

## **Course Syllabus**

### **Political Decision-making, Political Leadership and Governance: Political Psychology from a Comparative Perspective**

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Course Instructors: Prof Achim Goerres. Earlier iterations of this seminar were co-taught with Florian Rabuza, Hayfat Hamidou-Schmidt, or Sabrina J. Mayer.

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Meetings: Fridays, 8.30 to 10.00 am on campus in LK053. First meeting 14 October

#### **1. Overview**

This is a highly engaging, discursive seminar on how people think and decide politically and why. It is about elites and ordinary citizens.

I love teaching this course because the matter is close to my research, because it makes all of us think about ourselves as political beings and because we learn so much from one another. Many students in past years chose their theses in this field afterward. The course is open to all Master's programmes in political science.

The seminar is capped at 30 participants. Please register in the LSF system.

We have weekly Friday meetings in person on campus from 8.30 to 10.00 am. First meeting is 14 October. There is no component of remote teaching. Students have to attend every session and must not take part remotely. Active preparation for and participation in class discussions on campus are part of your credit load. Whenever you miss one session, you have to excuse yourself in advance with an acceptable reason and submit an alternative task substituting for your missed class participation within 14 days.

Questions that we will deal with

- How do individuals arrive at decisions in political contexts?
- What effects do gender and social identity have?
- What effect does the institutional context have on their decision-making? Which institutional roles are most prone to individual influences? How does decision-making vary between liberal-democratic and other political systems?
- To what extent are political elites different when taking a decision, compared with “ordinary citizens”?
- What effect does individual decision-making have on political output and most importantly good governance?
- Is there something like “good” and “bad” leadership with regard to decision-making? The course will deal with these kinds of issues and participants will learn how scientific approaches that are located at the intersection of politics, psychology and even economics try to find answers.

Political psychology is a relatively new but nevertheless exciting, vital and vibrant field. It is a modern branch of political science and its findings are often intriguing and have important implications for politics, society or in a normative sense. In this sense, the course offers a unique opportunity to get in touch with up-to-date developments within our discipline as well as interesting examples of the most sophisticated research in the field of political psychology.

#### **2. Summary of To Dos for students**

1. Attend each session prepared.
2. Prepare mandatory readings (40-50 pages a week) intensively and with written notes. Think about guiding questions and main concepts when preparing the reading.
3. Engage in class, make many mistakes and learn from them. Mistakes are opportunities to grow.
4. Write first full version of thinkpiece 1 in time.
5. Read first full versions of thinkpieces assigned to you with care.
6. Prepare feedback on and mock-mark one thinkpiece.
7. Poster: get approval for study by me, prepare file in time for printing, prepare oral presentation, upload study.

8. Prepare critical appraisal of one assigned poster.
9. Write final version of thinkpiece 1 in time.
10. Write final thinkpiece 2 in time.
11. Write final thinkpiece 3 in time if required.

### **3. Language**

Working language will be English unless all participants have grown up in a German-speaking environment. If all participants are native or near-native in German, using English would be laughable. Thinkpieces have to be written in English except for students for whom the course is mandatory.

### **4. Learning outcomes**

At the end of this course, students will be able to

- write an English text dealing with a complex issue to a given format and demonstrate critical thinking
- express their own thoughts and review others' in English discussions
- identify the main concepts, theories and problems in the comparative study of the ways in which individuals think and decide politically
- Prepare, present and critically assess scientific posters

### **5. Online material**

The reading material is available online at Moodle. To enter the online course, you need the password "OSis2021B." (Olaf Scholz ist seit 2021 Bundeskanzler.). Please note that this is copyrighted material that the university pays fees for. You are allowed to use it for studying and doing non-commercial research (e.g. your master's thesis). You are not allowed to make it available to the public. The readings are online under the name of the first-named author in a Moodle folder.

### **6. Work load**

Students are expected to work either 150 hours (5 ECTS), 180 hours (6 ECTS) or 210 hours. The load depends on the regulation of your programme. It is not possible to take part in the course for less than 5 ECTS. All students must attend all classes or provide alternative pieces of work (24 hours), read the allocated readings each week (about 4 hours per week, 48 hours), prepare a poster presentation for one week (14 hours) and read student thinkpieces for the thinkpiece conference. Those with 5 credits write two thinkpieces, those with 6 credits three thinkpieces, those with 7 credits either four thinkpieces or one normal and two longer ones.

