

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR:

By Professor Guillermina Seri

Children have been an uncomfortable presence in politics and political science since ancient times. Historically, societies have treated them as part of the household, as an extension of their mothers, or as potentially free but assumed incapable of exercising their freedom as “miniature,” incomplete citizens. While Aristotle devoted an entire book of his *Politics* to discuss children’s education to prepare them for life in the polis, children continued to be treated with ambiguity. They were labeled “passive” citizens with civil but not political rights even by revolutionaries such as Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès during the French Revolution. Blind spots surrounding children persisted in the twentieth century. In her 1958 book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt proposed to make natality “the central category” of political thought, with its promise of a “new beginning.” Still, she made no reference to children, or whether, when, and how they should be recognized as political agents.

Even progressive contemporary thinkers omit discussing children’s political agency. Jacques Rancière, concerned with the excluded, does not mention them. Giorgio Agamben devotes a book to the relation between childhood and history, yet he does not discuss children’s political status either. With some exceptions, as countries such as Argentina, Brazil, or Austria move the voting age to 16, children are still treated as “political ‘inexistent’,” as Itay Snir puts it, and they remain voiceless and excluded from formal politics. And yet, as Prof. Zoe Oxley’s research shows, young children have clear political ideas and affects regarding politics, institutions such as the presidency, and partisanship. Far from mere “future citizens,” children are thoughtful members of our communities, if we can only listen to them.

Crowning efforts that go back at least to 1796 Thomas Spence’s *The Rights of Infants in England*, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child introduced a comprehensive set of legally binding protections for everyone under 18 that acknowledges children’s inherent dignity, inalienable rights, and need for care, advancing a commitment to non-discrimination and to safeguarding their lives, freedoms, and best interest. The Convention includes the right to a name, nationality, identity, privacy, and to live with one’s parents. It guarantees fundamental freedoms of expression, thought, religion, and association, and extensive protections from all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect, including economic and sexual exploitation. It mandates special care for vulnerable children. It affirms every child’s right to develop to their fullest potential, supported by high-quality healthcare, adequate living standards, social security, and free primary education. Furthermore, articles recognize the rights to rest, leisure, and participation in cultural life. Ratified in 1990, the Convention makes states primarily responsible for guaranteeing children’s rights by taking “all appropriate measures,” including by collaborating internationally. With 196 state parties, the Convention is the international document with the most support. The only outlier is the United States, which signed but never ratified the document.

The protections in the 1989 Declaration are essential and urgent, especially in light of the massive scale of suffering millions of children are currently experiencing. Of the 2.4 billion children in the world, more than half were living in poverty in 2022.

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Too many lack access to healthcare, and newborns die for lack of appropriate maternal care. Poverty endangers children to various forms of exploitation, including the estimated 160 million who work, often in dangerous conditions.

Over 250 million children are deprived of an education and, among those who have access, too many receive substandard instruction. At least 36.5 million children have been forcefully displaced. The rights of migrant and refugee children are often ignored, by being detained, illegally separated from their families, and prevented from accessing legal protections. Increasingly, children are criminalized as adults. Over 5 million children are victims of human trafficking for labor and sexual exploitation. Millions of girls are forced into marriage, subjected to genital mutilation, and forced to give birth, and around 1 billion children experience physical and mental abuse, neglect, and violence.

About 400 million children live in regions under armed conflict and are often forced to engage in combat, abducted, and turned into military targets. By now, seven hundred thousand Ukrainian children have been displaced, many forcefully adopted by Russian families, and others used as child soldiers. In Sudan, at least five million children had to flee their homes since 2023 and 14 million need humanitarian assistance, many facing famine. In turn, violence in the Gaza strip is having a “catastrophic impact on children,” the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child conveyed, including “horrific levels of killing, maiming, and widespread violence,” with “more on the brink of starvation.”

