



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

Psychology Department

Semester/Year: Summer Session I, 2021

Course Title: Political psychology Under the Internet

Course Prefix/Number/Section: PSYC 6300 graduate seminar; PSYC 4359 selected topics, PHIL 4389 Topics in Philosophy and the Social Sciences

Instructor Name: Helen Abadzi, PhD

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Email Address: habadzi@uta.edu

Office Hours: By appointment; classroom L119 Life Science Building

Day and Time (if applicable): Monday-Thursday 10:30-12:30 am

Equipment: A laptop/computer with wireless capability; extensive use during class

Blackboard: <https://elearn.uta.edu/>

A. Catalog Course Description

Recently authoritarian regimes have gained popularity worldwide, supported by fake or distorted news that are propagated through the internet. To steer citizens, personal "big data" are collected by technology companies and sold to clients. Political strategists also use published psychology research to convince citizens to vote for certain parties. Why are these phenomena rising from Australia to Nigeria? Important research questions include the features of leaders that inspire greater trust and differences between more liberal and more conservative voters. The course will synthesize the relevant research that includes evolutionary adaptations, memory, emotion, cognitive biases, and personality research. It is open to graduates and undergraduates of all majors. Find out how to think critically and independently about the information around you.

B. Measurable Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should demonstrate ability to examine statements with political content and think critically about its veracity, the communication strategies, and likely effects on citizens on the basis of psychological research

More specifically, students should be able to:

- Present the economic strategies used by technology corporations to provide free internet access to all people through a profit-earning model. Discuss some intended and unintended consequences for individual and community finances and political governance.
- Analyze and discuss the areas of psychological research that show human vulnerability to influences by messages delivered through various online media.
- Discuss the rationale and psychological research aimed at changing political views through various internet-based messages.
- Analyze the ethics issues that arise through the use of political strategies.
- Demonstrate a general understanding of the techniques used to harvest personal data, store them, analyze them, and sell them.
- Apply psychological research to maximize benefits and minimize harm to users of online media.

C. Required Text(s) and Other Course Materials

Students receive a draft textbook free of charge. The textbook is under revision as new research is integrated. Students will help edit and enrich the content in preparation of an open-access textbook on political psychology.

D. Additional Text(s) and Other Course Materials

- (a) published articles on topics relevant to each session
- (b) chapters from political psychology textbooks
- (c) 1-2 blogs or popular articles in every session that contain relevant paradigms.

E. Major Course Assignments & Examinations:

- (a) Study of assigned book chapters;
- (b) A mid-term and a final test on the relevant topics; scoring system to be determined
- (c) Study of blog articles, with different ones assigned to different students; a one-page summary required that evaluate the rationale of the writers and notes personal impact, if any;
- (d) The final exam will cover topics taught in the entire course (scoring scheme to be determined)

F. Course Outline: The Summer Session I allows for 20 sessions, titled as follows:

Session 1 – Political psychology under internet conditions
Session 2 – Internet economics – from ads to social engineering
Session 3 - Evolutionary Psychology for the Internet Age
Session 4 – Ancestral communities and modern implications
Session 5 – Ancestral gender roles and modern implications
Session 6- Status, leadership and followership; identity fusion, religion
Session 7 – Social psychology and social media interactions
Session 8 - Memory functions and digital information processing
Session 9- Associative learning and reinforcement of online habits
Session 10 – Emotions and their expressions online
Session 11- Motivation for continuous user participation
Session 12 – Cognitive biases and influences on user decisions
Session 13 - Persuasion theories and manipulation practices
Session 14- Consumer psychology and e-commerce
Session 15 - Personality psychology and its contemporary uses
Session 16 - Political psychology and opinion change
Session 17 –Ethics for lives under the internet
Session 20- Research Synthesis and trends

Note: The order, content, and assignments presented below are subject to change. The course includes research and hypotheses about issues that are sometimes deemed controversial. These include the origins of political beliefs, racism, religious beliefs, and other topics.

Session 1. Current internet issues and broad political implications

Objective: The students will discuss a range of online behaviors that users frequently engage in, the benefits and the issues observed; compare current user practices with practices before the internet era

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 1

Assignment: Students look up and write a definition of terms frequently used in political discussions. These include:

Politics

Political psychology vs. political science

Socialism

Communism

Populism, Demagoguery

Neoliberal

Antitrust legislation

Liberals, conservatives in the US

Reality TV, reality shows

Evangelical Christians, Born-again Christians

Democrats in the US

Republicans in the US

Independent voters in the US

Brexit

Antifa

Income inequality, conditions of middle- and lower-income US citizens since about 2000

Optional assignment

Assignment: Graham, D. How Did the Internet Get So Good at Capturing Our Attention?

