Political Communication and Psychology in Europe*
Winter 2021/22

Thursdays 14:00 – 17:30, IBW Building, Seminar Room S103
6 ECTS

Instructor:
Bruno Castanho Silva, PhD
Cologne Center for Comparative Politics (CCCP)
Email: bcsilva@wiso.uni-koeln.de
Office hours: By appointment

---

1   Course Description

This course is designed for undergraduate students in social sciences. It introduces basic concepts and topics of the interplay between political communication and political psychology in electoral campaigns, with examples focused on (but not restricted to) European countries. At the end, students will know the fundamental models of communication, how framing effects affect individuals' attitudes and behavior – and when they fail to do so. We also cover recent topics on the influence of social media on political communication and voter persuasion. Students will learn the theoretical models, and be equipped with the methodological tools needed to study the effects of political communication in electoral campaigns.

---

*This is a preliminary syllabus subject to minor changes. Last updated July 15, 2021

2   Course Requirements

Grading will be composed of the following requirements:

1. **Final project (75%):**Specific format/type TBD

2. **Final project presentation (25%):** In the last week, students are required to present their final project. Delivering a presentation is **mandatory** for passing the course.

Points are converted to final grades as follows:

Points	Grade
100–96	1,0
95–91	1,3
90–86	1,7
85–81	2,0
80–76	2,3
75–71	2,7
70–66	3,0
65–61	3,3
60–56	3,7
55–51	4,0
50–0	5,0

Unexcused late submissions of final papers will be subject to grade deductions following the scale below:

Delay	Deduction
0–24 hours after deadline	20% penalty
24–48 hours after deadline	35% penalty
48–72 hours after deadline	50% penalty
> 72 hours after deadline	Not graded

Bonus points. It is possible to earn up to 6 bonus points in this course, meaning the maximum final grade can be 106. Between Weeks 2 and 7, students are asked to submit, by email, up to three questions about the weekly readings to the instructor,

up to four hours before our meeting. I will select up to three questions in total (from those submitted by all students) to discuss in class. If your question is selected in a week, you earn one bonus point that week. *Students can only earn bonus points if they fulfill the mandatory course requirements – meaning, deliver a final paper and do a presentation.* Bonus points can increase your grade, but never decrease it.

3   Schedule

Part I - Communicating with the Public

Week 1 (Oct 14): Introduction to the course and Political Communication: what/why do parties communicate?

Readings:

Stubager, R., and Seeberg, H. B. (2016). "What can a party say? How parties' communication can influence voters' issue ownership perceptions." *Electoral Studies* 44(December): 162–171.

Bittner, Amanda. (2011). "Leader Evaluations and Partisan Stereotypes – A Comparative Analysis". In: *Personality Politics: The Role of Leader Evaluations in Democratic Elections*, edited by M. C. Lobo and J. Curtice. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 17–37.

Week 2 (Oct 21): Communication in Parliament

Readings:

Osnabrügge, Moritz, Sara B. Hobolt, and Toni Rodon. "Playing to the Gallery: Emotive Rhetoric in Parliaments." *American Political Science Review* (2021): 1-15.

Proksch, Sven-Oliver, and Jonathan B. Slapin. "Position taking in European Parliament speeches." *British Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 3 (2010): 587-611.

Week 3 (Oct 28): Social Media: Changes in Style and Opportunities

Mandatory readings:

Castanho Silva, Bruno, and Sven-Oliver Proksch. 2021. Politicians Unleashed? Political Communication on Twitter and in Parliament in Western Europe". *Political Science Research and Methods*, FirstView.

Gilardi, Fabrizio, Theresa Gessler, Maël Kubli, and Stefan Müller. "Social media and political agenda setting." *Political Communication* (2021): 1-22.

Week 4: (Nov 4): Stepping out of bounds? Misinformation and its regulation

Florian Saurwein & Charlotte Spencer-Smith (2020): Combating Disinformation on Social Media: Multilevel Governance and Distributed Accountability in Europe, *Digital Journalism*, DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2020.1765401

Humprecht, Edda, Frank Esser, and Peter Van Aelst. "Resilience to online disinformation: A framework for cross-national comparative research." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25, no. 3 (2020): 493-516.

NB! No class on Nov 11 and Nov 18!!

Part II – Political Psychology

Week 5 (Nov 25): Values and Identities

Readings:

Feldman, S. (2003). "Values, Ideology, and the Structure of Political Attitudes". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, edited by D. O. Sears, L. Huddy, and R. Jervis. Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 477–510.

Huddy, Leonie, Alexa Bankert, and Caitlin Davies. "Expressive versus instrumental partisanship in multiparty European systems." *Political Psychology* 39 (2018): 173-199.

Week 6 (Dec 2): Personality Traits and Politics

Reading:

Zarouali, Brahim, Tom Dobber, Guy De Pauw, and Claes de Vreese. "Using a personality-profiling algorithm to investigate political microtargeting: assessing the persuasion effects of personality-tailored ads on social media." *Communication Research* (2020): 1-26.

Gallego, A. and S. Pardos-Prado. (2014). "The Big Five Personality Traits and Attitudes towards Immigrants." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40(1): 79–99.

Week 7 (Dec 9): How to influence attitudes and behavior?

Readings:

Coppock, Alexander, Seth J. Hill, and Lynn Vavreck. "The small effects of political advertising are small regardless of context, message, sender, or receiver:

Evidence from 59 real-time randomized experiments." *Science advances* 6, no. 36 (2020).

Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman. (2007). "Framing Theory". *Annual Review of Political Science* 10(1): 103–126

Week 8 (Dec 16): Final project presentations