

# VALUE AND BIAS IN PUBLIC POLICY

## PPOL 3260

### COURSE INFORMATION

#### *Professor*

Sophie Trawalter, Ph.D.

#### *Teaching Assistant*

Matt Motyl, Ph.D. Candidate

#### *Graders*

Kathryn Babineau & Melissa Rickman, M.P.P. Candidates

#### *Class Time and Location*

Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:00am-9:50am, *Monroe Hall 130*

#### *Lab Times and Locations*

Tuesdays, 5:00-5:50pm, *Cocke Hall 115*

Wednesdays, 6:00pm-6:60pm, *Cocke Hall 115*

Thursdays, 6:00pm-6:50pm, *Monroe Hall 122*

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

*Can't we all just get along? Why not?* Since the 1990s, political polarization has increased. Staunch conservatives and staunch liberals disagree on virtually every policy issue, even when facing the same facts. What's worse, they can't seem to work together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. In this course, we will take a social psychological perspective to examine why conservatives and liberals so often disagree and whether such disagreement is inevitable. We will also consider when political diversity might be a good thing and develop strategies for promoting political civility.

In class discussions and blog posts, you will explore political behavior and policy decisions. You will learn to think like a social psychologist and gain a deeper understanding of political behavior. Specifically, you will realize that much of political behavior is not rational. Rather, it is guided by cognitive biases, emotions, and ideological motivations. This deeper understanding of political behavior will empower you to engage in political discourse and become a role model of political civility.

More specifically, by the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the strengths of the scientific method and use it to evaluate claims about politics and policy (your own and others') and test new claims about political behavior
- Read scientific empirical articles with an eye toward real-world applications
- Articulate why rationalist models provide an incomplete view of political behavior
- Identify potential sources of bias in political/policy decisions
- Analyze how bias affects your and others' political/policy decisions
- Engage in constructive conversations about politics and policy; practice humility and take others' political perspective, talk with (not down to) others
- Develop viable strategies for reducing intergroup political conflict
- Consider ways to leverage political diversity and transform our political landscape
- Create new knowledge about political/policy decisions and behavior

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### *Participation*

Throughout this course, you will be part of a 6-person group. This group setting will give you the opportunity to discuss course readings, share ideas for course writings, and provide feedback on these writings. Group discussions should help you hone in on topics, deepen your analysis, and get you thinking about broader applications of course content. They will also provide opportunities to engage in discussions about politics and policy in a safe setting. Your participation grade will come primarily from your class participation and, more specifically, your group participation (as rated by you and your group members) and lab participation (see below).

### *Lab*

You are enrolled in a weekly one-hour lab section. During lab, you will get an opportunity to (1) apply course content to real-world events and/or (2) address questions inspired by class lectures, activities, and discussions. More specifically, lab sessions will consist of guided discussions and exercises to help you develop your thinking about political and policy issues, and guide your writing for the class blog. And/or, lab sessions will give you the opportunity to design and conduct studies (and ideally experiments) on political behavior. We will then conduct your lab experiment via MTurk, an online marketplace powered by Amazon.com. That is, we will recruit participants from this online community of workers and collect data, which we will analyze and discuss in class. In other words, lab sessions will enable you to contribute new knowledge and/or novel ideas about public policy and politics.

### *Learning Portfolio*

At the end of the course, you will be asked to create a learning portfolio in which you will reflect upon the changes in your thinking about politics and policy. Everything you will write in this course is eligible for inclusion in your portfolio. In addition, everything your fellow students write in this course, every reading you do for this course and every experiment and data your lab section produces are eligible for inclusion in your portfolio. Your mid-term exam will also be a part of your learning portfolio. Your success with this final assignment will depend in large measure on your continuous effort throughout the semester. This is not a course in which you can put off work, think about it later, or cram and do well. Keep an eye out for topics that really engage you early on and pursue them in your writings.

### *Group Blog*

Over the course of the semester, you and your group will be creating a blog. You are expected to contribute a minimum of 6 blog entries and provide a minimum of commentary on 6 blog entries. *Class activities and discussion can and should serve as the starting place for blog entries.* The key to writing successful blog entries is to follow-up and write blog entries on topics that move you. To ensure that you do not put off writing these blogs until the end of the semester, you will be asked to complete 3 blog entries by mid-semester. Do not put off writing these blogs until the last minute—you will not be satisfied with blog entries you write at the last minute.

At the end of the course, we will publish the course blog and invite the public—faculty and graduate student in the Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, local politicians and community leaders, other bloggers, online MTurk workers, your family and friends—to read and comment on the blog. This will be an opportunity for us to inform the general public about the psychological basis of political behavior and model what constructive political discourse might look like.

### *Quizzes*

You will be given two quizzes. Quizzes will be primarily multiple-choice questions and short answers. These quizzes will assess foundational knowledge that you will be learning from course readings, course lectures and activities, and group discussions.