February 4, 2021, Psychology Today.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/your-internet-brain/202102/how-did-the-internet-get-so-good-capturing-our-attention>

Session 2: Internet economics – from ads to social engineering

Objective: Students will research and report on the economic indicators related to the technology companies. They will link the business models with needs for user data and social engineering.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 2

Activities-Assignments

Students research online the economic characteristics, business models, net worth, and other features of online companies. They submit a two-page report and give a presentation in class (report is worth 10 points). For example, they look up economic data on one social media website and answer questions such as:

- How do the companies earn money? What is their business model?
- In how many countries do they operate approximately?
- What do they purport to sell, who are their clients?
- Did they do an IPO? (initial public offering) How have stock prices changed over time?
- Why must they grow nonstop?
- When did they start?
- Who are the major stockholders?
- What is their budget size or income amount annually?
- To which political parties do the companies or owners donate in the US?
- About how much is their CEO (chief operating officer) getting paid annually?
- Who does their programming, where are the programmers located?

Optional assignment: Students to choose one article or blog, summarize in 1-2 pages, and present in class. Blogs to be assigned for reading include the following:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/08/advertising-is-the-internets-original-sin/376041/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/31/technology/internet-advertising-business.html>

The data that turned the world upside down

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/mg9vvn/how-our-likes-helped-trump-win>

Session 3 - Evolutionary Psychology for the Internet Age

Objective: The students will give an accurate account of the essential evolutionary principles, with particular attention to the various adaptive mechanisms that are used in contemporary online interactions. The students will suggest potential analogies between online behaviors and evolutionary adaptations.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 3

Assignment: research the term “Social Darwinism”

Optional assignments

-Oxford Handbook, p. 245-256 on genetics and political behavior; also p. 613-618.

-Shariff, Green et al., 2021. The Privacy Mismatch: Evolved Intuitions in a Digital World; Current Directions in Psychological Science, Vol. 30(2) 159–166

-Toward an evolutionarily informed political psychology. Oxford Handbook p. 205. ch 7 Sidanius and Kurzban.

Session 4: ancestral communities and modern manifestations

Objective: The students will be able to give an accurate account of the essential evolutionary principles, paying close attention to the various adaptive mechanisms that are used in contemporary online interactions. Students will also point to potential analogies between online behaviors and evolutionary adaptations.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 4

Optional assignments:

Henrich, chapter 3. : Clans, states, and why you can’t get here from there.

Oxford Handbook, ch. 23, Leonie Huddy; ingroup-outgroup processes, p. 737; 754-763 on group development and also emotion

On group development and also emotion, p. 754-763

Social-Media-Political-Polarization-and-Political-Disinformation-Literature-Review.pdf

Creation of norms: watch video in

<https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/damon-centola-tipping-point-large-scale-social-change>

Session 5 – Ancient reproduction and modern gendered behaviors

Objective: The students will give an accurate account of the essential evolutionary concepts related to gender issues in evolution, with emphasis to contemporary online interactions. Gender interactions will be explored extensively in this chapter, and students will be able to point to potential analogies between online behaviors and evolutionary adaptations.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 5

Session 6: Status, leaders, and followers

Objective: The will be able to analyze the relationships between status, leadership choices, and willingness to obey leaders who have certain features; students will give examples of depersonalization or identity fusion from common political, sports, or religious situations.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 5.5

Assignment: Qanon conspiracies: The Prophecies of Q; American conspiracy theories are entering a dangerous new phase. Story by [Adrienne LaFrance; June 2020 Issue](#)

<https://www.npr.org/2021/04/22/989241933/q-a-documentary-unravels-twisted-knots-of-qanon-movement>

Optional assignment: Students in the habit of watch Netflix movies will write a report on topics, and the rationale for likely recommendations; how did certain movies influence students' subsequent preferences?

