DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Stony Brook University
College of Arts and Sciences

Spring 2020 Newsletter

Dear alumni and friends,

Greetings from the Department of Political Science. In these troubled times, it is more important than ever to stay connected, reestablish old ties and nourish existing relationships. We are thinking of all members of the larger Stony Brook Political Science community at this time and hope you and your family are well and have not been too adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leonie Huddy

Politics is not for everyone, as we have all experienced in talking to friends, colleagues and acquaintances, but this is a good time to share knowledge and understanding of government and the political process. If anyone doubted the importance of government in our daily lives, the current health crisis has surely put that concern to rest. From government-mandated social isolation and the amassing of needed health equipment, to emergency financial aid to small businesses and households, government has played a central role in dealing with the pandemic.

Faculty in the Department of Political Science are active researchers and frequently study contemporary political events. I wanted to let you know about some of their findings in this newsletter, which hold special relevance for our current times. I hope you enjoy reading about these different research studies!

Please stay in touch and send us updates about your accomplishments,

Best wishes,
Leonie Huddy
Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science

STUDYING PAST NATURAL DISASTERS TO UNDERSTAND REACTIONS TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The US has experienced serious natural, political and health disasters over the last several decades. Faculty members in Political Science have studied public reactions to several of these events, and their research sheds light on the potential social and political fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Oleg Smirnov

Talbot Andrews

Hurricane Florence. With support from the National Science Foundation, Professor Oleg Smirnov and PhD candidate Talbot Andrews studied Americans' reactions to Hurricane Florence, a devastating hurricane that wrought considerable damage on North Carolina and neighboring states in 2017. They conducted a survey of Americans before and after the hurricane to understand how a natural disaster affects people who live very far from it — in addition to studying the reactions of those directly affected. They found that people who lived far from the disaster were emotionally affected by it if they were high in certain aspects of empathy. They also found that some people high in empathy who felt obligated to help others, shut down during the crisis and said they were less affected by the disaster. One take away from their research is that Americans who are higher in empathy will be more concerned about victims of COVID-19 and wish to help them even if they are not living in an area that is especially affected by the virus. But not everyone will feel that way. Some people high in empathy who feel they should be doing something become overwhelmed and end up feeling less concern for victims. This doesn't mean that they are hard hearted. It's just their way of coping with the crisis.
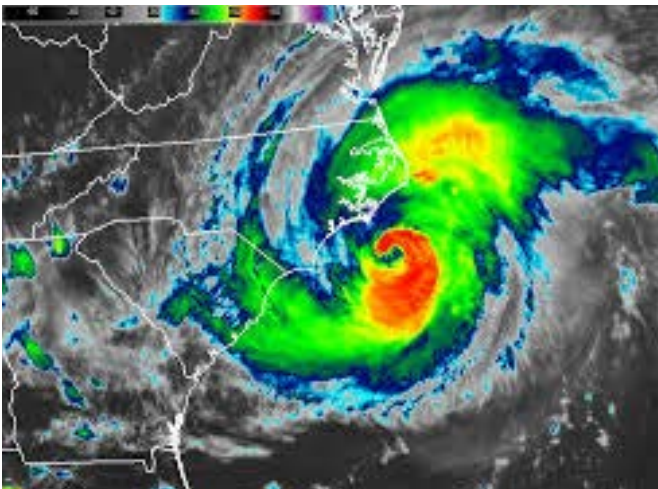
Read more on the following page.

Who Feels the Effects of Climate Change?
By Talbot Andrews and Oleg Smirnov

Feeling affected by climate change disasters consistently predicts both support for mitigation policies and engagement in individual mitigation behaviors. Focusing on the case of Hurricane Florence, we identify Americans who feel affected by such disasters. We find that those who are both worried about climate change and regularly discuss the issue were more affected by the hurricane. Furthermore, those who are high in perspective-taking abilities also feel more affected.

Climate change is extremely emotional, as made clear by popular media articles. While unpleasant, worrying about climate change increases belief in it and support for climate change mitigation policies. But people have the capacity to regulate their own negative emotions, and we know little about how emotions surrounding climate change evolve over time.

Previous work has shown that exposure to disasters increases worry about climate change – here we argue this is only one part of a feedback loop where both feeling the effects of disasters and worrying about climate change reinforce each other. We test whether worrying about climate change makes people vulnerable to feeling the effects of climate-change-related disasters even when they are not directly affected.