### **EVALUATION PROCEDURES**

Statement of high expectations and grading philosophy [HERE](#). Statement of resources (writing center, TAs, librarian) [HERE](#).

<b>Learning Assessment</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Evaluation procedure</b>
Participation	20%	(Attendance, self-, peer, and TA evaluations)
Learning portfolio	30%	(Rubric <a href="#">HERE</a> )
Class blogs	30%	(Completion checks)
Quizzes	20%	(Percent correct)
Extra credit	3.3%	

*A note on extra credit:* Students who generate a lot of discussion on the blog and/or who are featured disproportionately in learning portfolios will receive extra credit points. Their grade will go up 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g., B → B+, B+ → A-, A- → A)

### **COURSE MATERIALS**

All course readings, supplementary materials, and resources will be posted on the course website.

## COURSE CALENDAR

### Week 1: Why social psychology? (No Monday class, No lab)

*No Readings*

*Activities*

- Inattention blindness demo
- Social psychology “pop quiz”
- Name that Tune Demo
- “Fun to smoke marijuana” demo

### Week 2: A call for experimental politics?

*Readings*

- Chapter on methods

*Activity*

- *What would the control condition be?* Ask students to consider a number of claims made by presidential candidates (“Obama’s policies are responsible for our economic condition”) and ask them to determine what evidence they would need to believe this claim.

### Week 3: The rational political actor: Who is s/he? Do we really think s/he exists?

Monday

*Readings*

- Tetlock. (2002). Social functionalist frameworks for judgment and choice: Intuitive politicians, theologians, and prosecutors. *Psych Rev*, 109, 451-471.
- Patton & Sawicki. (1993). Basic Methods of Policy Analysis and Planning. In [book](#).

*Activity*

- Create a flow chart (or some other illustration) of how political/policy decisions are made

Wednesday

*Readings*

- Look over Wordpress instructions, help menus, etc.

*Activity*

- Begin Wordpress blog

### Lab

- Correlation lab: Find a correlation in the news (policy-relevant). Evaluate whether it is used correctly or not. (“marijuana associated with mental illness” therefore we should keep marijuana illegal? Make them come up with reverse causation story and third variables for a number of correlations)

## **Week 4: Cognitive Biases: Deep down, are we personality psychologists? (Fundamental attribution error, attribution theory)**

### Monday

#### *Readings*

- Tetlock. (YEAR). Cognitive biases and organizational correctives: Do both disease and cure depend on the political beholder?

#### *Activity*

- Compare and contrast Howard Dean with and without “context”

### Wednesday

#### *Readings—choose one*

- Quintanilla, Victor. (YEAR). (Mis)Judging intent: The fundamental attribution error in federal securities law.
- Maruna. (2006). A fundamental attribution error? Rethinking cognitive distortions. *Legal and Criminology Psych*
- Heradstveit et al. *Attribution Theory and Arab Images of the Gulf War*.

#### *Activity*

- “Name the attribution”—Use Kelly’s model of co-variation to make accurate attributions about politicians’ behavior (e.g., Bill Clinton and George Bush and then John Kerry all went on late night shows)

### Lab

- Design an experiment

## **Week 5: Cognitive biases: Why do we think the world revolve around us? (Naïve realism, egocentrism; Actor-observer biases, self-serving biases)**

### Monday

#### *Readings*

- Epley et al. (2009). Believers’ estimates of God’s beliefs are more egocentric than estimates of other people’s beliefs. *PNAS*, 106, 21533-21538.

### *Activities*

- Reflective exercise: What is your most important value? Why? Why might it not be important to others?
- NC Referendum outcomes—were you surprised? Why or why not?

### Wednesday

\*\*\*\* Quiz 1 \*\*\*\*

### Lab

- Design experiment

## **Week 6: Cognitive Biases: Are we cognitive misers? (Limited resources, schematic thinking, and stereotyping)**

### Monday

#### *Readings*

- Todorov et al
- Flag priming studies

#### *Activity*

- RAT video

### Wednesday

#### *Readings*

- Eberhardt. Looking deathworthy or more recent work on CA proposition re: 3 strikes
- Peffley & Hurwitz. Whites' stereotypes of blacks: Sources and political consequences.

#### *Activities*

- Some exercise on stereotypic depictions of candidates/issues?? Obama monkey cartoon; Hillary Clinton hysterical cartoon. Maybe do content analysis of political cartoons?
- What other policies have been linked with race, gender, religion, sexual orientation/identity, class? How do stereotypes about these groups affect people's policy opinions and decisions?

### Lab

- Design a study or experiment. For example, do implicit attitudes toward ethnic minorities and immigrant groups predict second amendment endorsement (or endorsement of "stand your ground" laws), above and beyond party affiliation, policy preferences, and explicit attitudes toward ethnic minorities and immigrant groups?

