PO4770 Political Psychology

Lecturer: Dr. Gizem Arikan
Office: 4.05 (3 College Green)
E-mail: arikang@tcd.ie
Office hours: (MT & HT) Thursdays 10-12 am during teaching weeks, or by appointment

Lectures: (MT) Wednesdays 9-10 am @ARTS 4050B; Wednesdays 4-5 pm @REG HSE
(HT) Fridays 9-10 am @ARTS 5025; Fridays 1-2 pm @ARTS4047

Module description

Representative democracy assumes engaged and rational citizens who use full information to make decisions on the basis of their self-interests. Modern democracies are also based on the assumption that individuals understand and accept their equal status as citizens and are willing to treat others as such. But to what extent do individuals in modern democracies satisfy these assumptions? How do individuals form their attitudes? Do they have organized belief systems that help them make rational decisions easily? Do individuals form their attitudes and make their choices on the basis of their self-interest? Do they seek out objective information when making decisions? Are individuals in modern democracies ready to treat others equally?

Political psychology is a relatively young field of study, which seeks to understand the psychological underpinnings of political attitudes and behavior. This module will introduce you to some of the major topics in the psychological study of politics by focusing on three broad questions concerning normative assumptions of democratic citizenship: How do individuals form and organize their attitudes? How do they process political information? Are most individuals ready to treat each other equally? Rather than providing yes/no answers to these questions, we will try to analyze the psychological processes underlying such citizen preferences.

In the Michaelmas term, we will first survey the history, major themes, and methods of the discipline, and then will move on to discuss how citizens form and organize their attitudes. Topics covered will include elite-based vs bottom-up approaches to ideology; personality and values, cognitive and symbolic approaches, and biological perspectives. We will then discuss different information processing models, talk about the role of affect and emotions in decision-making, motivated reasoning, media effects, and political networks.

In the Hillary term, we will examine group-based approaches to cooperation and conflict in societies. Conformity, obedience, authoritarianism, realistic conflict and social identity theories, social dominance orientation, system justification theory, ethnocentrism and nationalism, prejudice, political violence, and terrorism, will be among the topics that we will study.

Learning aims

The module aims to introduce students to the fundamental concepts and prominent approaches in political psychology. Students will gain a thorough understanding of the major theoretical debates and empirical findings in the discipline, and be able to discuss and evaluate the role of psychological factors underlying political attitudes and behaviour.
**Learning outcomes**

On successful completion of this module students should be able to:

- Describe the historical development of the field of political psychology.
- Compare and criticise the major approaches in the study of attitude formation and organization.
- Explain and interpret the major information processing models.
- Explain the psychological correlates of group dynamics including obedience, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and prejudice.
- Construct arguments concerning current political debates about citizen preferences in modern democracies.

**Office hours**

In case you have any questions about course content, readings, or class discussions, please come to my office hours on **Thursdays between 10.00 and 12.00**. In case you cannot make it to the office hours, please [e-mail](mailto:) me to set up an appointment. I will try to respond to your e-mails within two days during the teaching weeks and one day during the exam period, but note that I may get back to you a bit later than that if I am travelling to attend academic events such as conferences.

Please note that I will not be able to answer substantive questions concerning course content via e-mail. In case you have such questions, please see me during office hours or raise them during class meetings. Please bear in mind that I will not be able to cover the lecture material for you during office hours, as office hours are not intended to replace lectures. Therefore, try not to miss any classes.

**Course organization**

The courses will follow a lecture + seminar format. In general, I will open the class meetings by providing some background about the topic, connect it to the broader literature, and then open the topic up to discussion. On some occasions, I will lecture in between the discussions and provide further explanations. Still, you should not forget that this is a seminar course, and most of the time class meetings will involve in-depth discussions of the week’s material. It is therefore important that all students come to class having done the readings. I will present you with leading questions about the material assigned for the next class meeting so that you know what to focus on the readings. (More about readings below.)

