Political Psychology: POLSGR8221
IAB 711 4:10p-6:00p

This course focuses on ideas in psychology and their applications to politics. It has three dominant themes. The first is social influence and intrinsic predispositions: obedience, conformity, social pressure, authoritarianism, and personality traits. The second theme concerns the manner in which people interpret new information about politics and use it to update their beliefs. This section invites discussion of topics such as, To what extent and in what ways do media and politicians change voters’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors? Can and do voters use “information shortcuts” to compensate for their lack of direct information about policies? The third theme is the meaning, measurement, and expression of ideology and prejudice.

Political psychology is a vast field, and one semester is too brief to cover every important topic or every significant piece of research on the topics below. The classic readings tend to come from American politics, but the most interesting recent work tends to come from outside the United States.

Grades

You will be asked to (1) lead (or co-lead) the class discussion of one week's material, (2) participate actively in discussions every week, and (3) compose a 25 page literature review paper on a topic of your choosing, to be turned in on the date of the final exam. Please clear your paper topics with me as soon as possible. A preliminary draft of this paper should be discussed with me in office hours at least four weeks before the final draft is submitted. The format of this paper should follow the APSR style guide. These three graded components of the course will be weighted 25%, 25%, and 50%, respectively.

Prerequisites

I assume that students have taken graduate level coursework in either comparative politics or American politics. Prior coursework on public opinion is helpful but not required. One semester of graduate-level statistics is required; two or more semesters are recommended.

Readings

Each week, one or more students will lead discussion of the assigned readings. Class will begin with the discussion leader’s critical overview of each work's key concepts, claims, flaws, etc. After the presenters make initial observations about each reading, the floor will be open
to the entire class. Every student should come to class prepared to discuss each of the
readings and the connections among them.

There is no printed packet of course readings. PDFs of articles and book chapters are
available at the Courseworks site. In a few cases, you will need to get ahold of a book
manuscript, in which case I suggest purchasing used or electronic copies on-line.

For those who are encountering this subject matter for the first time, two groups of
(optional) background readings may be helpful. The first group comprises background
readings in psychology authored by political science faculty:

Kinder, Donald R. 1998. “Opinion and Action in the Realm of Politics.” In The

Sears, David O., Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis, eds. 2003. Oxford Handbook of
Political Psychology. New York: Oxford University Press. A compendium of literature
reviews on assorted topics.

The second group (again optional) includes collected readings in psychology authored by
psychology faculty:

Massachusetts: MIT Press.


The one required book is


**Week 1: Overview and Preliminaries**

Explorations in Political Psychology, eds. Shanto Iyengar and William J. McGuire. Durham, NC:
Duke University Press.

Read pp.15-24, the brief essays by Allport and by Newcomb.

H.T. Reis and C.M. Judd (Eds.), Handbook of research methods in social and personality
Week 2: Social Psychological Forces: Obedience


Week 3: Social Psychological Forces: Conformity, Social Norms, and Social Pressure


Week 4: Attitudes and Belief Systems


Week 5: Personality and Individual Differences


**Week 6: Group Identification**


**Week 7: Racial Attitudes, Explicit and Implicit**


**Week 8: Persuasion and Prejudice Reduction**

Week 9: Motivated Reasoning and Selective Exposure


Week 10: Bayesian Updating and Perceptual Screens


Week 11: Heuristics, Cues, and Bounded Rationality


**Week 12: Issue Framing**

Note: “Framing” has two very different meanings. Psychologists chiefly study “equivalence framing.” Political scientists chiefly study “issue framing.”


**Week 13: Critiques of the Enterprise**


**To be scheduled at the end of the semester: Student Presentations of Research Papers**