# DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

## *Fall 2021 Newsletter*

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Greetings from the Department of Political Science! I hope you and your family have continued to stay safe and well. We are very happy to announce that we have resumed teaching in-person this semester!! All students are required to be vaccinated and the semester is proceeding well without any major problems. It has been a relief to get back into the classroom.

A lot has happened since the spring. We held an in-person graduation in May, including a surprise appearance from an alum who graduated in 1971. Despite tough times, our PhD students have found employment as professors and researchers. We received good news about our standing as one of the Top 100 Political Science departments in the world. And our faculty continue to conduct interesting research on pressing current issues.

I hope you enjoy reading about these developments, including the work of our highly productive faculty. Please follow us on Twitter @SBUPoliSci to keep up with department developments as they happen.

Stay in touch and send us updates about your accomplishments -- we love hearing from you!

Best wishes,

Leonie Huddy, PhD
Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science

## PhD News!

We are very proud of our recent PhD graduates and their accomplishments.

**Talbot Andrews '20** moved from a position as postdoctoral fellow at Princeton University to become an Assistant Professor in the department of Political Science at the University of Connecticut.

**Brandon Marshall '20** took up a position as a data analyst in the Institutional Effectiveness department at Lebanon Valley College.

**Alessandro del Ponte '19** moved from a position as a postdoctoral fellow at the National University of Singapore to take up a postdoctoral position in the Center for the Study of American Politics at Yale University in the fall of 2021. He will begin a position as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alabama in the fall of 2022.

**Yangzi Zhao '21** accepted a position as a Research Associate at Avenues: The World School in New York City.

# Is a Rational Politics of Disaster Possible?

*By Talbot M. Andrews, Andrew W. Delton, & Reuben Kline*

This year, PhD alum Talbot Andrews '20, Professors Andrew Delton and Reuben Kline published an article concerning the academic journal *Political Behavior*. They wrote this blog post to accompany their article.

In the middle of the Pacific Ocean lies a tiny island nation, Kiribati. Due to rising waters, the island is predicted to be entirely under water in less than a century. There are too few citizens of Kiribati to have meaningfully contributed to human-caused climate change, numbering just over 100,000. Yet they and their descendants will either need to leave their island or engage in major adaptation efforts (Ives 2016). This illustrates one of the difficulties of disaster: Often the people in a position to prevent or mitigate the disaster are not the same as those affected. Human-caused climate change is due mainly to industrialized and industrializing countries, yet it is relatively poor countries that are most vulnerable.

Another difficulty, also revealed by climate change, is that disasters often require collective action. Consider that if only one country took mitigation steps (say, a costly carbon tax), it would not be enough in isolation to make a difference, yet that country's citizens would still suffer higher prices due to the tax. Multiple countries must work together to stop climate change and associated disasters.

A third difficulty is that disaster decisions are complex. How best can we mitigate climate change? The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recommends a multi-pronged approach, including a basket of different technologies (e.g., a mix of investment in incremental solutions like wind-power and more investment in nuclear power; IPCC 2014). Still, the exact details of the best approach are debated.

Given these kinds of difficulties, is a rational politics of disaster possible? This question motivated our recent research, recently accepted for publication in the journal Political Behavior. We used a series of economic games to test whether a group of people can solve complex disasters for others, even at a personal cost.

It is not obvious whether they can. Classic theories in political science assume people are self-interested. Given this assumption, there's little reason to think that people will be motivated to learn about how best to help others or will bother to take costly steps to do so. Other classic work worries that people are too blinded by partisanship or too blinkered by faulty heuristics to solve complex problems effectively.

In contrast, a different strand of research, coming from work on altruism and generosity in politics, suggests that citizens can be motivated to choose policies that benefit others. This could occur even when there are personal costs involved, such as the cost of somewhat higher taxes or the cost of spending time learning which policies are best.

