Government 2749: Political Psychology and International Relations

Spring 2021
Mon 3 PM - 5 PM ET
Harvard University

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Office Hours: by appointment

Preliminary syllabus – contents may change (January 21, 2021)

Course description

This graduate seminar explores the intersection of political psychology and international politics. Despite the proliferation of research at this intersection, many (most?) seminars on political psychology cover hardly any IR; many (most?) seminars in IR feature barely any political psychology. This class is an effort to bridge that divide.

Because of the “big tent” nature of IR, the interdisciplinary nature of the topic (spanning political science, various fields of psychology, and behavioral economics), and the ambiguity about what falls under its purview (can you have a theory of politics without a theory of mind? If not, what doesn't count as psychological? As Stanley Hoffmann argued in his presidential address to the International Society of Political Psychology in June 1985, “The term political psychology is a pleonasm: not all psychology is about politics, thank goodness, but politics is wholly psychological.”), it is impossible to cover the entire field in a twelve week seminar (even with additional reading lists! Including non-required readings, there are about 1100 articles and books on the syllabus this year, and this barely scratches the surface). The course is thus designed as a curated overview, in the hopes that it will familiarize you with some of the debates in the field and introduce you to material you might have not encountered elsewhere, opening up new lines of inquiry, and providing inspiration for future research.

The reading list for the class is deliberately eclectic, drawing on a wide array of research traditions, and employing a diverse set of methodologies. It includes:

- Foundational works in social psychology and behavioral economics (which I'll group together here as “behavioral approaches”), which much of the psychological work in IR continues to draw from (with varying degrees of fidelity).
- Classic works in IR that draw on behavioral approaches, because it's important to know where the field has been.
- New works in IR that draw on behavioral approaches, which give a sense of where the field is going.
- Cutting edge research in social psychology and behavioral economics, which may give a sense of where the field will be going in the future.
Table 1: Tentative Class Schedule

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After an introductory class focusing mostly on logistics and a general overview of the class, we begin the semester by exploring the relationship between psychology and rationality, which we use as a launching pad from which to investigate the landscape of political psychology in international relations.

We spend the following two weeks on what loosely might be thought of as “cold,” cognitive models of information processing: heuristics and biases, prospect theory, learning and updating from the past, predicting the future, and communicating through the use of signals. In contrast, the following two weeks focus on what generally might be thought of as “hot,” motivated models of decision-making: motivated reasoning, images and stereotypes, infrahumanization and dehumanization, perception, as well as emotions, morality, taboos, and indivisible issues. The divisions here are somewhat arbitrary — signaling and perception are mirror images of one another, and a number of the topics covered in subsequent weeks could easily be inserted here instead — but a broader level, what unites these latter two weeks is the way in which political judgments are often affect-laden.

The next two weeks focus on different dispositional theories and individual differences: personality, operational codes, integrative complexity, values, ideology, and culture. Historically, much of the work on personality and operational codes in IR has focused on the leader-level, while much of the work on values and ideology has focused on the mass public, but as the gap between the study of elite and mass political behavior has begun to dissipate, these two weeks might be better thought of as exploring the ways that different types of actors systematically differ from one another more generally.

The next three weeks all explore interaction and intergroup behavior: the psychology of small groups (how do these individual-level differences aggregate?), social categorization, social identity, and social dominance (how do individuals identify with and act as a part of groups in the first place?), honor, reputation and status, reciprocity and revenge, and thinking about collective identity at both the national, subnational, and supranational levels. If weeks 7-8 are dispositional, the penultimate week turns to the power of the situation, looking at the effects
of violence, threat and political repression, and in turn, terrorism and radicalization. Finally, we conclude with genetic, biological, and evolutionary theories, which portray many of the above mechanisms in a new light.

Course time

Following the results of the scheduling poll sent out to enrolled students, the class has been scheduled for Mondays at 3-5 PM ET.

Technology

We’ll be using three different platforms for the course, each for a different purpose.

Canvas

- The course website (https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/84668), which contains the syllabus and course readings.
- There are no required texts to purchase for this class; all readings are available electronically on the course website as PDFs.

Zoom

- The video chat software we’re using for class meetings.
- The links to each Zoom session will be made accessible through Canvas.

Slack

- Used for all class communication and asynchronous participation/discussion about course material.
- The Gov 2749 Slack workspace has two channels:
  - #announcements. All class announcements will appear here. (e.g. if there’s a technical glitch with one of our Zoom meetings, I’ll send an update about it in this channel).
  - #general. This channel is for general discussion about the course material. Participation in this channel counts towards your participation grade in the class (see below for details).
- The link to the Slack workspace is posted on Canvas.

If you have technical difficulties with any of these platforms, more detailed information is available via HUIT.
Course requirements and grading

15% Class participation (synchronous)
15% Slack participation (asynchronous)
20% In-class presentations/facilitation
15% Paper proposal and peer review exercise: March 5-10, 2021
35% Final paper due: May 3, 2021

This is a seminar-style class that revolves around class discussion; students should come to class having done the readings and ready to talk about them. Enrollment is normally limited to graduate students, and auditing is not normally permitted. After the first week, each week will be led in collaboration with graduate student facilitators, who will introduce the week’s topic, place the course readings in a broader perspective, before opening the floor for broader class discussion.

Because the class is designed to be helpful for your research, the main assignment in the class is to write an original research paper. The paper should either propose or test a psychological theory on a topic related to international politics, with the goal of producing something that, after some revision, could eventually be published in a top journal. A number of the works on this syllabus began as papers written in graduate seminars (including here in the Harvard Government department!); think of this assignment as a chance to write something that will make it on this syllabus in the future.