Children are also on the frontline of the climate and environmental crises, with about 1 billion living in highly vulnerable areas, 93 percent in places with high air pollution, part of the environmental hazards linked to one in four deaths of children under 5. As a vulnerable group, children need protections. But if they continue to be reduced to passive recipients of adult care, even the best legal frameworks may be delivered in ways that further disempower and silence them by reinforcing their exclusion from the political sphere.

Ironically, as Snir notes, “children have always been an essential part of politics,” serving as kings and queens, fighting in wars, and raising their voices to denounce injustice and challenging unjust political regimes. Indeed, it was high-school students who started the 2019 Chilean mass demonstrations that led to a constitutional convention. Earlier, in 2006, Chile’s “Penguin” high-school student protests challenged President Bachelet to end the privatization of education. Children’s key role was recognized in the Occupy Wall Street protests as in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and Dara’a, where indignation following the arrest of 15 children for painting graffiti in March 2011 led to the Syrian Civil war. Children’s efforts have led to recognition for leaders such as 11-year-old Malala Yousafzai, 15-year old Greta Thunberg, and earlier figures such as 15-year-old Claudette Colvin, 13-year-old Anne Frank, or 16-year-old Joan of Arc. From the 21 names behind the 2015 Juliana lawsuit to those mobilizing for safe schools with the March for Our Lives, or the 13- and 8-year old British clean air advocates who traveled to the recent United Nations summit, children continue to lead the way.

These movements and figures show how, despite their status as the “quintessential embodiment of the excluded demos,” as Snir puts it, children are capable of major political interventions at the forefront of struggles for democracy, justice, dignity, life, and the planet’s future, forcing society to confront issues it would otherwise ignore. Children keep demonstrating capacity for political action. What would it look like to integrate children into democratic life in ways that foster their participation without erasing their need for protection? As global crises worsen, listening to children is not just the right thing to do but essential for everyone’s survival. As children continue to voice their grievances and concerns, scholars like Itay Snir or Zoe Oxley help us to appreciate children’s voice, agency, and contributions to expanding inclusion and the democratic horizon for all.



PROFESSOR SOUND OFF

By: Professor Elizabeth O'Connor

Questions about the health of our democracy have been in the headlines, swirling around campus and showing up in the classroom, which made the optimistic title of an article from swing-state Pennsylvania all the more surprising: Pennsylvania Voters Bridge Deep Political Divides, Reduce Polarization in Groundbreaking Deliberative Polling Event.

The report describes an experiment this summer by Stanford University and associates, in which a representative sample of 175 voters gathered in PA for a weekend of discussion on local and national pressing concerns, Q & A sessions with various issue experts, and deliberation in large and small groups – with polling conducted before and afterwards. The experiment offered a hopeful view of how democracy can operate in an ideal setting.

Of course, America today does not feel *at all* like an ideal setting. In fact, news media, popular media, and an awful lot of campus chatter reveals that many of us are feeling a deep sense of unease, if not outright fear, about the path we are on as a nation. The reasons for this are numerous – levels of political polarization are intense. Income inequality has reached levels so high that it is hard to describe with data. Climate change and its risks are steadily advancing. Students are graduating into an uncertain future – the economy has been acting in ways that are unpredictable since the pandemic, housing prices are soaring, employment patterns are changing. How will AI affect the ability to get a good-quality job with benefits and stability this spring? Or next spring? With a defunded Department of Labor, how can we ensure that workers are safe at work – whether their risks involve physical dangers, harassment, replacement by robots, or immigration raids? The national discourse has grown increasingly divided, bitter and vitriolic, tipping over into violence far too often. And finally, with so much at stake, how on earth will we confront these challenges when our governing institutions seem increasingly unable to play their role in policymaking?

¹America in One Room: Pennsylvania, a Deliberative Poll coordinated by global problem-solving organization Helena and the Deliberative Democracy Lab at Stanford University. <https://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/news/pennsylvania-voters-bridge-deep-political-divides-reduce-polarization-groundbreaking>

It's easy and understandable to feel uneasy about participating in our democracy today I could feel my blood pressure rise just while typing that list, and I understand the perspective of students who tell me that discussing politics is best avoided at a time like this, when it feels very easy to walk into an argument and very hard to have a productive debate, and when the worst-case scenario of political violence is often somewhere in that week's newspapers.

That said, the lessons from the Pennsylvania experiment make me think that, actually, Union College political science students are exactly where they need to be right now. The experiment found that a process of "deep deliberation" allowed participants to narrow their partisan gaps, reach agreements or compromises on solutions to hot-button issues such as immigration, education and election integrity. Nearly all left the process with more respect for opposing political viewpoints and an interest in policies to protect democracy.

What is a deep deliberation process? Participants spent a few days in the same location, meeting in small and mid-sized groups, with moderators to guide discussions. They heard from experts and discussed what they learned. In four days, they built a sense of community and reached a degree of trust, enough to have open and frank conversations. What is a deep deliberation process? Participants spent a few days in the same location, meeting in small and mid-sized groups, with moderators to guide discussions. They heard from experts and discussed what they learned. In four days, they built a sense of community and reached a degree of trust, enough to have open and frank conversations.

On campus, that is what Union College students are doing a version of this deliberative process every day, in mostly analog ways, as they engage in higher education. Students are meeting in classes and other groups, both large and small, learning from faculty, staff and each other, while living in community. Students read works from scholars and scientists, build foundational knowledge, get exposed to new ideas and challenging ways of thinking. Moreover, instead of doing this for four days, like the Pennsylvania experiment, students engage in this deliberative process for *four years*, and emerge as stronger, critical thinkers and more informed citizens.

Today's unsettled times and disaffection with democracy are unsettling. But there is reason for optimism – the PA experiment showed that with exposure to knowledge and an opportunity to deliberate in-person with others about policies and trade-offs, groups of people can overcome polarization and become reinvigorated about the process of democracy. Higher education is an opportunity to live out this experiment on a broad scale – meaning students at Union College and elsewhere are currently building the skills needed to ensure that democracy not only survives but thrives.



INTERVIEW WITH OUR ALUM IRVING CORTÉS MARTÍNEZ

What is your current professional title?:

U.S. Diplomat/ Foreign Service Officer

What does the work involve?

I am currently serving as a Consular Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand. The core mission of a consular officer is to assist U.S. citizens abroad, facilitate legitimate travel to the United States, and protect national security. I adjudicate immigrant and nonimmigrant visas for applicants seeking to travel, study, work, or migrate to the U.S.

One of the most fascinating aspects of my job is the people I meet. I interview applicants from all walks of life—from famous Thai actors to farmworkers. For many, speaking to a consular officer is their first, and sometimes only, direct interaction with an American or the U.S. government. These brief interviews, often lasting only a few minutes, can directly shape local perceptions of the United States and its people.

As a Public Diplomacy officer on a consular tour, I aim to approach each applicant with respect and empathy, while ensuring the integrity of our immigration system. It's a delicate balance—safeguarding U.S. national security while also contributing positively to how America is viewed abroad.

How did your time at Union prepare you for your current position and/or, more broadly, your career?

Union College sparked my passion for immersing myself in new environments, languages, and cultures. Growing up in a small town in Oregon, I had only a limited understanding of how interconnected the world truly is. At Union, that perspective transformed.

For the first time, I built friendships with peers from Rwanda, Nepal, Togo, and Ghana—relationships that continue to this day. I also challenged myself academically, studying French and Portuguese, and took advantage of Union's opportunities to study abroad in Senegal, Argentina, and Brazil. Those experiences exposed me to diverse ways of life and taught me how to adapt and thrive in unfamiliar settings.

Union equipped me with the tools and mindset to become a more global, thoughtful person—ready to engage with the world beyond my own. Today, as a U.S. diplomat, I feel fortunate to do what I love: travel, learn languages, and connect with people across cultures.