Session 7: Social community effects in internet applications

Objective. The students will describe prominent social psychology concepts that help explicate the influence that social media have on users and on the decisions they make. They will be able to view examples of websites and form research-based hypotheses on the underlying reasons for which certain stimuli are placed in them.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 6

Optional assignments

-A research review of trust

-A research review of gun purchases and uses in the US

-Article: Group drumming stimulates behavioral and physiological synchronization that contribute to the formation of social bonds

-Workman et al.,ch. 24, p. 284

-Cottam et al.. (2016). Introduction to Political Psychology. 3rd ed. London: Routledge. Chapter 4. The political psychology of groups, p. 79-119

Investigating the power of group think, **research by** Clara Vandeweerd.

<https://www.media.mit.edu/articles/investigating-the-power-of-group-think/>

Session 8 - Memory functions and digital information processing

Objective: The students will be able to discuss the various types of memory, their features, and their implications for processing various types of information. They will also be able to explain essential attention mechanisms, how cognitive overload arises, and why it matters in online content. Lastly, they will discuss various memory implications on the use of social media.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 7

Session 9- Associative learning and reinforcement of online habits

Objective: The students will differentiate between classical and operant condition and will enumerate reinforcement schedules that enable responses to internet stimuli. They will apply this knowledge to areas such as videogames, betting, and the gig economy.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 8

Session 10 – Emotions and their expressions online

Objective: The students will enumerate the classical and operant conditioning processes and their ability to form unconscious or habitual responses. They will be able to distinguish the types of reinforcement schedules, shaping and extinguishing techniques, and gradients towards approach and avoidance. They will point to applications in online interactions.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 9

Assignment: Students collect samples of political ads of various parties, identify likely aims

Optional Assignments:

Digital emotion regulation by Wadley, Smith et al. 2020

Music and emotions for political purposes. Military songs?

Session 11- Motivation for continuous user participation

Objective. The students will describe important features of the mesolimbic dopamine system; will integrate the features of associate learning to explain why online content takes priority in users' attention. Students will describe the business models that integrate these neurocognitive features to create "addictive" content.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 10

Optional assignment: reporter listening into Q anon

movement <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/26/opinion/trump-qanon-washington-capitol-hill.html>

Students play Cambridge U. games online:

[DROG Gusmanson Design](#), [Bad News](#), [Harmony Square](#), and [Go Viral!](#).

Session 12 – Cognitive biases and influences on user decisions

Objective: The students will be able to discuss the reasons why cognitive biases exist, enumerate the most important ones. They will explain the uses made by online content providers in influencing users' opinions and choices.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 11

Assignment: identify cognitive biases used in this political discourse

HBO Axios interview with Donald Trump. Transcript shows plenty of red herrings.

<https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-interview-transcript-with-axios-on-hbo>

Session 13 - Persuasion theories and manipulation practices

Objective: The students will be able to enumerate persuasion theories and research, and give examples of persuasion efforts from various internet websites or social media.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 12

Assignment: students identify the methods used to persuade audiences that an election had irregularities.

For decisionmaking and persuasion, students do this 5 minute-test

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Y0kyVe7PUZu1gDVEZ54lZ8rAkV3mXAcz-NEh1LIJms4/present?ueb=true#slide=id.p>

Optional assignments

-[Emma Brown](#) et al. May 9, 2021. The making of a myth

https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2021/trump-election-fraud-texas-businessman-ramsland-asog/?itid=hp_dontmiss

-Fakey: A Game Intervention to Improve News Literacy on Social Media:

dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/3449080

Even Bumbledore made bad decisions

<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/teaching-current-directions-in-psychological-science-66>

-The Psychology of Fake News, (2020). DOI: 10.4324/9780429295379 Provided by Australian National University; The Psychology of Fake News Edited By Rainer Greifeneder, Mariela E. Jaffé, Eryn J. Newman, Norbert Schwarz;

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/oa-edit/10.4324/9780429295379/psychology-fake-news-rainer-greifeneder-mariela-jaff%C3%A9-eryn-newman-norbert-schwarz>

Session 14- Consumer psychology and e-commerce

Objective. The students will enumerate the most important features used by various sites to increase sales or convert to company opinions. They will critically examine the various

marketing recommendations aimed to improve sales and “conversions” and evaluate their reliability. They ought to become adept at recognizing the marketing tactics and critically think whether they want to abide by them in their lives.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 13

Session 15 - Personality psychology and its contemporary uses

Objective. The students will explain why traits are correlated, and the implication of the research for individuals, populations, and voter groups. The students will enumerate and discuss the prevailing personality classifications, notably the Five-Factor Model and their implications for various types of marketing strategies.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 14

Session 16 - Political psychology and opinion change

Objective. The students will discuss research pertaining to the various traits of more conservative and more liberal voters in various countries. They will discuss these with efforts to change voter opinions on the basis of their personal variables.