### **7. Attendance and participation**

You have to attend each session. You may never miss a class without excusing yourself for good reasons. For any session that you miss, you have to submit an alternative piece of work set by me within 14 days as class participation is part of the credit load. When you are sick, the 14 days start on your first day of recovery.

During the seminar, there is a heavy emphasis on discussion and the exchange of ideas. You are expected to prepare the weekly readings, about 40-50 pages, thoroughly and read the thinkpieces for the thinkpiece conference with great care. The instructor practices cold calling, i.e. they ask students to contribute even when they have not raised their hands.

### **8. Marking**

In order to be admitted for a final mark, you have to:

- attend all sessions or have provided alternative pieces of work submitted in time.
- take actively part in class
- prepare one poster presentation and one critical appreciation of another poster
- prepare feedback for one thinkpiece

The actual mark is derived from the weighted average of the thinkpiece marks.

## 9. Poster presentation

In the second session, you will be allocated to a week to prepare a poster presentation with a maximum of 5 minutes. The posters are presented jointly in one session and will be displayed online (unless you object).

- Each poster team must create a colour-printed scientific poster in the format A1 and present it. A scientific poster is the graphical presentation of scientific findings. The posters will be ordered for print by myself. The poster is to include some selective findings from an empirical study that you will have found through research and answer some questions that are listed below.
- The piece of research that is the essence of your poster must be an empirical study, e.g. a journal article, **that makes substantive use of one of the pieces that is among the required readings** (this is called prospective bibliographic search) e.g. an often-cited study that refers to one of the readings and is within the week that you will be allocated to. Note: some required readings are chapters from textbooks. In that case, you look for studies citing one of the items listed among the “further reading” section of the chapter. The piece of research that forms part of your presentation must be in English, in the field of political psychology and an accepted article in a peer-reviewed journal, a chapter from a monograph or a section in an edited volume. Neither are we looking for some obscure paper that is published on the internet, nor unpublished manuscripts and conference papers.
- Example: for week 2, you have to read Tversky, Amos/ Kahneman, Daniel (1974): Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. In: Science 185: pp. 1124-1131. So, you can look for a study that cites Tversky/Kahneman (1974).
- Bibliographic search is easiest performed with the help of library databases like Web of Science, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Scopus or others. They are accessible from within the university or via your VPN to our university.
- The researched piece must be from political psychology and not any other discipline, i.e. about the ways in which individuals think and act politically. Thus, a study from economics will not be good.
- This study must be relevant for political psychology and, you have to argue why it is relevant.
- Each study identified has to be shown to me for approval as quickly as possible and 14 days before the poster session the latest. Note that if students come down on the same study, the first group to flag this study to the instructor can “keep” that study, the other will have to find another one. Thus, no study can become the subject of a poster twice.
- This new study should be uploaded as a pdf document into the forum folder, so that other students can make use of it for their thinkpieces. Deadline is the Thursday before the respective poster session.
- You have to analyse the new study with regard to the following questions (questions should not be repeated on the poster):
  - What is or are the implicit or explicit research question(s)?
  - How do they relate to the content of the mandatory reading of that week?
  - Which data are analysed?
  - What is the main logic of the research design?
  - What are the main findings? Be selective.
  - Why are the findings relevant for political psychology or science at large?
- One person will present the poster in a maximum of 5 minutes. Groups can decide for themselves who presents.
- The poster should be crisp, clear and originally layouted. Students are required to independently make themselves familiar with poster techniques. Suitable software can be Microsoft Powerpoint or Publisher. Students can resort to Matthews (1990) and the following URLs. The instructor is not qualified to give you any technical help. In case of technical problems, please contact the ZIM or the IT branch of our department.  
<http://archosaurmusings.wordpress.com/2009/02/19/how-to-make-a-scientific-poster/>  
<https://www.science.org/content/article/how-prepare-scientific-poster> how to make a scientific poster  
<https://guides.nyu.edu/posters/design-tips>
- Spend a lot of time selecting what should go on the posters. Come up with a catchy title and do not forget all student names. Be selective.