What is your fondest recollection of majoring in Political Science?

My fondest memory is taking the Model United Nations class. As a freshman, fresh out of high school, I prepared to participate in one of the largest and most prestigious collegiate political simulations in the world. Our class was assigned a country, and within that, each group represented a UN committee.

My partner and I represented Niger in the United Nations Environment Programme.

Over 10 weeks, we researched our country's positions and drafted a policy memo on pressing environmental issues. At the end of the course, we traveled to New York City to participate in the UN simulation. I'll never forget sitting in the UN headquarters during the closing ceremony—the same halls where real international diplomacy happens. I was proud to receive an “Outstanding Position Paper” award, but what stayed with me most was the experience of collaborating with peers from across the globe to address shared challenges.

That was my first real glimpse of diplomacy: managing relationships, advancing national interests, and finding common ground to solve global problems. It's exactly what I do now as a diplomat. One day, I hope to serve in the U.S. Mission to the UN and continue the work I first began at Union College.

What advice would you have for current majors for life after Union?

Take advantage of opportunities that come your way—even if it feels outside your comfort zone. You don't need to land your dream job right out of college. Explore, take risks, network, and be open to unexpected paths.

I never imagined I would become a diplomat. After Union, I applied to the Fulbright program to teach English abroad—even though I had no prior teaching experience. That opportunity connected me with diplomats and introduced me to a career I hadn't previously considered. Each step opened new doors, eventually leading me to where I am today.

Finding the right career takes time, and it's perfectly okay to explore along the way. What matters most is being willing to try, to learn, and to embrace opportunities as they come.

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DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE

WINTER 2026 POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSE OFFERINGS

Introductory Courses:

PSC 111 Introduction to US Politics
(O'Connor, MWF: 09:15AM-10:20AM)

PSC 112 Introduction to Global Politics
(Oker, MWF: 11:45AM-12:50PM)

PSC 113 Introduction to Political Thought
(Cidam, TTH 10:55AM-12:40PM)

U.S. Politics:

PSC 277 Capital Region Political Internships
(Hays, F 3:00PM-4:00PM)

PSC 361R Political Psychology
(Oxley, TTH 9:00AM-10:20AM)

PSC 374 Pop Culture & Rock Music in the 1970s
(Hislope, TTH 10:55AM-12:40PM)

Methods

PSC 221 Discourse Analysis
(Bogatova, MWF 10:30-11:35 AM)

Political Theory:

PSC 221 Discourse Analysis
(Bogatova, MWF 10:30-11:35 AM)

PSC 232 Violence and Politics
(Cidam, TTH 1:55PM-3:40PM)

Comparative Politics:

PSC 241 Russian Politics
(Bogatova, MW 3:05PM-4:45PM)

PSC 244 The Politics of Extraction
(Seri, MW: 3:05PM-4:45PM)

International Politics:

PSC 257 International Political Economy
(Oker, MWF: 01:50PM-02:55PM)

PSC 258 Strategies of WWII
(Brown, TTH: 1:55PM-3:40PM)

PSC 359 Seminar: International Politics
(Brown, TTH 7PM-8:45PM)

UPPER LEVEL COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR WINTER TERM

PSC 221 Discourse Analysis

The phrase *abracadabra*, known from childhood fairy tales as a magic spell, literally means: what is said will become. Language is never just a neutral tool, it is power, it is identity, it is the ground on which our realities are built. Words create worlds. Today, in a landscape saturated with social media feeds, YouTube clips, TikTok trends, Instagram reels, Facebook posts, and the constant churn of “news” and opinion, discourse doesn’t simply inform us, it shapes how we think about ourselves, how we speak to ourselves, and what choices we believe are possible. For a modern person, struggling to keep balance in the insane ocean of lightning-fast, contradictory, and unverified information, the ability to see behind the surface of words is no less than a survival skill. This course equips students to understand how discourse produces meaning, how it channels emotions, how it legitimizes power, and how it influences everyday life, helping them preserve clarity and sanity in a world where language creates reality as much as it describes it.