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 15

Optional assignments

-Zmigrod et al., 2021

-Oxford Handbook p. 245-256 on genetics and political behavior;

Session 17 – ethics for lives under the internet

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 19

Session 18- Research Synthesis and trends

Assignment: Political psychology under the internet, chapter 20

Session 19- to be determined

Resources

Abadzi, H. in revision: Political psychology under the Internet

The Oxford handbook of political psychology;

Huddy, Leonie; 2013

Book: available, Central Library, JA74.5 .O94 2013, Books (A thru L = 4th floor; P thru Z = 5th floor)

Introduction to Political Psychology. 3rd Edition. By Martha L. Cottam, Elena Mastors, Thomas Preston, Beth Dietz. 2015. New York, Routledge
DOI <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.4324/9781315671932>
Not available online

Political Psychology: Situations, Individuals, and Cases. By David Patrick Houghton, 2nd Edition, 2014; New York; Routledge
Available online

Political Psychology. New Explorations. Edited By Jon A. Krosnick, I-Chant A. Chiang, Tobias H. Stark. 1st Edition; 2016. Psychology Press; DOI <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.4324/9781315445687>
Available online

The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard
By Kenneth Katzman. Edition 1st Edition ; First Published 1993; eBook Published 27 September 2019; New York, Routledge;
DOI <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.4324/9780429315886>
Available online

The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition. By Christopher Walter. First Published 2003; ebook 2016;
London, Routledge; DOI <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.4324/9781315236599>
Available online

Benenson, J. 2014. Warriors and worriers.

Final Exam on the content presented for the various areas of psychology.

F. Grading Policy:

All papers must be grammatically correct using APA style. Papers with many grammatical errors and misspellings will not receive a satisfactory grade. The grading system is as follows:

Letter Grade	Points Needed
90 – 100	A
80 – 89.99	B
70 – 79.99	C
60 – 69.99	D
0 – 59.99	F

The instructor reserves the right to give a grade of “F” for the course as a whole to any student found guilty of plagiarism of any assignment by the Office of Student Conduct.

Policy on Incompletes: No Incomplete (“I”) grade will be given.

Calendar

SUMMER 1ST FIVE WEEKS 2021

Jun. 6 Registration Ends for Summer 1st Five Weeks

Jun. 7 Late registration

Jun. 7 First day of classes

Jun. 8 Late registration

Jun. 10 Census Date

Jun. 28 Last day to drop classes; submit requests to advisor prior to 4:00pm

Jul. 5 Independence Day Holiday Observed

Jul. 8 Last day of classes

Jul. 12 Final exams

Assignments

Nearly every day, students will be asked to locate information and/or read articles and give presentations in class about what they read. They will submit daily papers of 1-2 pages summarizing what they have read. Failure to submit a daily report will result in a loss of 50 points.

Your course grade will be based on four exams scores and a final paper in lieu of a final exam. The exams and paper will be each worth 100 points for a total 500 points. The exams are weighted equally so your scores will be averaged to obtain a letter grade, where, A>90%, B>80%, C>70%, D>60%, F<60%. For example a student scores a total of 425 points on 5 exams and earns the full 5% of points for attendance. The course grade would be $425 + 25 = 450$ points or an "A". The cutoffs for A = 450, B = 400, C = 350, D = 300; and F < 300. Each exam will be comprised of 10-20 "objective answer" questions that may or may not include Multiple Choice, True/False, and Matching questions. Please note: Exams will not be "curved".

Details about the daily reports and paper will be finalized during class.

Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester and seek guidance from available sources (including the instructor) if their performance drops below satisfactory levels; see "Student Support Services," below.

Make-Up Exams:

A single “make-up” exam session for missed exams will be held on **June 29, 2020** during regular course hours. A request for taking a make-up exam must be made in writing. Please note: A “make-exam” is **not** a “do-over” exam for poor performance on a previously taken exam.

Late Assignments: Please read the following rules as they apply to late assignments. All papers are expected on due date.

G. Make-Up Exam or Assignment Policy:

Make-up assignments and exams will not be given.

