

# Political Psychology (GOVT 369)

**Professor:** Yamil R. Velez

**Contact:** yvelez@wesleyan.edu

**Office Hours:** 3:00-4:30 PM on Tuesday and by appointment.

**Office Location:** Room 213 in the Public Affairs Center.

**Course Overview:** Political psychology is a diverse and growing area of research in political science that uses psychology as a guide for understanding the political world. The purpose of this course is to expose you to the primary theoretical and methodological tools that help guide research in this area. Our main focus will be on developing "political psychological" thinking and surveying the landscape of this vibrant subfield. Many of the lessons we will learn in this class will have applications that extend well beyond political science, and should alter how you think about your own political attitudes and beliefs.

**Course Structure:** This course will be almost entirely discussion based. If a topic requires a great deal of background knowledge, I will prepare a short lecture covering the topic prior to our discussion. Students are expected to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each paper and how the papers relate to each other. Every week, students will post a set of three questions related to the readings and some of those questions will help guide the discussion. They will also write a short 2-3 page reaction paper on the readings.

**Course Objectives:** By the end of the course, students will:

- Have a better conceptual understanding of the role that psychology plays in politics
- Have a better appreciation of how biases influence an array of important political outcomes
- Develop a more rigorous way of thinking about political issues
- Be better equipped to dissect complex issues and arguments
- Become acquainted with the research process

**Required Book:** Sears, David, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis. 2013. *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2d. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

## Course Outline:<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction to Class

- **September 8:** Course overview
  - Lavine (2010)

### 2. Thinking Fast and Slow

- **September 15:** *How do people process and evaluate information? What does this mean for the study of politics?*
  - Oxford Handbook Ch. 4

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<sup>1</sup>All articles will be made available on the course's NotaBene site.

– Kahneman (2011) Ch. 1-2

### 3. Personality and Individual Differences

- **September 22:** *how do different kinds of people approach the political world? how much can we generalize theories of political behavior?*
  - Gerber et al. (2011)
  - Verhulst, Eaves, and Hatemi (2012)
  - Mischel and Shoda (1995)
  - Greenstein (1967)

### 4. Motivated Reasoning

- **September 29:** *can people accurately reach conclusions on the basis of evidence, or do conclusions drive the search for evidence?*
  - Taber and Lodge (2006)
  - Nyhan and Reifler (2012)
  - Coppock and Guess (2015)
  - Miller, Saunders, and Farhart (2015)

### 5. Framing Effects

- **October 6:** *how do you persuade people in the realm of politics? what is the role of the media and campaigns?*
  - Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997)
  - Druckman (2003)
  - Leeper and Slothuus (2016)
  - Druckman (2001)

### 6. Racism and Prejudice

- **October 13:** *what are the factors that shape prejudicial attitudes and beliefs? is it possible to reduce prejudice?*
  - Devine (1989)
  - Duckitt (2001)
  - Kinder and Sears (1981)
  - Velez and Lavine (2016)

### 7. Affect and Emotion

- **October 20:** *what is the role of affect and emotion in shaping political decision-making?*
  - Lodge and Taber (2005)
  - Marcus and MacKuen (1993)
  - Huddy et al. (2005)
  - Erisen, Lodge, and Taber (2013)

### 8. Political Ideology

- **October 27:** *how do people organize their political beliefs? where do those beliefs come from?*
  - Converse (1962)

- Smith et al. (2011)
- Jost (2006)
- Haidt, Graham, and Joseph (2009)

## 9. Research Design and Criticism Workshop

- **November 3**

- Martin (2001)
- Mutz and Reeves (2005)
- Gibson et al (2014)
- Kane (2016)
- Brader (2005)

## 10. Implicit Attitudes

- **November 10:** *how much of our political thinking is governed by unconscious processes?*

- Taber and Lodge (2016)
- Arcuri et al. (2008)
- Perez (2010)
- Mo (2015)
- Berger, Meredith, and Wheeler (2008)

## 11. Polarization and Political Extremism

- **November 17:** *why have Americans grown so politically polarized?*

- Hetherington and Weiler (2009)
- Mason (2015)
- Iyengar, Good, and Lelkes (2012)
- Levendusky and Malhotra (2016)

