

Public Opinion and Political Psychology Syllabus

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Overview and course requirements

In this course for advanced undergraduates and graduate students, we will delve into the psychology behind political opinion and behavior. In the field of political science, the psychological mechanisms guiding political views were initially explored mainly through studies in public opinion, which is to say, survey research. Partly in response to the limitations of survey research, and partly as an off-shoot of work independently occurring in psychology departments, experimental and laboratory techniques were added to the toolkit, and although the questions being explored were similar to those in public opinion, the subfield became known as political psychology. We will be treating these two fields in a unified fashion, given their overlapping interest in the psychological mechanisms behind political behavior and opinions.

We begin with a brief introduction to the two fields, assuming that students are more familiar with public opinion than with political psychology. We then tackle three major topic areas, exploring papers that employ both survey and experimental designs. The first section covers the organizing structures behind political beliefs: ideology; identity and social groups; personality – and in particular, the so-called “authoritarian” personality; and finally ambivalence, or how individuals deal with conflicting views. The second section moves beyond belief structures, to look more closely at psychological processes of political judgment and evaluation: how individuals deal with deficient information; how they use shortcuts of memory and calculation; how they are influenced by their unconscious associations and beliefs; and how emotions, in particular, influence judgment and behavior. The last section moves in turn beyond the single individual, to look at the practical problems of persuasion: how the news media affects consumers; and how the media and elites affect individuals’ judgments by framing the importance of competing issues. In the last class, we will spend half our time discussing the big picture – how far we have come, and where the field might go next – which naturally segues into specific proposals for where to go next, the student papers.

Requirements Each student will be required to write weekly 1-page response papers, present to the class at least three of the papers we will be reading, and develop a final project. The final grade will be determined by 20% class participation and discussion, 20% response papers and presentations, and 60% the final project.

- **Response papers** These should be short, but not summaries. Rather, they should focus on one or two related papers, emphasize their strengths, and present critiques and avenues for improvement or further research, as well as questions raised that might be interesting to discuss in class. Students may skip up to two weeks of their choosing.
- **Presentations** A sign-up sheet will be posted online a couple days after the first class, and students are expected to fill out their schedule in the first couple weeks of class. Presentations should be very brief (5-10 minutes) and should include a short overview of your chosen paper and, as with the response papers, an evaluation of its strengths, weaknesses, and the substantive questions it raises.
- **Final paper** Because much of what we will read involves either experiments or survey design, students will not be required to provide a full paper with data and results. Instead, they are asked to provide,

essentially, the first two-thirds of a paper: a research hypothesis, overview of the relevant literature (perhaps more extensive than would fit in a final published paper), and a careful design of an experiment, survey, or other data-generating process that will hopefully answer your questions. Furthermore, along the way, students will be required to submit a short paper proposal (Week 11) and the last class will be dedicated to discussions of paper proposals and research design.

Week 1. Introduction

Groundwork

After looking briefly at some of the seminal works in public opinion, we will focus mainly on Zaller's book. Though not the be-all and end-all of the field, it is an important effort to synthesize the entire process, from public influence, to psychology, to survey response. His model will turn up in different guises throughout the rest of the course. The week on political psychology will serve more as an introduction to students who might be less familiar with experimental and laboratory research and design. It will also look more broadly at the question of psychology, and how that differs, or doesn't, from the dominant rationalist paradigm.

Week 2. Public Opinion

W. Lippmann. *Public Opinion*. Transaction Publishers, 1922 Ch. 1

V.O. Key and V. Orlando. *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. Knopf New York, 1961 Introduction.

J. Zaller. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press, 1992 Ch 1-5.

Further reading:

P.E. Converse. Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion in the Political Process. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 51(4):S12–S24, 1987

J.S. Fishkin. *The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy*. Yale University Press, 1997

S. Herbst. *Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics*. University Of Chicago Press, 1993

A.J. Berinsky. *Silent Voices: Public Opinion and Political Participation in America*. Princeton University Press, 2004

Week 3. Political Psychology

H.A. Simon. Human Nature in Politics. *American Political Science Review*, 79(2):293–304, 1985

G.a. Quattrone and A. Tversky. Contrasting Rational and Psychological Analyses of Political Choice. *American Political Science Review*, 82(3):719–736, 1988

R. McDermott. Experimental Methods in Political Science. *Annual Reviews in Political Science*, 5(1):31–61, 2002

W. Rahn, J.L. Sullivan, and T.J. Rudolph. Political Psychology and Political Science. *Thinking About Political Psychology*, pages 155–186, 2002

Structures of Belief

In public opinion research, as in popular opinion, the dominant organizational principle was originally the ideology, so we begin with that. As we will see, the fundamental question will be whether ideology is a separate causal factor, or merely a name for empirically evident clusters of beliefs. Another source of belief organization, this time outside the individual, is the social group, where group identities may structure and organize beliefs – or again, it may just be that we hang out with like-minded people. Turning in a more traditionally psychological direction, perhaps instead there are personality types that structure beliefs. Authoritarianism has become a popular framework for understanding a certain cluster of belief types, but perhaps even more than the previous two topics, it is also beset by accusations that the notion is ad hoc and not causal. Finally, we will look at what happens when beliefs are not consistent or structured, and how individuals deal with conflicting opinions.

Week 4. Ideology

P.E. Converse. The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Politics. *Ideology and Discontent*, pages 206–261, 1964

C.H. Achen. Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response. *American Political Science Review*, 69(4):1218–1231, 1975

S. Feldman. Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values. *American Journal of Political Science*, 32(2):416–40, 1988

J.H. Kuklinski, R.C. Luskin, and J. Bolland. Where Is the Schema? Going Beyond the ‘s’word in Political Psychology. *American Political Science Review*, 85(4):1341–1356, 1991

P. Goren. Party Identification and Core Political Values. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(4):881–896, 2005

J.T. Jost and O. Hunyady. Antecedents and Consequences of System-Justifying Ideologies. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14(5):260–265, 2005

Further reading:

D.O. Sears, R.R. Lau, T.R. Tyler, and H.M. Allen Jr. Self-Interest Vs. Symbolic Politics in Policy Attitudes and Presidential Voting. *American Political Science Review*, 74(3):670–684, 1980

J.A. McCann. Electoral Choices and Core Value Change: The 1992 Presidential Campaign. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41:564–583, 1997

J.T. Jost, J. Glaser, A.W. Kruglanski, and F.J. Sulloway. Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(3):339–375, 2003

W.G. Jacoby. Value Choices and American Public Opinion. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(3):706–723, 2006

Week 5. Identity and Social Groups

P.J. Conover. The Influence of Group Identifications on Political Perception and Evaluation. *Journal of Politics*, 46(3):760–785, 1984

Rm Kramer and Mb Brewer. Effects of Group Identity on Resource Use in a Simulated Commons Dilemma. *J Pers Soc Psychol*, 46(5):1044–57, 1984

H.E. Brady and P.M. Sniderman. Attitude Attribution: A Group Basis for Political Reasoning. *American Political Science Review*, 79(4):1061–78, 1985

L. Huddy. From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory. *Political Psychology*, 22(1):127–156, 2001

P. Oakes. Psychological Groups and Political Psychology: A Response to Huddys Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory. *Political Psychology*, 23(4):809–824, 2002

Further reading:

H. Schuman and J.M. Converse. The Effects of Black and White Interviewers on Black Responses in 1968. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 35(1):44–68, 1971

R. Huckfeldt and J. Sprague. Networks in Context: The Social Flow of Political Information. *American Political Science Review*, 81(4):1197–1216, 1987

P.J. Conover. The Role of Social Groups in Political Thinking. *British Journal of Political Science*, 18(1):51–76, 1988

M.B. Brewer. The Social Self: On Being the Same and Different at the Same Time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17(5):475, 1991

P.E. Tetlock, R.S. Peterson, C. McGuire, S. Chang, and P. Feld. Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes Assessing Political Group Dynamics: A Test of the Groupthink Model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(3):403–425, 1992

D.C. Mutz. *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes*. Cambridge University Press, 1998

D.R. Kinder. Belief Systems After Converse. *Electoral Democracy*, pages 13–47, 2003

Week 6. Personality and Authoritarianism

S. Feldman and K. Stenner. Perceived Threat and Authoritarianism. *Political Psychology*, 18(4):741–770, 1997

H. Lavine, D. Burgess, M. Snyder, J. Transue, J.L. Sullivan, B. Haney, and S.H. Wagner. Threat, Authoritarianism, and Voting: An Investigation of Personality and Persuasion. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 25(3):337, 1999