**Week 7: Cognitive Biases: Does that mean we're always mindless? (Implicit vs. explicit processes)**  
**No Monday class**

Wednesday

*Readings*

- Gawronski et al

*Activities*

- Political Implicit Association Test (IAT): Reflect on whether implicit and explicit political preferences are the same or different.
- Race Implicit Association Test (IAT): Reflect on whether implicit and explicit political preferences are the same or different.

Lab

Design an experiment (with Carlee's aide)

**Week 8: When are we persuaded? (Persuasion, fear appeals, elaboration likelihood models)**

Monday

*Readings*

- Something by Cialdini, Part 1
- Persuasion and the military piece from Wise Interventions

*Activity*

- TBD

Wednesday

- Something by Cialdini, Part 2

*Activity*

- Dissect political ads or speech/debate—which tactics are they using? What do these tactics reveal about the candidates (i.e., their campaign managers' and aides') assumptions about their audience?

Lab

- Design persuasive message—competition between lab sections ☺

**Week 9: What is the role of emotions in politics, politics in emotions?**

Monday

*Readings*

- Paper on how anxiety makes people more conservative
- Paper on how conservatives are happier
- Gary's purity paper?

*Activity*

- TBD

Wednesday

*Readings*

*Activity*

Lab

**Week 10: The rise of ideology—from emotions to morality; what are our moral foundations?**

Monday

*Readings*

- Jon's moral foundations paper

*Activity*

- Analysis of moral foundations; choose particular issue and ask students to diagnose the source of disagreement between liberals and conservatives (e.g., abortion—liberals think of it as a justice-related issue, conservatives think of it as a sanctity-related issue)

Wednesday

\*\*\* Quiz 2 \*\*\*

**Week 11: On the perils of political diversity**

Monday (pre-Election Day)

*Readings*

- Jon Haidt's paper on moral diversity
- Moral migration?

*Activity*

- Map of social network and demographical and "moral" diversity

Wednesday (post-Election Day)

Election outcomes—were you surprised? Why or why not? Stereotypes about voters, naïve realism, etc.

\*\*Host “cocktail party” event (in lieu of class?) after election do chat about the election? Have some structure (e.g., discuss other people’s reactions to the election outcome—why do you think people are reacting this way?)\*\*

Lab

- Design an experiment

**Week 12: Intergroup processes (identity; minimal group paradigms, warmth v. competence, ingroup love v. outgroup hate, pluralistic ignorance, groupthink)**

Monday (arbitrary groups presumed to be equal)

*Readings*

- Reading on social ID

*Activities*

- Minimal group paradigm demo
- Prison dilemma paradigm demo

Wednesday (real groups presumed to be unequal)

*Readings*

- Hillary’s paper on like v. respect
- Tamar’s paper on liking and (unfair) intergroup allocations
- Brian’s paper on small gestures to keep inequalities

*Activity*

- TBD

Lab

- Design experiment

**Week 13: How can we resolve or at least reduce political intergroup conflict? Can patriotism save us? All we need is love? No Wednesday Class**

Monday

### *Readings*

- Transue. (YEAR). Identity salience, identity acceptance, and racial policy attitudes: American national identity as a uniting force.

### *Activity*

- Have students design a retreat to improve intergroup (republican/democrat, conservative/liberal) relations based on the Contact Hypothesis

### Lab

- Design experiment

## **Week 14: How can we leverage political diversity? (Wisdom of the crowds)**

### Monday

#### *Activities*

- Take both sides' perspective on some policy debate (same-sex marriage? Gun control? Stand your ground?). Then, consider it from a social psychologist's perspective! Opportunity for "created value"?
- Have students redefine their superordinate ID a la Common Identity Model; what would that look like? What would that ID be? (Americans?) What strategies could we use to get other people to re-identify in this way? (Think back to the day republicans and democrats in congress didn't sit on their respective sides but, instead, sat together during the 2011 State of Union Address)
- Have students design a retreat to improve intergroup (republican/democrat, conservative/liberal) relations based on the Contact Hypothesis

### Wednesday

#### *Activities*

- Op-ed re: bipartisan solution to some policy issue (can you "create value" given conservatives' and liberals' agendas?)
- Executive memo to the president re: how to leverage political diversity

### Lab

- Design an experiment

## **Week 15: Debriefing**

### Monday

- Invite speakers (who?? Would Jon Haidt come? Maybe Tim Wilson, or his wife, council women Dede Smith, or Dean Harding, or Jesse, Ben's friend who writes legislation for congress, on behalf of congress men and women) and have them prepare for a conversation/question and answer period.

## Wednesday

### *Activity*

- Revise (or redo) flow chart; compare and contrast

### Lab

- Debrief: What have we learned by designing experiments? What did experiments reveal?