- Layout will not be marked, but an edible award will be given after each poster session. The presentation and poster will be commented on, but not marked. If the quality is poor, an additional work package will be agreed upon between you and me
- Posters have to be submitted via e-Mail to [Karin-teuchler@uni-due.de](mailto:Karin-teuchler@uni-due.de). Each poster should be submitted once as a PDF-document and once in its original format (like PPTX).
- If most students are fine with it: all posters are uploaded for public display in the internet for a few weeks

## **10. Critical appreciation of a poster**

Each study has limitations and advantages. Whereas the presenters of the study have to stress the added value of their study to the discipline, a second group will try to find weaknesses of a study and point them out in a 5 minute presentation without optical support. Each team will be allocated one project to comment on. This also includes a critical appraisal of the poster's concept and content.

## **11. Thinkpieces**

Note: the rules oblige you to plan your thinkpiece submission carefully. It is easy to miss an important deadline. A printed version has to be given to the instructor in the session. This assignment is intended to measure your depth of critical thinking and to give you a chance to exercise your writing. In order for you to write about as many different topics as possible, you must write each thinkpiece about a different bloc of topics. There are three blocs with up to four topics each.

## **12. Thinkpiece conference**

For the first thinkpiece that you hand in, you will get feedback in a thinkpiece conference by the other students and the instructor.

## **13. Thinkpiece submission**

The first complete draft of thinkpiece 1 has to be submitted online to all participants. After that, final thinkpieces can be submitted each week. The instructor aims to mark the thinkpieces within two weeks. Thus, students can receive early feedback if they submit early.

Late submissions will not be accepted and result in the mark fail (5.0) for the late thinkpiece or thinkpieces. All thinkpieces have to be marked 4.0 or better.

## **14. Marking of thinkpieces**

The instructors aims to mark the thinkpieces within two weeks. The marking scheme is:

You are marked on a multidimensional scheme. Each partial mark (1.0; 2.0; 3.0; 4.0; 5.0) is weighted and added up for the final mark.

Formalities (spelling, referencing, word limit) 10 %, structure of the thinkpiece (three parts, suitable contents of each) 10 %, presentation of the argument from reading that you are dealing with (clarity, word limit) 20 %, structure of your text (coherence, logic) 30 %, critical thinking (own opinion, aptitude at weighing arguments) 30 %.

### **Objectives of thinkpieces:**

- SHORT thinkpieces help you to learn to write concisely and use words effectively.
- Since there is an emphasis on reflection, you learn how to critically deal with scientific findings and form opinions of your own.
- Given the free structure of the assignment, you must reflect deeply about a topic for you to be able to come up with a good thinkpiece.

### **Necessary requirements:**

- The thinkpiece needs to be about at least one reading of a week.
- In the thinkpiece, you write about the whole thesis or part of the thesis of the author(s). In the past, more selective thinkpieces that focussed on one smaller argument of a text tended to achieve higher marks.

- You must refer to further literature apart from the piece that you are dealing with (articles, books, chapters; internet sources are only legitimate if the institution hosting the source is unquestionably appropriate).
- A minimum of six academic sources has to be used. Among these six, only published or accepted journal articles from scientific journals and monographs count. Contributions in edited volumes and other legitimate sources may be used in addition to the minimum of six. Marking will take into consideration the depth with which you work with the sources. To quote something in a footnote without working with it will not fare well.
- There needs to be a summary of the argument that you are dealing with that must not exceed one third of your thinkpiece.
- You need to show your own opinion. You can do this in various ways depending on how you set up the thinkpiece. This does not mean that you have to destroy the authors' work. You can also agree with them, but you have to explain why. Think about to what extent you find an author's central thesis convincing.

#### **Optional things to do in the thinkpieces (other things possible as well):**

- You can refer to other evidence. For instance, you could choose to criticise the authors for being too focused on one particular case and being unable to explain others.
- You can look at the argument(s) internally. This means that you critically assess the consistency of an argument or facets thereof.
- You can compare the readings with other authors' works.
- You can deal in detail with the ways in which the main concepts are used.
- ...

