Course description

The field of political psychology is vast and cuts through many subfields of political science. The focus in this course is about how theories of psychology apply to explain people’s political attitudes and behaviours. In particular, the course is about how people receive, process, and use information they receive from their environment, interactions with others, the news media, and political elites to develop, change or maintain their political attitudes and make political decisions. Topics to be explored include candidate evaluation and choice, political knowledge and misinformation, media effects, political polarization, and racial prejudice. Students will also be introduced to basic notions of the experimental design, a requisite to understanding the work produced in political psychology.

Course text

The required text for this course is:


Other readings are available electronically through Western Libraries and the course’s OWL site (see the Resources tab).

Course assessment

Students will be assessed as follows:

- **Class participation (15%)**: students will be responsible to sign up for leading class discussion at least three (3) times during the semester. See the Excel spreadsheet in the Resources tab on OWL to learn about the reading weeks you are responsible.

- **2 short essays each worth 25%**: Students are required to produce two essays of about 1250 words each in response to two prompts. The first prompt will be distributed on October 14 and the second on November 18. The first essay is due on OWL on **November 15, no later than 11:55pm** and the second on **December 6, no later than 11:55pm**. No late essay will be accepted.

- **Final take-home exam (35%)**: Students will be given a cumulative final take-home exam on December 9 to be turned in on OWL. The date will be determined by Western. Look for the final exam schedule to be published during the semester. The exam will consist of seven short answer questions. No late exam will be accepted.

Topics and readings

**Week #1 (September 9): Course introduction**

Review of syllabus and class organization.
Week #2 (September 16): Introduction to Political Psychology


Suggested/Graduate students readings:


Week #3 (September 23): Experimental Political Science


Suggested/Graduate students readings:


Week #4 (September 30): Political attitudes


Suggested/Graduate students readings:


Week #5 (October 7): Decision-Making and Judgment


Suggested/Graduate students readings:


**Week #6 (October 14): Heuristics and Cues**


**Suggested/Graduate students readings:**


**Week #7 (October 21): Online and Memory-Based Information Processing**


**Suggested/Graduate students readings:**


**Week #8 (October 28): Motivated Reasoning, Political Knowledge, and Misinformation**


**Suggested/Graduate students readings:**


**Week #9 (November 4): Reading week**

**Week #10 (November 11): Candidate Evaluations**


Suggested/Graduate students readings:


**Week #11 (November 18): Evolutionary approaches to political psychology (special guest Jordan Mansell, post-doctoral fellow at NEST (Western))**


Suggested/Graduate students readings:


**Week #12 (November 25): Media Effects**


Suggested/Graduate students readings:


**Week #13 (December 2): Race, Racial Priming and Racial Prejudice**


Suggested/Graduate students readings:


**Week #14 (December 9): Intergroup Relations and Polarization**


Suggested/Graduate students readings:
