

2024



Mondays
12:30–13:50

B218

[Moodle](#)

POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

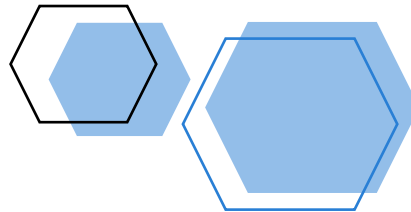
MICHAL SMETANA

- an award-winning course about the fallibility of the human mind and its impact on world politics
- it is designed for active students who enjoy interactive teaching methods, in-class debates, weekly tasks, and challenging term projects
- note that the course is quite demanding, and most of the coursework takes place during the semester rather than in the exam period



WHAT DO WE COVER IN THE COURSE?

When discussing international politics, we often tend to talk about “states” as living beings. However, all the decisions to launch wars, sign trade agreements, or build new alliances are ultimately made by actual human individuals from flesh and blood. And, as all individuals, even these high-level decision-makers are prone to cognitive biases and misperceptions; they have feelings and emotions and often care about justice and fairness as much as they calculate material costs and gains; they are susceptible to the way issues are framed and often make decisions that are supposedly against “rational” thinking. In this course, we will draw on behavioral, social, and moral psychology concepts to study how these phenomena work and how they influence international relations in our times.



WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE AND IN THE CLASS?

Most classes in this course represent a lecture-seminar hybrid: I present some basic overviews of the current developments in the field and relevant academic concepts and theories, but your input and ideas are critically important for a collaborative learning process. Attendance and active participation are compulsory, with up to three abstentions allowed (for whatever reason – no prior excuse is needed). Before each class, I will ask you for a brief preparation, often filling in some online survey or other simple task. All assignments are always available in [Moodle](#).



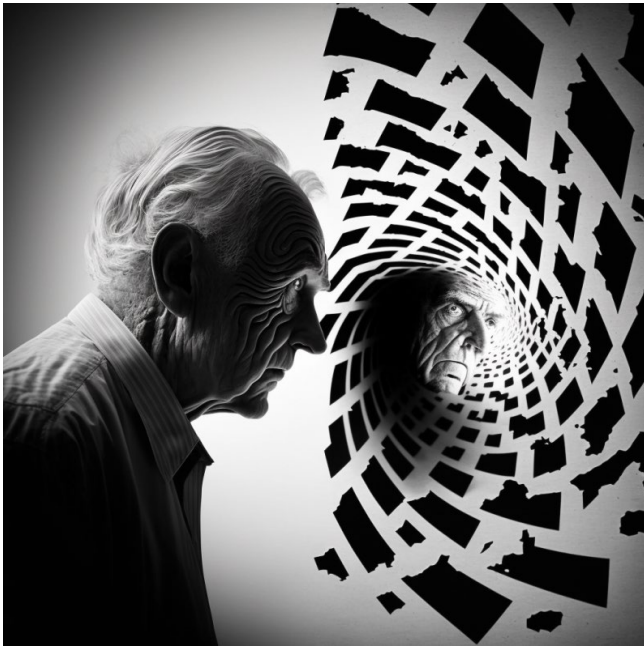
WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE CLASS?

After each class, I will usually ask you to follow up on what we've learned and read a scholarly article that will elaborate on the problem in more detail. From a learning perspective, this approach works much better than the traditional "read first / attend the lecture later" approach. Readings for each class will be available for you in the Moodle. After you read the article(s), you will have time until Sunday of that week to provide a brief reflection (min. 250 words) on the reading in a Moodle forum for the given class – I will usually give you a small task, such as trying to apply the ideas from the reading in a new context. Do not repeat what the article is about – give me your own perspective and answer what we ask you about. Note that to pass the course, you need to read all the assigned readings and do all the tasks, and there are penalties for late deliveries (-0.5 points for each day).

SPECIAL TERM PROJECT

At the beginning of the course, you will choose one of the four types of term projects that you will be working on this semester. You will be able to (1) design your survey experiment, in which you will be collecting, analyzing, and visualizing your original data; or (2) conduct and record a simulation game, where you will be examining the mechanisms behind individual players' decision-making; or (3) record your video podcast where you will interview an expert in the field; or (4) replicate some earlier psychological experiment and produce a science video for the broader public. I will propose some specific topics in Moodle that you will sign up for, but you can also submit your own topic, and I will be happy to consider it.