Since so much of what we do as scholars is a collective enterprise, mid-way through the semester, the class also has a peer review exercise. You’ll work up a short (3-5 page) proposal for your research paper, and submit it to me electronically. I’ll then send each proposal to 2-3 other students in the class, who will provide written feedback on each proposal, so that you’ll begin the second half of the semester with helpful advice about how to move forward with the project. I’ll provide more information about the paper and review requirements early in the semester.

In addition to in-class participation, we’ll also use the course’s Slack channel for asynchronous participation. Starting on February 1, a short (e.g. 1 paragraph) reaction post will be due on the course’s #general Slack channel at 12 PM the day of each class meeting. This will be a chance for you to ask questions, flag the parts of the material that was of the most interest to you, engage with one another’s comments and questions, and help set the agenda for the seminar later that day. Please treat discussions on Slack the same way that you would treat in-person interactions in class: engaging with one another other respectfully and constructively.

While 15% of the course grade comes from synchronous participation in class and 15% comes from asynchronous participation over Slack, asynchronous participation through Slack can also be supplementary to synchronous participation in class: students who may not be as comfortable speaking during class can make up for it by being more active in asynchronous participation.
participation over Slack, provided they have the preapproval of the instructor.

Collaboration and academic integrity policy

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to discuss the material presented in the course with your classmates. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in political science and properly cite any books, articles, websites, etc. that have helped you with your work.

Special accommodations

Students requiring academic accommodations are requested to present their letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with me by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to make these arrangements by this date may negatively affect my ability to implement the arrangements on time.

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Introduction I
The first class will consist of a general overview of the course; no readings are required.

Introduction II: Psychology and rationality


Recommended
Rationality and its discontents


The landscape of political psychology (inside and outside of IR)


Cold cognition I: Heuristics, biases, and prospect theory


Recommended

Heuristics and biases


Prospect theory


**Cold cognition II: Updating, learning, signaling, and predicting**


**Recommended**

*Learning, analogical reasoning, and updating*


**Problem representation and poliheuristic theory**


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Signaling and communicating


*Predicting and forecasting*


Hot cognition I: Motivated reasoning, images, stereotypes, and perceptions


Recommended

Motivated reasoning


**Images and stereotypes**


**Infrahumanization and dehumanization**


Vaes, Jeroen, Jacques-Philippe Leyens, Maria Paola Paladino, and Mariana Pires Miranda. 2012. “We are human, they are not: Driving forces behind outgroup dehumanisation and the humanisation of the ingroup.” *European review of social psychology* 23 (1): 64–106.


Perception and misperception


Yarhi-Milo, Keren. 2014. *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.


Hot cognition II: Emotions, morality, taboos, and indivisible issues


Recommended

Emotions


**Morality**


Taboos and indivisible issues


Habit and practice


Dispositions I: Personality, operational codes, integrative complexity


Recommended

*Cognitive maps and operational codes*


**Personality, motives, and leadership style**


**Integrative complexity**


Tetlock, Philip E, Jane Bernzweig, and Jack L Gallant. 1985. “Supreme Court decision making:
Cognitive style as a predictor of ideological consistency of voting.” *Journal of Personality and

Suedfeld, Peter, Raymond S Corteen, and Carroll McCormick. 1986. “The role of integrative
complexity in military leadership: Robert E. Lee and his opponents.” *Journal of Applied Social

Suedfeld, Peter, and Susan Bluck. 1988. “Changes in integrative complexity prior to surprise


America: Cognitive style, value conflict, and the limits of compromise.” *Journal of Personality and

Clinton: An Automated Content Analysis of Temporal Stability and Source Bias.” *Political
Psychology* 21 (3): 587–596.

Koo, Jasook, Joon Han, and Junghyun Kim. 2002. “Integrative Complexity of South-north Korean
286–304.


Conway III, Lucian Gideon, Felix Thoemmes, Amy M Allison, Kirsten Hands Towgood, Michael J
Wagner, Kathleen Davey, Amanda Salcido, Amanda N Stovall, Daniel P Dodds, Kate Bongard
et al. 2008. “Two ways to be complex and why they matter: Implications for attitude strength

Suedfeld, Peter. 2010. “The cognitive processing of politics and politicians: Archival studies of

Conway III, Lucian Gideon, Daniel P. Dodds, Kirsten Hands Towgood, Stacey McClure, and

Conway III, Lucian Gideon, Laura Janelle Gornick, Chelsea Burfeind, Paul Mandella, Andrea
Kuenzli, Shannon C Houck, and Deven Theresa Fullerton. 2012. “Does complex or simple
rhetoric win elections? An integrative complexity analysis of US presidential campaigns.”


Integrative Complexity: Current Challenges and Future Directions.” *Political Psychology* 35 (5):
647–659.


Dispositions II: Values, ideology, and culture


Recommended

Values and ideology


*Culture*


Intergroup I: Small groups, social categorization, and social identity


Recommended

Small groups


Social categorization, social identity, and social dominance


Intergroup II: Honor, reputation, status, reciprocity, revenge


Recommended

Honor, reputation, status, and the struggle for recognition


**Reciprocity and revenge**


**Intergroup III: National, subnational, and supranational identities**


**Recommended**

**National and transnational identities**


*Constructing nations and ethnic groups*


Historical memory, apologies, and collective victimhood


Violence as cause and effect: Political violence and exposure to threat and repression


Recommended

*Exposure to threat, violence, and repression*


Terrorism and (de)radicalization


Genetic, neurobiological, evolutionary, and quantum psychology


Recommended

Genetic and neurobiological


Evolutionary


Quantum cognition


