

189J PO

Political Psychology

Course Syllabus – Spring 2026

Instructor: Ms. Claudia Alegre (she/her)

Class Meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:15 pm – 2:30 pm

Classroom: Carnegie Hall 110

Instructor email: claudia.alegre@pomona.edu

Office: Carnegie Hall 09

Office Hours: By Appointment - [Link here](#) and on Canvas

Course Description

This seminar explores political psychology, examining how psychological processes shape political beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Using insights from psychology, behavioral science, and experimental methods, we will study cognitive heuristics, motivated reasoning, emotions, identity, prejudice, and social influence in the context of U.S. politics. Students will engage with empirical research, social and political psychology theories, and applied examples to understand individual and group behavior in political life.

The course will also address how intergroup and intragroup conflicts emerge in real-world contexts. In light of recent events, including the January 2026 fatal shooting of Renee Nicole Good by an ICE agent in Minneapolis and the subsequent increase in federal immigration enforcement, students will explore how psychological frameworks help explain reactions, political mobilization, and conflicts in polarized times. The seminar emphasizes discussion, critical analysis, and the application of theory to contemporary political issues.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain key theories and empirical findings in political psychology.
- Analyze how cognitive, emotional, and social factors shape political attitudes and behavior.
- Evaluate experimental and observational research in political psychology.
- Understand the psychological mechanisms behind political polarization, prejudice, and identity politics.

Course Structure

Each class session will combine lecture, discussion, and analysis of assigned readings. Lectures will provide foundational context, but active engagement with readings is essential. This seminar is discussion-oriented: students are expected to come prepared to analyze, question, and debate the material.

Required Text

1. Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology, 3rd Edition 2023

- a. <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/51639>
- b. Available through the Claremont Colleges Library

Additional readings will be posted on Canvas.

Grading

Class Participation – 20%

Active participation is a key component of the course. Students are expected to contribute to discussions, ask thoughtful questions, and engage with peers' ideas.

Weekly Reading Journal – 20%

- Students will maintain a weekly reading journal using a single shared link (e.g., Google Doc) that they provide at the start of the semester. This link will give the instructor access to all entries for the semester.
 - **Content:** Each week, students must post a reflection of at least one page, double-spaced, 12-point font, on the assigned readings. Reflections should summarize the readings and include your own analysis, questions, or connections to theoretical frameworks such as social identity theory, system justification, social dominance, and intergroup conflict.
 - Entries are due every Wednesday at 11:59 PM, the day before class. Students must ensure that their journal is updated weekly for review.
 - **Evaluation:** Journals are graded on completion and engagement, not on perfection. Thoughtful reflection demonstrating that you have read and thought about the material will earn full credit.

Paper Proposal – 20%

Students will submit a 2-page proposal outlining their final paper topic.

- **Content:** The proposal should include a description of the topic, the theoretical framework you plan to use, and the key questions you aim to address.
- **Due Date: February 17.**
- **Evaluation:** Graded on clarity, feasibility, and the depth of theoretical engagement.

Final Research Paper – 40%

The final assignment is a 10–12 page, double-spaced research paper.

- **Focus:** Papers should explore a theoretical question in political psychology, synthesizing and critically engaging with course readings. No original empirical research is required.
 - **Content:** Papers should demonstrate mastery of concepts such as social identity theory, system justification, social dominance theory, or intergroup conflict, and may integrate multiple frameworks or propose theoretical extensions.
 - **Due Date: May 11**
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Class Expectations

To foster a productive and supportive learning environment, all students are expected to adhere to the following standards throughout the course:

1. Academic Integrity and Honor Code:

This course upholds the highest standards of academic honesty. All work submitted must be your own. Plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, or any form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action according to university policies. Proper citation of sources is required in all assignments.

2. Attendance and Participation:

Class attendance is mandatory. Given that films will typically be watched during class and discussions are integral to the learning experience, consistent attendance is essential for success. If you must miss a class due to illness or emergency, please notify me in advance when possible and arrange to make up missed work.

3. Late Submission Policy:

Timely submission of assignments is essential to maintain fairness and to help you stay on track with the course schedule. **All assignments must be submitted by the stated deadline.** If you anticipate needing an extension, you must contact me *before* the deadline to request an accommodation. **Late submissions without prior approval will incur a penalty of 10% off the assignment grade per calendar day late.** For example, an assignment submitted two days late without permission will lose 20% of the earned points. Assignments submitted more than **five days late will not be accepted** unless prior arrangements have been made.

4. Respectful Engagement:

Our classroom is a space for open, thoughtful, and respectful dialogue. Please listen attentively and engage respectfully with your peers and instructor, even when viewpoints differ. Disrespectful behavior, including interruptions, dismissive remarks, or discriminatory language, will not be tolerated.

5. Preparedness and Professionalism:

Come prepared by completing all readings and viewing assignments before class. Arrive on time and ready to participate actively. Use electronic devices appropriately and avoid distractions during class.

6. Communication and Emailing:

If you have questions or concerns, please first consult the syllabus and course materials. When emailing me, please allow at least 48 hours for a response before sending a follow-up message, as I strive to give thoughtful and thorough replies. You are also encouraged to attend my office hours for more in-depth discussion or assistance. Office hours provide an excellent opportunity to engage directly and clarify any course material or concerns.

By following these expectations, we can maintain a positive, inclusive, and intellectually stimulating environment for everyone!

Student Resources

Mental Health and Wellness

Pomona College is committed to supporting your mental health and overall well-being. The Health and Wellness Center offers confidential counseling and psychiatric services to help you navigate personal or academic challenges. You can access individual and group counseling, wellness workshops, and peer support programs. For more information, visit the Health and Wellness Center website or call (909) 621-8139.