F. Pratto, D.G. Tatar, and S. Conway-Lanz. Who Gets What and Why: Determinants of Social Allocations. *Political Psychology*, 20(1):127–150, 1999

S. Feldman. Enforcing Social Conformity: A Theory of Authoritarianism. *Political Psychology*, 24(1):41–74, 2003

H. Lavine, M. Lodge, and K. Freitas. Threat, Authoritarianism, and Selective Exposure to Information. *Political Psychology*, 26(2):219–244, 2005

Further reading:

B. Altemeyer. *The Authoritarian Specter*. Harvard Univ Pr, 1996

K. Stenner. *The Authoritarian Dynamic*. Cambridge University Press, 2005

Week 7. Ambivalence

R.M. Alvarez and J. Brehm. American Ambivalence Towards Abortion Policy: Development of a Heteroskedastic Probit Model of Competing Values. *American Journal of Political Science*, 39(4):1055–82, 1995

M. Peffley, P. Knigge, and J. Hurwitz. A Multiple Values Model of Political Tolerance. *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(2):379, 2001

K.M. McGraw, E. Hasecke, and K. Conger. Ambivalence, Uncertainty, and Processes of Candidate Evaluation. *Political Psychology*, 24(3):421–448, 2003

S.J. Basinger and H. Lavine. Ambivalence, Information, and Electoral Choice. *American Political Science Review*, 99(02):169–184, 2005

Further reading:

S. Feldman and J. Zaller. The Political Culture of Ambivalence: Ideological Responses to the Welfare State. *The Political Research Experience: Readings and Analysis*, 2002

H. Lavine. The Electoral Consequences of Ambivalence Toward Presidential Candidates. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(4):915–929, 2001

R.M. Alvarez and J. Brehm. *Hard Choices, Easy Answers: Values, Information, and American Public Opinion*. Princeton University Press, 2002. Ch. 1-4.

Cognitive Processes and Limitations

The previous two weeks have led us inexorably towards more detailed psychological mechanisms for understanding how beliefs are formed and how they change. In this section, we look more closely at the processes of decision making: not so much the structure of beliefs, but their creation and subsequent effects on behavior. Here, of course, the experimental method will be crucial. We begin with how individuals think given limited or flawed information, how they deal with flawed memories, or rationalize ad-hoc decisions they have made. We then look more closely at heuristics, the short-cuts of evaluation and analysis people employ to make decisions in a complex world when perfect Bayesian rationality may be impossible. We then turn from such (semi) conscious procedures to unconscious ones, and look at a small portion of the huge new literature suggesting that we are all, unconsciously, riven by prejudice and instinctive judgments. Does the fact these prejudices can be suppressed mean that they are not a problem? Finally, we look at the tricky nature of emotion: is it another short-cut for analysis; or again, just a name for a cluster of opinions; or does it have its own causes and effects independent of the other mechanisms we have explored?

Week 8. Cognitive and Informational Limitations

W.M. Rahn, J.a. Krosnick, and M. Breuning. Rationalization and Derivation Processes in Survey Studies of Political Candidate Evaluation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 38(3):582–600, 1994

M. Lodge, M.R. Steenbergen, and S. Brau. The Responsive Voter: Campaign Information and the Dynamics of Candidate Evaluation. *American Political Science Review*, 89(2):309–326, 1995

S.L. Althaus. Information Effects in Collective Preferences. *American Political Science Review*, 92:545–558, 1998

C.S. Taber and M. Lodge. Information Processing and Public Opinion. *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology (New York: Oxford Up 2003)*, pages 433–76, 2003

M. Gilens. Political Ignorance and Collective Policy Preferences. *American Political Science Review*, 95(02):379–396, 2005

Further reading:

St Fiske, Dr Kinder, and Wm Larter. The Novice and the Expert: Knowledge-Based Strategies in Political Cognition. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology(Print)*, 19(4):381–400, 1983

J. Zaller. Information, Values, and Opinion. *American Political Science Review*, 85(4):1215–1237, 1991

J.T. Cacioppo and R.E. Petty. Effects of Message Repetition and Position on Cognitive Response, Recall, and Persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(1):97–109, 1979

C.S. Taber and M.R. Steenbergen. Computational Experiments in Electoral Behavior. *Political Judgment: Structure and Process*, page 141, 1995