We used economic games to simulate how people might prevent disaster for others. In economic games, players are given clear rules that determine how they and others will earn real money, as a consequence of the choices everyone make. Economic games have many benefits for political science: One benefit is that we can create fully transparent institutions and see how manipulating the features of the institutions affects behavior. Another is that because there are clear rules and real stakes, we can compare players' behavior to predictions from game theory. (Game theory is a mathematical branch of economics that studies how people should behave in games of strategy.)

Figure 1: The consequences of meeting or failing to meet the threshold for others.
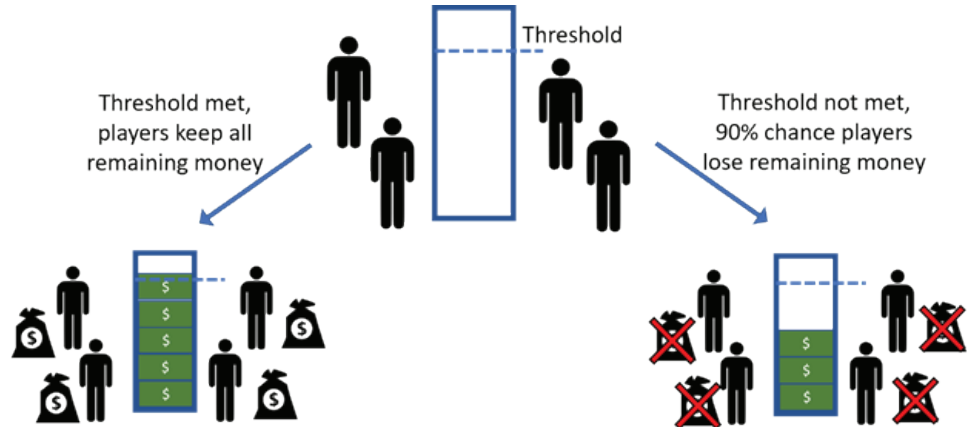
In our games, players worked in groups of four. Each player started with a pot of real money. The exact amount varied, ranging from $1 to $20 in different experiments. Critically, when the experiment started, there was a very high chance all this money would be wiped out by a simulated disaster.

None of the groups, however, controlled their own destiny. Instead, each group had the opportunity to help another group, a beneficiary group, by spending money on disaster prevention for that beneficiary group. If players contributed enough, they prevented the disaster for their beneficiary group. So, if you were one of our players and wanted to help another group, you could choose to do so a personal expense. Helping was not cheap: It cost a full one-fifth of your initial stake. And, to add complexity, we provided you with several ways to invest your help. Although any type of investment was reasonable, depending on your experimental condition only one was best. This means that some thinking is required to figure out how best to help. Based on your decision and those of the rest of your group, you might avert disaster for the beneficiary group.

Were players willing to pay to help others? Yes: The overwhelming majority of our players were willing to help, despite the large cost. In fact, the number willing to help others was nearly identical to the number willing to pay on their own behalf that we found in earlier work using the same game (Andrews et al. 2018).

More importantly, did they make good investments for averting disaster? Again, the answer is yes: Players were generally able to evaluate which investment would be best—they were sensitive to which choice best suited each experimental condition. In some of our experiments, we also allowed players to buy advice from us on how to help. The overwhelming majority of players did buy advice, and this improved their choices.

Altogether our experiments show that players were not simply generous for the sake of generosity. Instead, our players were motivated to be usefully helpful for preventing disaster for others. More work remains to be done because our games involved small groups facing a well-defined problem, which is not always true of real-world disasters. Nonetheless, our results provide evidence that, under at least some conditions, a rational politics of disaster is possible.

*References*

*Andrews, T. M., Delton, A. W., & Kline, R. (2018). High-risk high-reward investments to mitigate climate change. Nature Climate Change, 8, 890–894. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0266-y*

*IPCC. (2014). Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contributions of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (R. Pachouri & L. Meyer, Eds.). Geneva, Switzerland.*

*Ives, Mike. 2016. "A Remote Pacific Nation, Threatened by Rising Seas." The New York Times.*

# In the News

## We're in the Top 100 of Academic Ranking of World Universities

The Department of Political Science was one of five Stony Brook University departments listed as among the top 100 departments in the world in their field. You can read more about that [here](here).