Please pay attention to the following during class discussions:

- Please do not interrupt your classmates when they are talking. You can make a brief note about the points you have in mind and raise them after your friend is finished.
- Please make sure to support your points with references to the readings, objective facts, empirical findings, and logical arguments.
- You may find that some of the issues that we will discuss may be controversial and thus stir a lot of emotions. Please make sure to pay the utmost respect to your fellow classmates and instructor when voicing your opinions. Please refrain from using language that is offensive or insulting to any persons or groups.
Course materials

We will draw on readings from the following books for most of the course. A number of copies have been ordered to the library, and some resources are available as e-books.


There are also other readings, which are available electronically, through the TCD journal arrangements or on the web. I will also make some readings (such as chapters from books not listed above) available through Blackboard.

Some readings may include a lot of concepts and theoretical approaches from psychology that students may find challenging at the beginning of the semester. Many articles also make use of quantitative methods, which might pose some challenges to students who have not taken courses on research methods or statistics. Please do not be put off by the terminology or numbers that you see in the readings! While quantitative methods are becoming increasingly accepted in all fields of political science, this is not a methods course, and I do not expect you to fully understand all details related to the methods parts in the articles. We will do a crash course at the beginning of the semester that will help you with some basics concerning quantitative methods, and particularly experimental methods.

The reading schedule below also includes some readings that may help you with your reading for the course.

Rather than trying to understand all details, focus on the research problem at hand, main arguments, and the findings when reading the articles. Make sure that you understand the terms and concepts well, and let me know if you have any questions about them. As mentioned above, I will also present you with questions concerning the readings in advance so that you can be better prepared for class discussions.

We will also watch the following movies and documentaries and discuss them in our class meetings. These DVDs are also available in the library.

The Wave (Die Welle) / Director: Dennis Gansel, (DVD)

Obedience / Produced by Stanley Milgram, (DVD)

Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment / film by Philip G. Zimbardo (DVD)

I will also post relevant blog posts, news stories, or videos to the Blackboard.
Assessment

As with most senior sophister courses in our department, assessment for this course will be based on two essays which account for 40% of the overall grade for the course (20% per essay) and an annual exam at the end of the second semester (Hilary Term) which accounts for 60% of the overall grade.

In line with departmental guidelines, all essays:

- must be within the word limit (no longer 2,000 words including notes or footnotes, but excluding bibliography),
- must be submitted in Word or PDF format,
- use double or 1.5 line spacing and leave a margin of at least one inch at the left-hand side,
- must be numbered,
- state the final word count,
- use proper citation and referencing, (You can use the referencing format of your choice as long as it is consistent across the essay.)
- must be submitted via Blackboard, which integrates a plagiarism detection software turnitin.

As per Trinity policy, all essays should begin with the essay cover sheet, affirming that the essay is all the student’s own work. The cover can be downloaded from the department web site:
https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/undergraduate/

Please read the department’s undergraduate handbook, which contains a lot of useful information about submission of written assignments and guidelines on writing essays:

The first essay is due no later than 6pm on 24 November 2017. All students should write an essay discussing the following question:

Converse argues that belief systems of elites should be distinguished from those of the ordinary citizens. Do you agree or disagree? How much evidence is there in favor of Converse’s claim? What is the counter-evidence other political psychologists have presented so far? Are there meaningful mass belief systems that serve as important guides to when making decisions in politics?

The second essay is due no later than 6pm on 14 March 2018. Students should pick and write their essays on one of the topics below:

To what extent are authoritarianism and social dominance orientation useful in explaining ethnocentrism and prejudice? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches in terms of explaining intergroup dynamics.

In the light of existing theory and research from political psychology, discuss whether it is possible to create a society where there is no systematic prejudice against marginal groups.

Academic integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception. Academic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating on an exam or assignment, plagiarizing, representing someone else’s work as your own, submitting work previously used without the informing and taking the consent of the instructor, fabricating of information or citations, etc. will not be tolerated. Plagiarism will lead to automatic failure and the matter will be reported to the student’s
tutor and the dean of the faculty; severe penalties are likely to ensue, including possible exclusion from the exam or even the College, in accordance with College policy.