L.M. Bartels. Uninformed Votes: Information Effects in Presidential Elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, 40:194–230, 1996

A. Lupia and M.D. McCubbins. *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?* Cambridge University Press, 1998

Week 9. Heuristics

A. Tversky and D. Kahneman. Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases. *Science*, 185(4157):1124–1131, 1974

V.C. Ottati. Determinants of Political Judgments: The Joint Influence of Normative and Heuristic Rules of Inference. *Political Behavior*, 12(2):159–179, 1990

A. Lupia. Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias: Information and Voting Behavior in California Insurance Reform Elections. *American Political Science Review*, 88(1):63–76, 1994

M.D. Cobb and J.H. Kuklinski. Changing Minds: Political Arguments and Political Persuasion. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41:88–121, 1997

R.R. Lau and D.P. Redlawsk. Advantages and Disadvantages of Cognitive Heuristics in Political Decision Making. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(4):951–971, 2001

Further reading:

M. Lodge, K. McGraw, and P. Stroh. An Impression-Driven Model of Candidate Evaluation. *American Political Science Review*, 83(2):399–419, 1989

D. Chong. How People Think, Reason, and Feel About Rights and Liberties. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(3):867–99, 1993

J.J. Mondak. Source Cues and Policy Approval: The Cognitive Dynamics of Public Support for the Reagan Agenda. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(1):186–212, 1993

K.M. McGraw and M. Steenbergen. Pictures in the Head: Memory Representations of Political Candidates. *Political Judgment: Structure and Process*, pages 15–41, 1995

E. Converse Philip. Assessing the Capacity of Mass Electorates. *Annual Review of Political Science*, pages 331–353, 2000

C.P. Haugtvedt and R.E. Petty. Personality and Persuasion: Need for Cognition Moderates the Persistence and Resistance of Attitude Changes. *Journal Of Personality and Social Pschologv*, 63(2.308-319), 1992

Week 10. Automatic and Unconscious Response

R.H. Fazio, D.M. Sanbonmatsu, M.C. Powell, and F.R. Kardes. On the Automatic Activation Ofattitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50:229–238, 1986

P.G. Devine. Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(1):5–18, 1989

A.G. Greenwald, D.E. McGhee, J.L.K. Schwartz, Y. Shoda, and M.I. Attitudes. Measuring Individual Differences in Implicit Cognition: The Implicit Association Test. *Journal of Personality*, 74(6):1464–1480, 1998

H. Lavine, E. Borgida, and J.L. Sullivan. On the Relationship Between Attitude Involvement and Attitude Accessibility: Toward a Cognitive-Motivational Model of Political Information Processing. *Political Psychology*, 21(1):81–106, 2000

M. Lodge and C.S. Taber. The Automaticity of Affect for Political Leaders, Groups, and Issues: An Experimental Test of the Hot Cognition Hypothesis. *Political Psychology*, 26(3):455–482, 2005

Further reading:

A.G. Greenwald, M.R. Banaji, and Others. Implicit Social Cognition: Attitudes, Self-Esteem, and Stereotypes. *Psychological Review*, 102:4–27, 1995

C.M. Brendl, A.B. Markman, and C. Messner. How Do Indirect Measures of Evaluation Work? Evaluating the Inference of Prejudice in the Implicit Association Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(5):760–773, 2001

N. Terkildsen. When White Voters Evaluate Black Candidates: The Processing Implications of Candidate Skin Color, Prejudice, and Self-Monitoring. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(4):1032–53, 1993

Week 11. Emotion

G.E. Marcus and M.B. Mackuen. Anxiety, Enthusiasm, and the Vote: The Emotional Underpinnings of Learning and Involvement During Presidential Campaigns. *American Political Science Review*, 87(3):672–685, 1993

Ge Marcus. Emotions in Politics. *Annual Reviews in Political Science*, 3(1):221–250, 2000

R. McDermott. The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science. *Perspectives on Politics*, 2(04):691–706, 2004

T. Brader. Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(2):388–405, 2005

B.C. Burden and C.a. Klofstad. Affect and Cognition in Party Identification. *Political Psychology*, 26(6):869–886, 2005

L. Huddy, S. Feldman, C. Taber, and G. Lahav. Threat, Anxiety, and Support of Antiterrorism Policies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3):593–608, 2005

Further reading:

G.E. Marcus, W.R. Neuman, and M. Mackuen. *Affective Intelligence and Political Judgment*. University Of Chicago Press, 2000

L.M. Isbell and V.C. Ottati. The Emotional Voter. *The Social Psychology of Politics*, pages 55–74, 2002

R.L. Nabi. Exploring the Framing Effects of Emotion: Do Discrete Emotions Differentially Influence Information Accessibility, Information Seeking, and Policy Preference? *Communication Research*, 30(2):224, 2003

Persuasion

In the concluding weeks of the course, we turn from analysis to synthesis, examining the real-world interplay of the various factors we have previously explored. We begin with the fraught question of the effect of the news media on consumers: how large is it, and is bias a problem given the vulnerabilities we have already thoroughly documented? Delving deeper into a specific mechanism here leads to the burgeoning field of “framing,” where external sources affect not people’s beliefs per se, but the relative importance ranking of the issues before them. The effects of framing appear quite large, and are a challenge for traditional rationalist approaches, since it is unclear how rational bayesian beliefs should respond to arguments about relative importance.

Week 12. The Media

S. Iyengar, M.D. Peters, and D.R. Kinder. Experimental Demonstrations of the “Not-So-Minimal” Consequences of Television News Programs. *American Political Science Review*, 76(4):848–858, 1982

L.M. Bartels. Messages Received: The Political Impact of Media Exposure. *American Political Science Review*, 87(2):267–285, 1993

T.E. Nelson, R.a. Clawson, and Z.M. Oxley. Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance. *American Political Science Review*, 91:567–584, 1997

W.P. Eveland and D.V. Shah. The Impact of Individual and Interpersonal Factors on Perceived News Media Bias. *Political Psychology*, 24(1):101–117, 2003

P.A. Beck, R.J. Dalton, S. Greene, and R. Huckfeldt. The Social Calculus of Voting: Interpersonal, Media, and Organizational Influences on Presidential Choices. *American Political Science Review*, 96(01):57–73, 2004

Further reading:

J. Zaller. The Myth of Massive Media Impact Revived: New Support for a Discredited Idea. *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*, pages 17–78, 1996

D.R. Kinder. Communication and Opinion. *Annual Reviews in Political Science*, 1(1):167–197, 1998

J.M. Miller and J.a. Krosnick. News Media Impact on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Politically Knowledgeable Citizens Are Guided by a Trusted Source. *American Journal of Political Science*, 44(2):301–315, 2000

Week 13. Framing

J.A. Krosnick and D.R. Kinder. Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming. *American Political Science Review*, 84(2):497–512, 1990

J.N. Druckman. On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who Can Frame? *The Journal of Politics*, 63(4):1041–1066, 2001

J.N. Druckman. Political Preference Formation: Competition, Deliberation, and the (Ir) Relevance of Framing Effects. *American Political Science Review*, 98(04):671–686, 2004

N.a. Valentino, V.L. Hutchings, and I.K. White. Cues That Matter: How Political Ads Prime Racial Attitudes During Campaigns. *American Political Science Review*, 96(01):75–90, 2004

P.R. Brewer and K. Gross. Values, Framing, and Citizens' Thoughts About Policy Issues: Effects on Content and Quantity. *Political Psychology*, 26(6):929–948, 2005

N.J.G. Winter. Beyond Welfare: Framing and the Racialization of White Opinion on Social Security. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2):400–420, 2006

Further reading:

J.N. Druckman, L.R. Jacobs, and E. Ostermeier. Candidate Strategies to Prime Issues and Image. *Journal of Politics*, 66(4):1180–1202, 2004

A.J. Berinsky and D.R. Kinder. Making Sense of Issues Through Media Frames: Understanding the Kosovo Crisis. *Journal of Politics*, 68(3):640–656, 2006

G.A. Huber and J.S. Lapinski. The “Race Card” Revisited: Assessing Racial Priming in Policy Contests. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2):421–440, 2006

Week 14. Wrap-up and paper proposals.

We finish with a look backwards and forwards. What have these psychological approaches added to our understanding of political opinion and behavior? How, if at all, do they challenge traditional rational-behavior models? What sorts of new models can we devise that more directly include all the vagaries of human belief and thought that we have explored? And how might we apply the discoveries to our specific fields of interest? I look forward to seeing your own proposals for where to go next.