H. Attendance Policy:

At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. For this course, here is the attendance policy:

The role of the instructor in this seminar is to provide structure and direction, lecture and serve as a consultant, coordinator and resource person to the seminar members. Active participation by seminar members is expected in order to promote peer learning through thoughtful reading, thinking, and discussion. Therefore, participation is mandatory. Class activities include seminar discussions and organized presentations. Students are expected to participate each week in a timely and engaging fashion. **Students are also expected to assume responsibility for their own learning and to actively involve themselves in class discussions and exercises.**

Absence/Late Policy: Regular attendance for entire class periods is expected. Students should arrive to class on time and stay until the end of class. Arriving late and departing early is disruptive to the class. It is the student's responsibility, whether present or absent, to keep abreast of assignments. Any student missing over 3 classes will receive a failing grade for the course. It is your responsibility to ensure you sign in for each class (see instructor for sign in sheet).

Face Covering Policy

While the use of face coverings on campus is no longer mandatory, all students and instructional staff are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings while they are on campus. This is particularly true inside buildings and within classrooms and labs where social distancing is not possible due to limited space. If a student needs accommodations to ensure social distancing in the classroom due to being at high risk they are encouraged to work directly with the Student Access and Resource Center to assist in these accommodations. If students need masks, they may obtain them at the Central Library, the E.H. Hereford University Center's front desk or in their department.

Class/Social Responsibility

Class responsibility entails regular class attendance, class preparedness and active class participation with consideration for others. When students participate actively in class discussions, learning is enhanced. To be able to participate actively and with relevance to the course subject matter, it is important to complete reading assignments prior to each class session. Students are encouraged to discuss readings with peers, classmates, and the instructor. Students are encouraged to consult additional readings when time allows.

Cell Phones: Please turn off cell phones. If you must make a call, please step out.

I. Course Schedule:

As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course. Should technical problems arise with course delivery, alternate but equivalent assignments may be given so long as the overall learning objectives, general time frame and grading structure for the course are sustained.

The course schedule is set up for each week. Please review this thoroughly before emailing instructor with questions.

Note: Grades will be posted to the campus MyMav system at course completion and made available on the University Schedule for posting of grades. Grades cannot be given by email per University Policy.

J. Expectations for Out-of-Class Study:

Beyond the time required to attend each class meeting, students enrolled in this course should expect to spend at least an additional three hours (for each hour of class or lecture per week) of their own time in course-related activities, including reading required materials, completing assignments, preparing for assignments and exams, and reviewing online content, etc.

K. Grade Grievance Policy:

See College of Science Program Manual.

L. Student Support Services:

UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit or contact Ms. Jennifer Malone, Coordinator of the Office of Student Success and Academic Advising located on the third floor of Building a of the School of Social Work Complex. Dr. Chris Kilgore serves as a writing coach and resource as well and has posted an online writing clinic. Also, the Maverick Resource Hotline may be contacted at 817-272-6107, or send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at www.uta.edu/resources.

M. Librarian to Contact:

The Social Sciences/Social Work Resource Librarian is John Dillard. His office is in the campus Central Library. He may also be contacted via E-mail: dillard@uta.edu or by Cell phone: (817) 675-8962, below are some commonly used resources needed by students in online or technology supported courses:

<http://www.uta.edu/library/services/distance.php>

The following is a list, with links, of commonly used library resources:

- Library Home Page.....<http://www.uta.edu/library>
- Subject Guides<http://libguides.uta.edu>
- Subject Librarians<http://www-test.uta.edu/library/help/subject-librarians.php>
- Database List.....<http://www-test.uta.edu/library/databases/index.php>
- Course Reserves.....<http://pulse.uta.edu/vwebv/enterCourseReserve.do>
- Library Catalog<http://discover.uta.edu/>
- E-Journals<http://utalink.uta.edu:9003/UTAlink/az>
- Library Tutorials<http://www.uta.edu/library/help/tutorials.php>
- Connecting from Off- Campus<http://libguides.uta.edu/offcampus>
- Ask a Librarian<http://ask.uta.edu>

N. Emergency Exit Procedures:

Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exits, which are the stairwells located at either end of the adjacent hallway. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist handicapped individuals.

Note: UTA provides institutional information, such as drop policies, in a separate document under canvas.

<https://resources.uta.edu/provost/course-related-info/institutional-policies.php>

Students are expected to download and understand the document