

PSYC 4100 B : NEW FRONTIERS IN POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Instructor	Dr. Michael J. A. Wohl
Term	Winter 2027
Course Delivery	In-person
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Office Location	314C Social Science Research Building
Office Hours	By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION/INSTRUCTOR'S STATEMENT

Why does politics so often feel less like a debate about ideas and more like a fight over identity, morality, and belonging? In this seminar, we will use social and political psychology to understand some of the most urgent political issues of our time: polarization, misinformation, populism, support for strong leaders, collective action, forgiveness, and democratic repair.

Drawing on cutting-edge research, we will examine how identity, threat, emotion, memory, and group loyalty shape what people believe, who they trust, and how they act. This is not a course about parties, platforms, or parliamentary procedure. It is a course about people: why we divide, why we follow, why we fight, and how we might find ways back from the brink.

Across the term, you will become an expert on a topic, lead discussion, propose an original study, and develop a research proposal that applies psychological science to a real-world political problem. If you have ever wondered why reasonable people can see the same political event so differently, why “us versus them” thinking is so powerful, or what psychology can teach us about strengthening democracy, this course is for you.

EVALUATION (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Course Evaluation of Grade	
Class Participation (i.e., Involvement in class discussions)	10%
Thought paper	25%
Student-Guided Seminar	25%
Proposal Blitz	10%
Final paper	30%

TEXT

No textbook. There are assigned readings each week, which can be downloaded from the CU Library. Example readings are as follows (subject to change):

Swann Jr, W. B., Gómez, Á., Dovidio, J. F., Hart, S., & Jetten, J. (2010). Dying and killing for one's group: Identity fusion moderates responses to intergroup versions of the trolley problem. *Psychological Science*, 21, 1176-1183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610376656>

Noor, M., Shnabel, N., Halabi, S., & Nadler, A. (2012). When suffering begets suffering: The psychology of competitive victimhood between adversarial groups in violent conflicts. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 16(4), 351-374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868312440048>

Robertson, C. E., Shariff, A., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2024). Morality in the anthropocene: The perversion of compassion and punishment in the online world. *PNAS nexus*, 3, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae193>

Wohl, M. J. A., Stefaniak, A., & Smeekes, A. (2020). Longing is in the memory of the beholder: Collective nostalgia content determines the method members will support to make their group great again. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 91, 104044. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2020.104044>