as well as journal articles. Book chapters will be accessible via the course website.


requirements

PARTICIPATION (25% of your final grade)

One important prerequisite of participation is class attendance. Class attendance is vital and required.

It is essential to read all of the assigned readings and think carefully about what you have read in advance of the class session. Frantically skimming the articles in the minutes before class begins will limit the quality of our class discussion and impede your ability to learn anything useful. Your education and our class discussion of the readings will both benefit from your careful reading of the articles as well as the time you spend in advance of class reflecting on what you have read and learned.

You will also be expected to actively participate in class discussions in a thoughtful way.
LEADERSHIP OF CLASS DISCUSSION (15% of your final grade)

For three weeks during the semester, you will be responsible for leading class discussion. Your goal is to ensure that the class engages in thoughtful reflection about what we can learn from that week’s readings. How you do this is up to you and your fellow discussion leader. You could spend time discussing the articles individually, engaging the themes that cross different articles, connecting that week’s topic to prior readings, or discussing ways to extend and elaborate on the week’s readings. Your grade will reflect the quality of your preparation, as well as the quantity and quality of class discussion you generate.

You will be graded on your class participation and discussion leadership, which will count toward 40% of your final grade. You can choose which assignments will compose the remainder of your grade from the following options:

AN EXTRA WEEK OF DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP (each worth 5% of final grade, if selected)

RESPONSE PAPERS (each is worth 5% of your final grade, if selected)

In these response papers, you will use the week’s readings as inspiration for a possible future research project. In your memo, develop a plan for how you could empirically extend ideas raised in that week’s readings. Your proposal might extend ideas raised in the studies, or you might propose an interesting question that the authors do not consider. Describe your research question, why it is important and how it would contribute to the literature, the central hypotheses you would want to test, and how you would test your hypotheses. These papers should be single-spaced and two to three pages in length. Turn them in at the beginning of class on the day we discuss that topic.

BOOK REVIEW AND CRITIQUE (each is worth 10% of your final grade, if selected)

If there is a book on political psychology that you are interested in that is not on this syllabus, you can choose to read it and write up a book report. When we cover the most closely related topic in class, you will present a short summary of the book to the class and engage some of the strengths and weaknesses of the text. You should also turn in a book review essay (two to four pages) on the same matters, as a hard copy and as an electronic copy for distribution to the rest of the class via the course website.

LITERATURE REVIEW (each is worth 20% of your final grade, if selected)

Another option is to write an essay that assesses the current literature on a topic of your choosing (given instructor approval). This essay should be five to eight single spaced pages in length and is due the last week of the semester. The central goal of the paper will be to assess and summarize the research about a particular topic – to identify the central question or questions, highlight the most important literature related to the topic, and provide commentary about the strengths and weaknesses of the current research in the area. More details will be outlined on a separate handout.

RESEARCH PAPER (worth 50% of your final grade, if selected)

You can also choose to develop a research paper that tests an interesting question about political psychology. This paper should follow the format of the kinds of academic papers read in class – including development of a research question, a review of relevant literature, theory, tests of these explanations, and interpretation of what you find. Expectations for the research paper are outlined in a separate handout.
D2L is your friend

This syllabus, assignments, and other exciting material can be accessed on the class website on learn.colorado.edu.

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 www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

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 www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode. Academic dishonesty will result in an F in the course and referral to the Honor Court 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

COURSE SCHEDULE

1. about political psychology

Monday, January 13

Introduction to the course and the study of political psychology


2. political socialization

Monday, January 27

Parental socialization, how we develop our political orientations


and one (or more) of the following:


3. biological roots of behavior

Monday, February 3

Genetics and the roots of political behavior, physiological response


4. personality

Monday, February 10

Political personality, the Big Five, authoritarianism


5. rationality and altruism

Monday, February 17

Assumptions of citizen rationality, self-interest, altruism


6. emotion

Monday, February 24

Emotions, affect


7. memory structures and organization

Monday, March 3

Memory, associative networks, ideology, core values, the structure of beliefs


8. information processing

Monday, March 10

Information processing, impression formation, the role of information in evaluation


9. inference and heuristics

Monday, March 17

Inference, heuristics, short cuts, civic competence

- choose one (or more) of the following:

spring break

Monday, March 24

10. motivation and bias

Monday, March 31

Automatic processing, motivated reasoning, bias in decision-making


11. persuasion and attitude change

Monday, April 7

Political persuasion, attitude change

12. group identity

Monday, April 14

Social identities, in-group/out-group sentiments, nationalism, patriotism


13. prejudice and group conflict

Monday, April 21

Understanding the roots of prejudice and group conflict, the consequences of ethnocentrism


14. social forces and cooperation

Monday, April 28

Social and evolutionary roots of cooperation, routes to cooperative outcomes