Please read pp. 45-47 of the College Calendar for University’s plagiarism policy: https://www.tcd.ie/calendar/undergraduate-studies/general-regulations-and-information.pdf

General guidelines for students on avoiding plagiarism could be found in the Library’s online tutorial: https://www.tcd.ie/library/support/plagiarism/story.html

Late essays

All late work, unless excused in advance by the module lecturer, or justified by medical certificate or tutor’s note, will be penalised at a rate of 5 marks per day. Under no circumstances will work be accepted after the set work has been marked and handed back to other students, or after the end of the second lecture term.

Make sure to save and back-up your work, as these type of excuses will count as acceptable excuses for late work!

Disability policy

Students with a disability are encouraged to register with the Disability Service (https://www.tcd.ie/disability/) to seek supports where the disability could affect their ability to participate fully in all aspects of the course.

Lecture and reading schedule

Michaelmas term

Week 1: Introduction

Houghton, chapter 2.


Optional: Chong, Dennis. Degrees of Rationality in Politics. (Huddy et al., chapter 4)

Week 2: Methods in Political Psychology


**How do individuals form and organize their attitudes?**

**Week 3: Structure and consistency in attitudes: The top-down approach**


Converse, Philip E. 1960. The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics. (Jost and Sidanius, Reading 10)


**Week 4: Structure and consistency in attitudes: Bottom-up approaches – Personality and values; genetic influences on attitudes**


**Week 5: Structure and consistency in attitudes: Bottom-up approaches – Motivated cognition and group-based approaches**


Optional: Feldman, Stanley. 2013. Political Ideology. (Hudy et al., chapter 19)
How do individuals process political information?

Week 6: Memory-based models of information-processing


Week 7: Reading week, no class

Week 8: Alternatives to memory-based models: Online information-processing and affective models


Week 9: Motivated reasoning


Week 10: Media effects

Iyengar, Shanto, Mark D. Peters, and Donald Kinder. 1982. Experimental Consequences of the ’not-so-minimal’ Consequences of Television News Programs. (Jost and Sidanius, Reading 7)

Krosnick, Jon, and Donald Kinder. 1990. Altering the Foundations of Support for the President through Priming. (Jost and Sidanius, Reading 8)

Optional: Valentino, Nick, and Yioryos Nardis. 2013. Political Communication. (Hudy et al., chapter 18)

**Week 11: Political networks and political behavior**


**Week 12: Essay feedback and semester review**

I will be out of country to attend a workshop this week. We will either have a make-up class or have an online session. Details will be announced in Blackboard.

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**Hillary term**

*Are individuals ready to treat each other equally? Why / why not?*

**Week 1: Intergroup relations and conflict – An introduction**

Take some tests on the Project Implicit web page: [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/ireland/](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/ireland/)


Kinder, Donald. 2013. Prejudice and Politics. (Hudy et al., chapter 25)


**Week 2: Conformity and obedience**

Watch: Obedience / Produced by Stanley Milgram, (DVD)

Watch: Quiet Rage: The Stanford Prison Experiment / film by Philip G. Zimbardo (DVD)

Houghton, chapters 4 and 5.
**Week 3: Authoritarianism and threat**


Altemeyer, Bob. 1998. *The Other Authoritarian Personality*. (Jost and Sidanius, Reading 4)


Nisbet-Larking et al., chapter 18.

**Week 4: Social dominance orientation**


**Week 5: Intergroup conflict: Realistic threat perspective**


**Week 6: Intergroup conflict: Social identity perspective**


Nisbett-Larking et al., chapter 19.

**Week 7: Reading week, no class**

**Week 8: Contrasting intergroup approaches to social conflict**

Watch: *The Wave* (Die Welle) / Director: Dennis Gansel, (DVD)
Week 9: System justification and collective political action


Week 10: Psychology of political violence

Eckstein, Harry. 1980. Theoretical Approaches to Explaining Collective Political Violence. (Jost and Sidanius, Reading 23)


Weeks 11 and 12: Review and conclusions