#### **Format:**

- Structure:
  - Introduction
    - Motive for your thinkpiece: why is this interesting to read? Why did you write this?
    - your thesis: your claim
  - Main body: structured discussion
    - summary of the argument that you want to write about
    - each paragraph should be clear; you can check this by trying to summarise the content of one paragraph in one sentence. If you cannot do this, there is too much going on in one paragraph.
    - define the main concepts clearly and use them consistently
  - Conclusion
    - A summary of your argument
- Length: optimal length 1,500 words, maximum 2,000 words excl. bibliography
- Scientific standards of citations: be consistent, use either in-text citations or footnotes/endnotes.
- Language:
  - your English does not have to be flawless, but we have to be able to understand what you mean.  
Bad language inhibits clear understanding.
  - In contrast to German, good academic English uses:
    - short sentences
    - a simple clause structure
    - the active voice
    - verbs to put a lot of the action instead of complex constructions with nouns

#### **Quality assurance:**

- Writing short texts is more work than longer ones. Do not underestimate the time that you need to write a good three A4 pages thinkpiece. Do calculate about 30-35 hours of concentrated work.
- Re-writing is essential. Very few people, not anyone that we know in the academic world, can write a text once without doing a lot of re-writing. This is because we cannot think as clearly as we can write. Once we see something written, we can identify problems of coherence much more easily and solve them.

- Plan your thinkpiece:
  - Start with brainstorming a list of all ideas as keywords (unstructured, in the order in which they come to your mind)
  - Structure the ideas into an outline using hierarchical bullet points like in this very list; bear in mind the overall structure: introduction – main text – conclusions
  - take a break and do something else
  - go back to the outline and revise it
- Write and re-write efficiently:
  - write a full first rough draft of your thinkpiece; if you have problems at certain parts, highlight them and continue writing elsewhere; this rough draft is to get all your thoughts into written text
  - take a break and do something else
  - Re-read the rough draft and identify problems of coherence; sort them out by re-writing parts of the draft
- Fine-tune your writing
  - once you feel that the argument that you are making is coherent, you can start fine-tuning your writing
  - Each paragraph should have one main thought; you can check this by trying to summarise the content of one paragraph in one sentence. If you cannot do this, there is too much going on in one paragraph. Also, paragraphs should not be too short. If it has less than 5 lines, it could be an indication that you can expand on that thought.
  - The order of thoughts expressed in the paragraphs should make sense; summarise each paragraph in one sentence and check whether the order of thoughts is meaningful
  - once you feel that each paragraph is in order with regard to content, start checking language and grammar; it is helpful to read a thinkpiece backwards, i.e. you read the last sentence and check it, then the penultimate sentence, then the second before last etc.; this way, you will not be preoccupied with content, but concentrate on style, grammar and spelling.
- Expose the writing to “others”:
  - Read the thinkpiece aloud to your pet or your teddy bear. When we hear something aloud, we have an instinctive feeling whether the text is OK. If you have the feeling that something is not in order, it is very likely that something is really not.
  - Give the thinkpiece in time to someone else to read. Use the group of students in this class, to find a buddy to exchange thinkpieces with.

## **Further Information:**

Writing Resources at Haverford College, <https://www.haverford.edu/writing-center/resources-writers>

A writing lexicon at Princeton,

<https://writing.princeton.edu/sites/writing/files/lexicon.pdf>

## **15. Plagiarism**

We assume that you are honourable individuals who are here to appreciate the ideas and findings of political psychology. If a black sheep has found his or her way into the class, which is very unlikely, we are required by departmental decision to punish with the full array of instruments (failing of class, report to the exam board who will punish by a temporary or permanent stop of your studies, report to the chancellor of the university who will fine you with a substantial fee).

## **16. Reading preparation**

The course load requires you to spend a sufficient number of hours per week, reading intensively and actively. If you do not read properly, the course will be very difficult for you and you will hold others back in the weekly sessions.

The course is to make you think about the psychology of politics, in particular about the ways in which individuals think and decide politically from a comparative point of view. Political psychology started out with a universal approach, negligent of the context-dependency of all human action and thinking. Only recently, the context in

which individuals are embedded (social, economic, cultural, institutional etc.) has been put centre stage. On top of that, we will always go back and forth between ordinary citizens and elites.