From the start of the course, you will be required to consult your term project regularly with me through a dedicated Moodle forum. By March 3, you must select which of the four types of term projects you prefer and whether you want to work on the project individually or as a group. By March 22, you should have the topic and some basic plan for your special term project approved by me. The deadline for submitting the final project results is May 12. Finally, May 13 and 20 will be dedicated to the PPIR Students' Conference, where you will present the results of your project and discuss them with the rest of the class.



“NO-ELECTRONIC-DEVICES” RULE

In this course, we observe a strict no-laptop / no-tablet / no-phone policy; in other words, the students and lecturers are not allowed to use electronic devices during the class. Please note that the motivation for this rule is not to discipline the students or to make it harder for you in any way—on the contrary. Using laptops for notetaking during class has, according to the latest studies in neuroscience and pedagogics, very high cognitive costs; it is a constant distraction for your brain, which is unable to focus on the lecture itself. This ‘no electronic devices’ policy has been tested at many renowned universities abroad, and the results are highly positive. I encourage you to just listen to the lectures, pose questions whenever something is unclear or worth further elaboration, actively engage in the in-class debates, and make a note on paper when you feel it is something you would like to follow up on at home.



EXAM

The exam part of this course will be slightly different than you are used to. We will set up a debate among 3 to 4 students, in which you will discuss ideas, theories, and concepts from political psychology and apply them in a contemporary setting of world politics. The point is not to “win” the debate and “defeat” your opponent but to demonstrate your ability to use what you have learned during the course actively. I will set available dates for these debates towards the end of the semester.



COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Feb 19): Introduction: Human Brain and International Relations

Week 2 (Feb 26): Cognitive Biases in World Politics

Week 3 (Mar 4): Framing Effects and the Prospect Theory

Week 4 (Mar 11): Justice and Fairness in International Politics

Week 5 (Mar 18): Survey Experiments in Political Psychology

Week 6 (Mar 25): Leadership Styles and Elite Traits (*guest lecture by Ondrej Rosendorf*)

Week 7 (Apr 1): No class (Easter Monday)

Week 8 (Apr 8): Conspiracy Theories (*guest lecture by Jonáš Syrovátka*)

Week 9 (Apr 15): Bottom-up and Top-down Models of Foreign Policy Attitudes

Week 10 (Apr 22): Moral Foundations of Foreign Policy Attitudes

Week 11 (Apr 29): Hybrid Warfare and Disinformation (*guest lecture by Jakub Eberle*)

Week 12 (May 6): Deviance, Stigma, and Ontological (In)security

Week 13 (May 13): PPIR Students' Conference (Session I)

Week 14 (May 20): PPIR Students' Conference (Session II)



OKAY...A SUMMARY

Before each class: check Moodle and do the assigned small task

During each class: listen, ask, discuss, challenge us, and think; up to three absences are allowed; we observe a 'no-electronic-devices' policy

After each class: do the assigned task by Sunday on the same week; you must do all the tasks during the semester and not be delayed more than three times

By March 3: let me know whether you want to conduct your term project individually or in a group

By March 22: have the topic and the preliminary plan of work approved by me

By May 12: submit the final outcome of your term project

On May 13 and 20: present and discuss the results of your term project with others in the class

In May and June: sign up for an exam session



EVALUATION

After-class reflections:

25 points, -0.5 points for each day of delayed delivery

Term project:

30 points, -2 points for each day of delayed delivery

Exam:

25 points

In-class activity:

20 points

* note that in each of these four segments (reflections, term project, exam, activity), you need to score min. 50% in order to pass the course.

100-91 points: A

90-81 points: B

80-71 points: C

70-61 points: D

60-51 points: E

50-0 points: F



ABOUT ME

I am an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Director of the [Peace Research Center Prague \(PRCP\)](#), and a Head Researcher at the [Experimental Lab for International Security Studies \(ELISS\)](#). My main research interests revolve around nuclear weapons in world politics, but I am also very interested in applying social/cognitive/experimental psychology in IR, studying the dynamics of international norms, theorizing deterrence models, and examining frozen conflicts in Europe and Asia. You can visit my [academic website](#) and [Twitter page](#). For consultations, you can contact me at smetana@fsv.cuni.cz