

SYLLABUS
POL-UA 812: Introduction to Political Psychology
Fall 2021, New York University
Mondays & Wednesdays, 3:30pm-4:45pm

Prof. Eric Dickson
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Phone: don't call, email instead

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:30am-11:30am & 3pm-4pm, and by appointment.
Office Hours will usually be accessible both virtually and in-person – always via Zoom, and usually in-person.

Office Hours via Zoom:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4927748931?pwd=aXdxRmkwbDVKeXRRYmVNLytjOWd4dz09>

Office Hours in-person:
See ericdickson.net/officehours for physical locations, updated once a week on Monday

Course Description: How do campaign advertisements influence voters' perceptions and behavior? What roles are played by emotion in politics? What features of the political environment influence the way in which different ethnic, religious, or other social groups interact with and view one another, and what role do stereotypes play in political behavior? How and why do ideologies form, and how does partisanship influence the way that voters understand the political world?

These questions, and many others, are the province of *political psychology*, a field that uses experimental methods and theoretical ideas from psychology as tools to help understand political processes. This course offers a broad overview of political psychology at the undergraduate level. The basic objectives of the course are threefold. First, it introduces important concepts from psychology, offering new ways of thinking about subjects as varied as personality, the dynamics of social groups, and the ways in which emotion affects decision making. Second, it applies these concepts to various topics within political science, including the media and political advertising, race relations, the legitimacy of government institutions, and the formation of opinions and ideologies, as a means of providing a new perspective on how to understand the political world around us. And third, by describing political psychology experimentation in detail, the course teaches about how the scientific method can be applied to the study of politics.

Course Prerequisites: There are no formal prerequisites for this course. Any concepts that may be used in class will be introduced and discussed at length as we go along.

Covid-19 Policies: Per NYU rules for Fall 2021, appropriately worn facial coverings are required at all class meetings, and eating is not permitted in class. (Occasional sips of water are okay.) Students who are not in compliance with these requirements (or other NYU rules that may be promulgated) will be asked to leave the classroom.

Teaching Modality: The course is offered in-person, and the plan is to stick with this as much as possible. We also have access to Zoom technology if this becomes necessary (e.g., the professor is sick, a significant fraction of the class is sick at the same time, university policies on in-person teaching change as the pandemic progresses, etc.). The Thanksgiving week classes (22 & 24 November 2021) will take place on Zoom rather than in-person.

Course Requirements: Your course grade will be determined by a combination of the following factors: (1) homework assignments (35%), of which there will be three over the course of the semester; (2) one in-class midterm exam (25%); (3) and a (comprehensive) in-class final exam (40%).

The course homework assignments will offer opportunities to engage the course material creatively. As mentioned above, this class teaches political psychology in part through describing various kinds of experiments that researchers have undertaken as a way of learning about political processes. The homework assignments will give you the opportunity to, for example, think about how you would design a political psychology experiment of your own, write a memo advising one of the presidential candidates on how they should conduct their television advertising campaign, and so on.

I do not take attendance; however, you cannot reasonably expect to do well in the course without having assimilated the contents of the lectures. Some of the contents of the lectures will not be in any assigned reading materials, and quite a bit of the material in the assigned readings will not come up in lecture; you will be responsible for everything covered in the assigned readings and in lecture for the purposes of the exams.

Course Books & Readings: There is one required textbook for the course:

(ITPP) Cottam, Dietz-Uhler, Mastors, and Preston. 3rd edition (2016). *Introduction to Political Psychology*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

In addition, students will read a modest number of supplementary research articles (most of them relatively brief), at the rate of less than one per week. Most of these appear on the syllabus below; all are available online through the NYU library system. I will likely add another couple of articles in the latter part of the semester, but this will not amount to very much additional reading beyond what is listed here.

Course Outline *dates approximate, and subject to change based on current events*

Lecture 1 (Wednesday, 8 September 2021): Introduction to Political Psychology

ITPP Chapter 1

Lectures 2-4 (Mon 13, Weds 15, Mon 20 September 2021): Cognition, Heuristics, Biases, and Dissonance in Political Psychology

ITPP Chapter 3 (section on Information Processing)

Quattrone, George A., and Amos Tversky. 1988. "Contrasting Rational and Psychological Analyses of Political Choice." *American Political Science Review* 82:719-736.

Lectures 5-6 (Weds 22, Mon 27 September 2021): Social Identities and the Political Psychology of Groups

ITPP Chapter 3 (sections on Categorization, Social Identity)

ITPP Chapter 4

Tajfel, Henri. 1982. "Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations." *Annual Review of Psychology* 33: 1-39.

Lectures 7-9 (Weds 29 September, Mon 4, Weds 6 October 2021): Emotions, Attitudes, and Beliefs in Political Psychology; Media and Communication

ITPP Chapter 3 (sections on Affect and Emotion, Attitudes)

ITPP Chapter 6, 7

Brader, Ted. 2005. "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade

Voters by Appealing to Emotions.” *American Journal of Political Science* 49(2): 388-405.
Brady, William J., Julian A. Wills, John T. Jost, Joshua A. Tucker, and Jay J. Van Bavel. 2017.
“Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks.” *Proceedings of the
National Academy of Sciences* 114(28): 7313-7318.

Monday, October 11 is Fall Break – no classes that day. All Monday classes meet on Tuesday, October 12
instead.

**Lectures 10-11 (Tues 12, Weds 13 October 2021): Political Psychology of Race and
Ethnicity**

ITPP Chapter 8

Bobo, Lawrence. 1983. “Whites’ Opposition to Busing: Symbolic Racism or Realistic Group
Conflict?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45:1196-1210.

**Lectures 12-13 (Mon 18, Weds 20 October 2021): Personalities and Attributions in
Politics**

ITPP Chapters 2 & 5

Gerber, Alan S., Gregory A. Huber, David Doherty, and Conor M. Dowling. 2011. “The Big
Five Personality Traits in the Political Arena.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 14: 265-287.

In-Class Midterm Exam: Monday, 25 October 2021 from 3:30pm-4:45pm Eastern Time

**Lectures 14-15-16 (Weds 27 October 2021, Mon 1, Weds 3 November 2021): Political
Polarization**

**Lectures 17-18 (Mon 8, Weds 10 November 2021): Fake News and Conspiracy
Theories**

**Lectures 19-20 (Mon 15, Weds 17 November 2021): Obedience, Extremism, Violence,
and Nationalism Part I**

ITPP Chapters 9 & 12

Thanksgiving Week Classes (22, 24 Nov) will be taught via Zoom rather than in person

**Lectures 21-22 (Mon 22, Weds 24 November 2021): Obedience, Extremism, Violence,
and Nationalism Part II**

ITPP Chapters 10, 13, & 14

**Lectures 23-24 (Mon 29 November 2021, Weds 1 December 2021): Fairness,
Legitimacy, and Democratic Stability**

ITPP Chapter 11

**Lecture 25 (Mon 6 December 2021): Political Psychology of the COVID-19 Pandemic
and the QAnon Conspiracy Theory**

Lecture 26 (Wed 8 December 2021): Political Psychology of Empathy and Culture

Wilson, Richard. 1997. “American Political Culture in Comparative Perspective.” *Political
Psychology* 18(2): 483-502.

Lecture 27 (Mon 13 December 2021): Overflow, Wrap-Up, and Extended Q&A

In-Class Final Exam: date TBA (will be 1 hour and 50 minutes, held at the time designated by the registrar for
MW 3:30-4:45pm classes)