Whenever you prepare your readings, you can think about the following questions:

- What is the central question that the authors want to answer?
- What kind of reasons do they give?
- What kind of evidence do they refer to?
- What kind of analytical methods do they employ?
- Do you find the argument convincing?
- How does the piece resonate with other things that you know?
- What are two to five key concepts addressed in that week's reading?

Reading without taking notes, making links, drawing and other forms of active engagement in writing does not work.

## 17. Topics

Week	Topics and guiding questions	Readings
14 Oct	Introduction: organisation, recap of empirical methods necessary to read the studies, allocation of topics for presentation  Definition of the sub-discipline	-
21 Oct	Cognitive shortcuts and systematic distortions in individual's assessments: heuristics and biases  In what ways do individuals make “wrong” assessments? What is the difference between a random and a systematic mistake? What are the implications of the systematic mistakes that people make in assessing things – in politics and in everyday life?	Tversky/Kahneman (1974) (Kahneman nobel laureate in economics of 2002) Lau/Redlawsk (2001)
28 Oct	“Irrational feelings”: emotions Are emotions systematic or random? Can emotions provide adequate behavioural guidance? Are we slaves of our emotional reactions?	Marcus (2000) Small et. al (2006)
04 Nov	No session	
Saturday 05 Nov 10 am- 11.30 am remote session	Making individual decisions  What are the steps to arrive at a political decision?  What are the cognitive requirements at each step?  What factors that ought not to matter do matter in political decision-making?	Lau (2003) Redlawsk (2004)
11 Nov	Sex, roles and identity: gender I  Stereotypes in politics  Social roles	Bauer (2019) Schneider/ Bos (2019)
18 Nov	No meeting	
25 Nov	No meeting	
02 Dec	Sex, roles and identity: gender II  Political Ambition and Action	Fox/ Lawless (2014) Kolltveit (2022)

## Bloc 2: Decision-Making and Public Policy

Week	Topics and guiding questions	Readings
09 Dec	<p><b>Deadline for online submission of first full draft of thinkpiece 1</b></p> <p>What individuals think about policies: attitudes and public policy</p>	Bartels (2005)
	<p>What is an attitude? What are the objects of political attitudes? How does the nature of attitudes matter for policy-making?</p>	Van der Pligt et al. (1986)
16 Dec	<b>Thinkpiece conference</b>	<p>Students are allocated a certain number of thinkpieces to read before the session and to mock-mark (give marks that do not count) at least one thinkpiece</p>
	<i>Christmas Break</i>	
12 Jan	<b>Deadline for submission of posters</b>	
13 Jan	<p><b>Deadline for online submission of final draft of thinkpiece 1</b></p>	<p>Ahlquist/Levy (2011) Cottam/Dietz-Uhler (2010: chap. 5)</p>
	<p>How leaders make decisions To what extent are leaders different from “ordinary citizens” in making decisions?</p>	
20 Jan, 8.30 am to 10 am	<b>Poster Conference on campus</b>	<p>The session is preceded by a gallery walk: students walk by all posters and read them</p>
		<p>Students have to skim-read the studies researched by the presenters of that week</p>
20 Jan, 4 pm to 5.30 pm	<p><b>On the same day: remote meeting with Prof Mark Vail</b></p>	<p>Campbell (2014: Chaps. 1 and 3) Herd and Moynihan (2018: Chap. 1)</p>
	<p>Institutional Effects on the Perception and Behaviour of Citizens: the American Welfare State</p>	
<b>Bloc 3: Highlights in the Political Psychology of Current Affairs</b>		
27 Jan	<p>Populist Attitudes What are populist attitudes? How are they related to other important psychological factors, such as conspiracy beliefs, social and political trust?</p>	<p>Akkerman/ Mudde/ Zaslove (2014) Erisen et al. (2021)</p>
	<p>Joint decision on one article the last week (e.g. Corona and policy decision, attitudes towards the war in the Ukraine, decisions among autocrats)</p>	
03 Feb	<p><b>Deadline for submission of thinkpiece number 2</b> Synthesis One topic of political psychology in current affairs</p>	<p>Students will have to read one article that is selected by the class in advance</p>
28 Feb	<b>Deadline for submission of thinkpiece number 3 (for some students)</b>	

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