## 12. Forming Impressions

- **December 1:** *how do people form impressions of candidates?*

- Holbrook et al. (2001)
- Lodge et al. (1995)
- McGraw (1991)
- Feldman and Conover (1983)
- Huddy and Terkildsen (1993)

## 13. Attitude Change and Persuasion

- **December 8:** *is it possible to change peoples' attitudes and beliefs once they have been formed?*

- Broockman and Kalla (2016)
- Levitan and Verhulst (2016)
- Paluck (2009)
- Zaller (1991)

## Grading System:

I use the grade conversions used by the registrar to assign grades.

## Grade Breakdown:

1. Final Paper (40 %): The final paper will be an analytical essay covering a topic discussed in the course or a research paper that employs statistical analyses. The paper should be 15-20 pages long.
2. Reaction Papers (20 %): Every week, you will be asked to submit a short 2-3 page reaction paper about the readings. These papers are due before lecture. There is no reaction paper due during the first week of class. I will drop your lowest reaction paper grade.
3. Discussion Questions (15 %): Prior to the lecture, you should submit discussion questions pertaining to the readings for the week. These discussion questions should be sent in by 5 PM on Wednesday.
4. Prospectus (10 %): The prospectus is a short 3-5 page proposal that sketches out a plan for the final paper and discusses how the paper fits into the existing literature.
5. Participation (15 %): Participation in the course will be determined by your engagement in class and outside of class. Every week, you will submit three questions about the material. These questions are due before class.

**Important Dates:** Papers are due before class.

- November 10: Prospectus
- December 15: Final Paper

**Readings:** All of the readings will be posted on the class' NotaBene site. NotaBene is an interactive annotation tool for articles and books. This site will allow you to annotate and ask me questions while you read the material. This is a good tool if you do not understand something in the article or if the article gives you a research idea. I **strongly** recommend using this service as we move through the course.

**Extra Help:** Students are expected to hand in their own work. Do not hesitate to come to my office during office hours to discuss an assignment or any aspect of the course.

**Late Work:** Late research paper assignments will lose 2/3 of a letter grade (e.g., a B+ becomes B-) for each day they are late. An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted more than 10 minutes after the stated deadline. The assignment becomes two days late 24 hours after the deadline, 3 days late after 48 hours, 4 days late after 72 hours, and 5 days late after 96 hours. Assignments over five days late will not be accepted for credit.

**Contacting the Instructor:** I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course content and assignments. Please refer to me as Professor Velez in all correspondence. In general, if you have a clarification question you can reach me over e-mail or on my office phone. Questions about course material, grades, or how to structure your research paper are best dealt with in office hours where we can have a more productive conversation than over e-mail. If my office hours do not work for you because of your class schedule, work schedule, or another important commitment, I am also available by appointment. I cannot guarantee that if you e-mail me shortly before an assignment is due that I will be

able to answer your questions, so please make sure and e-mail me early if you have a time-specific question.

**Contested Grades:** If you wish to contest a grade you must submit a written explanation of why you believe the grade is inaccurate within two weeks of getting the assignment back. You must wait 24 hours from the time the assignment is returned before you submit the written explanation. I will not discuss grades until 24 hours after the assignment is passed back. If you ask me to reevaluate your grade then I reserve the right to either raise or lower your grade based on my reevaluation. This policy is meant to address disagreements with my assessment of your work. It does not pertain to calculation errors on my part. If you believe I have made a mistake adding up points, converting your points to a percentage, etc. you can let me know immediately, and I will be happy to correct any mistakes. Grades will not be rounded up.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

**Technology in the Classroom:** You may not use laptops or tablets (unless you contact me about an exception).

**Academic Integrity:** Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another persons work as your own is always wrong. I expect students to follow the Wesleyan honor code and I will report any cases of academic dishonesty to the Honor Board.

Please read this for more information: [Wesleyan Honor Code](#)

For information on plagiarism: [Plagiarism, Student Handbook](#)

**Title IX:** Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 states that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. See [Title IX at Wesleyan](#) for more information.

**Syllabus:** Note that this syllabus is a rough guide and subject to change.