PSC 232 Violence and Politics

What is the relationship between violence and politics? Is politics a continuation of violent struggle through other means? Or is there a fundamental difference between the two? What is the relationship between legal order and violence? What is the role of violence in resisting different forms oppression? Can the use of violence ever be morally justifiable? If so, when and why? This political theory course aims to inquire into these challenging questions by studying the theoretical debates on the relationship between violence and politics with a special emphasis on questions related to the relationship between legal order, constitution of the state, and the use of violence both in support of, and in opposition to, the existing order. During the course of the term, we will focus on debates surrounding different forms of violence in embedded in our legal systems, look at examples of resistance movements, assess different arguments made in defense of nonviolent and violent methods of resistance, analyze different conceptions of civil disobedience, and grapple with the question of how representations of violence affect our judgments about its legitimacy and/or justification

PSC 241 Russian Politics

Anyone who follows the news might reasonably conclude that Russian politics—both international and domestic—are paranoid, aggressive, criminal, and underhanded. A series of questions are raised: Do all Russian politics revolve around the personal power of Vladimir Putin? Is Putin more like a criminal than a typical political leader? Does he personally call for his political opponents to be murdered? What is the significance of his KGB background? Did Russia help elect Donald Trump? How and why? While our efforts to answer these questions will not result in definitive answers, we will develop an understanding of Russia on its own terms, as a country with its own rules that stem from its culture and history and that give prominence to informal politics. We will examine these informal networks of power through topics including state power, authoritarianism, political economy, nationalism, foreign policy, organized crime, and the ordinary politics between and among elite opposition groups as well as between state and society.

PSC 244 The Politics of Extraction in the Americas

As the shrinking of the Amazon keeps making headlines, extractive activities including large-scale mining, logging, and agriculture are rapidly transforming the landscape of the Americas. This class surveys main extractive activities across the hemisphere, their output and political impact. While feeding expanding markets, extractivism has been linked to land grabs, forced displacement, conflicts, state and paramilitary violence, lobbying, corruption, and coups d’état. In exploring trends and cases, we will review concepts, theories, and alternatives to extractivism, including women and indigenous-led traditions of protecting different forms of life and Earth itself. By taking this course, students will develop informed perspectives regarding which extractive activities may be essential, and whether (and how) they can be done sustainably, as part of the quest to secure a livable future.

UPPER LEVEL COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR WINTER TERM (CONT'D)

PSC 257 International Political Economy

This course introduces students to the study of international political economy (IPE). It addresses the reciprocal, interactive relationship between politics and economics in the international system.

Increasingly integrated global markets present growing challenges and opportunities for political actors around the world. We will explore the effects of political factors on international economic relations as well as the impact of economic factors on domestic and international politics across a variety of issue areas in IPE

PSC 258 Strategies of WWII

This course will examine the interplay between military and political strategies that shaped the course of World War II, with special attention to the European Theater. It is designed to illustrate the nature of strategic thinking, its relationship to tactical thinking, and its real-world constraints. Special attention will be given to the British decision to continue fighting after the French surrender, the Battle of Britain, Hitler's decision to invade Russia, the allied decision to invade North Africa, and the planning for Normandy. Prerequisite(s): PSC 111 or PSC 112 or PSC 113 or sophomore standing

PSC 277 Capital Region Political Internships

This class enables students to become politically active and/or gain political experience by working for elected officials, government agencies, election campaigns, interest groups, non-profit organizations, lobby firms, etc. Students draw on their internship experience and related academic work to reach a better understanding of the complexities and dynamics of politics at the state or local level. Students are permitted to enroll in this course twice, although the course will count toward the Political Science major only once. Prerequisite(s): Sophomore standing and permission of the instructor.