To test our predictions, we conducted a survey of 1,500 Americans before and after the hurricane. Consistent with our predictions, we found that being worried about climate change significantly increases the chance someone feels affected by Hurricane Florence amongst those who regularly discuss climate change. People who resided in a state hit by the hurricane were most likely to say that it affected them. But even when controlling for physical exposure, people who were concerned and discussed climate change felt more affected by the hurricane.

Above, the top panel shows the first panel shows what percent of total deaths caused by Hurricane Florence occurred in each state. The bottom panel shows what percent of the total number of people who reported being personally affected by Hurricane Florence in each state.

Public Reactions to the 9/11 Terror Attacks. Professors Stanley Feldman and Leonie Huddy examine how people who are made especially anxious by a physical threat act in self-protective ways to avoid dangerous events and locations. Following the 9/11 terror attacks, we conducted a survey of Long Island and Queens residents. In the month after the attacks, local residents who worried about their personal safety used more caution in handling their mail (in response to the anthrax scare), spent more time with their families, delayed or dropped air travel plans, and used public

Stanley Feldman

transportation in Manhattan less frequently (Huddy, Feldman, Capelos, Provost, 2002). Most people worried about becoming a terror victim, but not everyone felt that way. Following 9/11, women, Black, Latino, and less educated residents of Long Island and Queens were most anxious about being victimized by terrorism. In the same way, Americans will differ in their reaction to COVID-19. Not everyone will worry to the same extent about getting infected by the virus. Those who do will be most cautious in their personal behavior and will be less willing to return to their former work and social life until there is a vaccine or treatment. Others who don't feel a sense of anxiety will be far more willing to emerge from social isolation. These reactions are only partly linked to the actual danger of being affected by the virus and are also psychological in nature. Read more here.

Emotional Reactions to Infectious Diseases. Professor Jennifer Jerit and co-author Scott Clifford, University of Houston, studied how feeling disgusted by an infectious disease results in people learning less information about it than those who are worried but not disgusted. They ran several studies in which Americans were asked to read a story about an infectious disease. Some learned or were shown images of disgusting

Jennifer Jerit

symptoms. They found that people who received information that made them feel disgusted by the disease better remembered the symptoms that were disgusting, but had worse memory for other aspects of the disease. Feeling disgusted also reduced their interest in learning more about the disease. Disgust is a potential reaction to COVID-19 whether in response to the thought of someone shedding the virus or the images of dysfunctional infected lungs. To the extent that someone is disgusted by COVID-19, Jerit's work suggests they will avoid learning more about the disease. This could have deleterious consequences if, for example, they fail to learn about the most effective ways to protect themselves from infection. Read more here.

Each research study holds important lessons for understanding Americans' reactions to the COVID-19 health crisis.

THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

We would be remiss to ignore the upcoming 2020 election. Many faculty members have a deep interest in current American politics and the newsletter contains information about some of their research.

Professor Helmut Norpoth was one of the first political scientists to predict a Trump victory in 2016 and has just released his prediction for 2020.

It is a statistical model that relies on presidential primaries and an election cycle as predictors of the vote in the general election. This year, the model has been calibrated to predict the Electoral College vote and do so without first making a prediction of the popular vote.

The 2020 Forecast of the Primary Model
Helmut Norpoth

Helmut Norpoth

With schools closed, sporting events canceled, the stock market crashing every other day, and presidential primaries postponed, it seems premature, if not downright ludicrous, to offer this forecast of the November election: President Trump has a 91% chance of winning a possible match-up with Democrat Joe Biden, based on primary performance in New Hampshire and South Carolina, plus the first-term electoral benefit. Trump would get 362 electoral votes, Biden 176. In a possible match-up with Bernie Sanders, Trump's chance of winning would rise to 95%. In that scenario, Trump would get 390 electoral votes, Sanders 148.

These predictions come from primarymodel.com. It is a statistical model that relies on presidential primaries and an election cycle as predictors of the vote in the general election. Note that this year the model has been calibrated to predict the Electoral College vote and do so without first making a prediction of the popular vote.

Winning the early primaries is a major key for electoral victory in November. On the Democratic side, Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders split the primaries in New Hampshire and South Carolina, while Trump handily won the Republican Primary in New Hampshire (the GOP primary in South Carolina was cancelled this year).