Writing and Academic Support

To assist you in developing strong academic skills, Pomona provides several resources:

- The **Writing Center** offers one-on-one tutoring and workshops to support writing across all disciplines. Visit the Writing Center website for appointments and resources.
 - Location: Collins Center, Room 103
 - Phone: (909) 621-8057
 - Website: pomona.edu/writing-center
- The **Academic Support Programs** provide help with study strategies, time management, and accommodations for learning differences. More information is available at Academic Support.
 - Location: Smith Campus Center, Room 104
 - Phone: (909) 621-8548
 - Website: pomona.edu/academic-support
- The **Quantitative Skills Center** supports students needing assistance in math, statistics, or quantitative reasoning. Visit the Quantitative Skills Center to learn more.
 - Location: Honnold Library, Room 220
 - Phone: (909) 621-8136
 - Website: pomona.edu/quantitative-skills-center

I strongly encourage you to use these services as needed to help you succeed academically and personally throughout the semester.

Course Calendar

Audio recordings of lectures are permitted for private use only. You cannot distribute lecture recordings to anyone else without our authorization. Unauthorized distribution of course recordings is a cause for disciplinary action.

Jan 20 (Tue): Introduction to the Course

No readings

Jan 22 (Thu): The Scope of Political Psychology

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 1: Introduction: Theoretical Foundations of Political Psychology

Jan 27 (Tue): Social Identity Theory I

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 24: Political Identities (Mason)
 2. Tajfel & Turner, 1979, *An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict*
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Jan 29 (Thu): Social Identity Theory II

Readings:

1. Perez, 2015, *Xenophobic Rhetoric*
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Feb 3 (Tue): Intergroup Conflict I

Readings:

1. Brewer, 1999, *Ingroup Love vs Outgroup Hate*
 2. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 27: Prejudice and Politics (Kinder)
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Feb 5 (Thu): Intergroup Conflict II

NO CLASS - PLEASE COMPLETE READINGS

Readings:

1. Esses et al., 2001, *The Immigration Dilemma*
 2. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 29: Prejudice Reduction and Social Change (Tropp & Dehrone)
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Feb 10 (Tue): System Justification Theory I

Readings:

1. Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004, *A Decade of System Justification Theory*
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Feb 12 (Thu): System Justification Theory II

Readings:

1. Monteith and Hildebrand, 2020, *Sexism, perceived discrimination, and system justification in the 2016 U.S.*

presidential election context

Feb 17 (Tue): Social Dominance Theory I

Readings:

1. Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*
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Feb 19 (Thu): Social Dominance Theory II

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 23: Group-Based Hierarchies of Power and Status (Craig & Phillips)
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Feb 24 (Tue): Identity and Political Behavior

Readings:

1. Huddy, 2001, *From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination*
 2. Miller et al., 1981, *Political Beliefs and Group Identity* **(Optional)**
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Feb 26 (Thu): Nationalism and Group Conflict

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 21: National Identity, Patriotism, and Nationalism (Huddy)
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Mar 3 (Tue): Ideology and Belief Systems

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 17: The Psychological and Social Foundations of Ideological Belief Systems (Federico & Malka)
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Mar 5 (Thu): Authoritarianism

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 20: Authoritarianism and Political Conflict (Feldman & Weber)
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Mar 10 (Tue): Political Polarization

Readings:

1. Iyengar & Westwood, 2015, *Fear and Loathing across Party Lines*
 2. Chapter 24: Political Identities (Mason)
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Mar 12 (Thu): Emotions in Political Psychology

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 6: Emotion and Political Psychology (Brader & Gadarian)
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Mar 16–20:

Spring Break – No Classes

Mar 24 (Tue): Group Threat and Intergroup Relations

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 29: Prejudice Reduction and Social Change (Tropp & Dehrone)
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Mar 26 (Thu): Collective Action and Protest

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 26: Social Movements and the Dynamics of Collective Action (van Stekelenburg & Gaidyte)
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Mar 31 (Tue): Political Cognition

Readings:

1. Oxford Handbook: Chapter 5: Political Decision-Making (Lau & Redlawsk)
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Apr 2 (Thu):

No class – Instructor at conference

Apr 7 (Tue): Prejudice and Discrimination I

Readings:

- 1.Oxford Handbook: Chapter 27: Prejudice and Politics (Kinder)
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Apr 9 (Thu): Prejudice and Discrimination II

Readings:

- 1.Oskooii, 2016, *Discrimination Impacts on Sociopolitical Behavior*
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Apr 14 (Tue): Race, Ethnicity, and Politics

Readings:

- 1.Oxford Handbook: Chapter 25: The Gaze From Below: Toward a Political Psychology of Minority Status (Pérez & Vicuña)
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Apr 16 (Thu): Immigration and Intergroup Attitudes

Readings:

- 1.Oxford Handbook: Chapter 28: Migration and Multiculturalism (Green & Staerklé)
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Apr 21 (Tue): Political Violence and Extremism

Readings:

- 1.Oxford Handbook: Chapter 14: The Political Psychology of Terrorism (Snider et al.)
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Apr 23 (Thu): Political Leadership and Personality

Readings:

- 1.Oxford Handbook: Chapter 2: Personality Approaches to Political Behavior (Bakker)
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Apr 28 (Tue): Identity and Political Communication

Readings:

1.Oxford Handbook: Chapter 16: Political Communication (Young & Miller)

Apr 30 (Thu): Social Media, Group Identity, and Polarization

Readings:

1. Wakefield and Wakefield, 2022, *The Antecedents and Consequences of Intergroup Affective Polarisation on Social Media*

May 5 (Tue): Theoretical Integrations I – Future Directions in Political Psychology

No Readings