PSC 359 Seminar: International Politics

Selected topics in international politics. Content will vary from year to year. Preference to sophomore and junior political science majors.

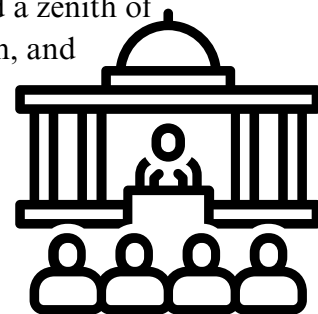
Prerequisite(s): PSC 111 or PSC 112 or PSC 113 or sophomore standing.

PSC 361R Political Psychology

The application of psychological theories to understanding the political attitudes and behavior of individuals (citizens, political leaders) as well as groups. Specific topics include stereotypes, personality, social cognition, attitude formation, social identity theory altruism, emotion, and elite decision-making. Prerequisites: PSC111 or PSC112

PSC 374 Pop Culture & Rock Music in the 1970s

The 1970s was a remarkable decade of transition and turbulence. Stagflation, the oil crisis, the fall of Saigon, de?tente, Watergate, Three Mile Island, the women's movement, left-wing terrorism, urban decay, the rising gay movement, and the looming dread of ecological disaster were just a few of the trendlines. The writer Tom Wolfe dubbed the 70's the "Me decade," by which he meant the transition away from 1960s communitarianism and New Deal-style politics and towards an individualist ethos of hedonism, self-realization, and personal freedom. Rock music, which was the dominant musical style, reflected and promoted this culture shift, emphasizing a libertine attitude and downplaying the social consciousness, egalitarianism, and anti-capitalist motifs that prevailed among the youth in the 60s. This course surveys the cultural, economic, and political landscape of the decade through the prism of rock music, which reached a zenith of aesthetic creativity, genre-expansion, and commercial success

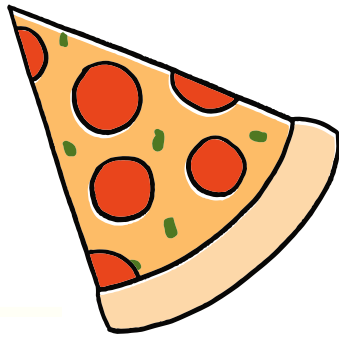


Pizza & Politics

(Food provided)

October 9 – From Panic to Pride: The Political Science Senior Thesis Journey

October 16 – Pi-Sigma-Alpha Panel: The Constitution, Contested: Rights, Institutions, Power, and the Present Moment



October 21 – Prof. Çiğdem Çıdam: “Contesting State Lawlessness: Mobilizations of Law in Practices of Solidarity with Migrants”

October 28: Sean Binder: “Security and Solidarity in the “Migration Crisis” (Tuesday at 5 pm)

SPRING 2026 TERM IN WASHINGTON DC

POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPT

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**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN
POLITICS? DO YOU HAVE
QUESTIONS ABOUT CLASSES?
ARE YOU CONSIDERING A
MAJOR OR A MINOR IN
POLITICAL SCIENCE?**

Join us for the

**POLITICAL SCIENCE
STUDENT-FACULTY
LUNCH**

MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2025

EVEREST LOUNGE (IN HALE HOUSE)

12:45 PM-1:45 PM (COMMON HOUR)



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POLITICAL SCIENCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Our PSC Instagram Account hit 475 followers!

Many thanks to our students who help us get the word out about our events! We appreciate every liked post, comment, and shared story as it helps spread the word about events and opportunities such as Pizza & Politics, meet the Political Science Department lunches, and our Spring Term in D.C.!

Our Union College Political Science Department Connection Student Faculty, Alumni, & Faculty LinkedIn page has over 300 members. Students and alumni continue to join on a regular basis so the potential connections continue to grow.

If you haven't joined yet and need help building your LinkedIn page, please visit the Becker Career Center on campus, as they can help get you started. It's never too early to start building a LinkedIn profile.

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