What also favors Trump in 2020 is the cycle of presidential elections operating for nearly 200 years, as illustrated by the snapshot since 1960. After one term in the White House the incumbent party is favored to win re-election unlike the situation when it has held office for two or more terms.

Presidential elections going back as far as 1912 are used to estimate the weight of primary performance. It was in 1912 that presidential primaries were introduced. That year the candidate who won his party's primary vote, Woodrow Wilson, went on to defeat the candidate who lost his party's primary vote, William Howard Taft. As a rule, the candidate with the stronger primary performance wins against the candidate with the weaker primary performance.

Read more on the following page.

For elections prior to 1952, all primaries were included. Beginning in 1952, only the New Hampshire Primary has been used, as a rule. South Carolina has been added for elections since 2008. Both Obama then and Hillary Clinton in 2016 enjoyed strong support in a large and most loyal Democratic constituency, African-Americans, who are few in numbers in New Hampshire. So did Joe Biden this year, who relied on South Carolina as his "firewall."

Candidate with Better Primary Vote Wins General Election							
	Primary Vote in Republican Party			Primary Vote in Democratic Party			Election Winner
Year	Candidate	(%)	Rival (%)	Candidate	(%)	Rival (%)	
1912	Taft	33.9	51.5	Wilson	44.6	41.6	Wilson
....							
1964	Goldwater	22.3	35.5	Johnson	95.3	1.6	Johnson
....							
1980	Reagan	49.6	22.7	Carter	47.1	37.3	Reagan
....							
2012	Romney	39.3	22.9	Obama	82.0	1	Obama

How the White House Party Has Fared (Since 1960)

After One Term	After Two Terms or More
• 1964 W	• 1960 L
• 1972 W	• 1968 L
• 1980 L	• 1976 L
• 1984 W	• 1988 W
• 1996 W	• 1992 L
• 2004 W	• 2000 L
• 2012 W	• 2008 L
• 2020 ?	• 2016 L

For the record, the PRIMARY MODEL, with slight modifications, has correctly predicted the winner of all but one of the presidential elections since it was introduced in 1996; it predicted Al Gore in 2000, who lost the electoral vote though winning the popular vote. For elections from 1912 to 2016, the PRIMARY MODEL picks the winner, albeit retroactively, every time except in 1960, aside from 2000.

To read an abstract containing more information about election forecasting models, please click here.

Understanding Non-Voters. Earlier this year, Professor Yanna Krupnikov served as an academic advisor to the Knight Foundation, which conducted a large survey of 12,000 non-voters, examining their political attitudes and behavior. The findings were released in February 2020. There are roughly 100 million Americans who do not vote regularly. The study surveyed 12,000 Americans who chronically do not vote – those who are not registered to vote or voted only once in the last six national elections.

Yanna Krupnikov

It also included additional samples in key battleground states. The study provides important insight into who is a chronic non-voter and why they don't vote. The study dispels several popular myths about non-voters. It is often thought that non-voters are Democrats but the study found that non-voters were a more even mix of Democrats and Republicans. Less surprisingly, non-voters are less engaged with news and information and more likely to say they don't feel informed enough to decide who to vote for. They have less faith in the electoral system than voters. And Americans aged 18 to 24 are less interested in politics and less informed than other age groups.

To learn more, you can read the study here, or check out *Politico's article* on the survey.

STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Renee DiResta '04

Franck D. Joseph II '12

40 Under Forty Class of 2020. Seven Political Science alumni were honored in January at Stony Brook's *40 Under Forty* awards. Congratulations to Maureen Ahmed '11, Stephanie Baez '08, Renee DiResta '04 (pictured), Franck D. Joseph II '12 (pictured), Ricardo Martinez '04, Michelle Mbekeani '11, and Trisha Sakjhuja-Walia '11 for their accomplishments in the areas of civil service and activism, the law, marketing, and writers and the media.

Read more here.

Brandon Marshall

3MT Competiton. PhD student Brandon Marshall was a finalist for Stony Brook's Three Minute Thesis Virtual Competition 2020.

Brandon's thesis focuses on party polarization in the US. He argues that this situation — hostility between Democrats and Republicans — has worsened as national elections have become more competitive and partisans become increasingly divided along the lines of religion, urban-rural, and race and ethnicity.

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