## Pilot Program Fosters Collaborative Research

Faculty and graduate students in Political Science were chosen to pilot a new program funded by the Bernard and Audre Rapoport Foundation. The program is designed to help early-career graduate students develop their research skills. You can read more about the program [here](here).



*PhD student Adam Panish*

## Profs, PhD Student Pen Blog on Support of "Millionaire Tax"



Professors **Hannah Nam** and **Yanna Krupnikov**, and PhD student **Samuel Jens** wrote a blog entry for the Midwest Political Science Association in the spring of 2021 about their research on why people support a "millionaire tax." You can read the entry [here](here).

# Scholarships and Awards



We extend our congratulations to PhD students **Michael Yontz** and **Hillary Style** who were awarded 2021 Milton Lodge Endowed Scholarships in recognition of their outstanding research potential.

Michael Yontz was also awarded the Frank Myers Graduate Student Teaching Award.
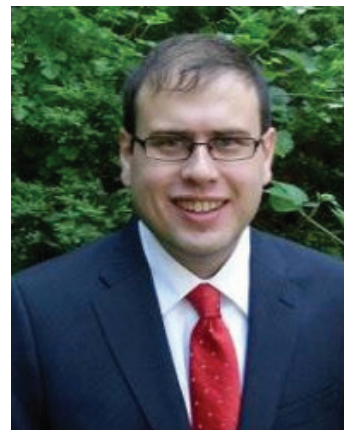


Professor **John Ryan** was awarded the 2021 Frank Myers Faculty Teaching Award in recognition of his performance as an outstanding instructor.

# Politics Shapes Voters' Moral Values

*By Joseph A. Vitriol*

Moral beliefs matter for the political preferences and choices of ordinary citizens. What Americans think about right and wrong predicts their attitudes on public policy, how they react to current events, and who they choose as their leader. Not surprisingly, differences in moral beliefs can lead to political disagreement, fueling misunderstanding and conflict. Because beliefs about right and wrong motivate voters on election day, political leaders commonly appeal to the distinct moral concerns of their constituencies.

But are the moral beliefs of ordinary citizens stable and unchanging, causing political preferences, identities, and behavior? Afterall, beliefs about what is right and wrong, about what makes for a good society, should be fundamental, preexisting guideposts to the political choices of the average American. In a new study forthcoming at Political Psychology, Senior Researcher Joseph A. Vitriol and his colleague demonstrate that this assumption may itself be misguided, and that political loyalties can change what citizens claim to think about right and wrong.

How did the researchers arrive at this conclusion? During the summer and fall months of 2016, before the U.S. Presidential Election, they conducted a multi-wave survey assessing Americans' political identities, beliefs, and preferences. The survey also measured Americans' own moral beliefs and what they perceived as the moral beliefs of the two major party candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. What they found is that voters with strong partisan attachments (i.e., as a Republican or Democrat) changed, over the course of the campaign, what they described as their moral beliefs. This change in moral beliefs, however, was not haphazard nor random— many Americans revised their moral beliefs to align more closely with what they believe are the moral beliefs of the candidates for whom they cast their vote.

What these results suggest is that even so-called fundamental beliefs about right or wrong can change over time, depending, critically, on political context and who voters support as their leaders. Although some voters may support candidates who match their preexisting moral beliefs, the authors nonetheless concluded that political leadership is also moral leadership. In the same way that voters' political attitudes often follow the direction espoused by political leaders, citizens readily revised even closely held and cherished moral beliefs to align with the candidates in whom they invest their trust and confidence.

# May 2021 Commencement



*Provost Goldbart, Larry Emert '71, and President McInnis*

## Larry Emert '71 Joins Us after 50 Years!

One of our May 2021 Commencement ceremonies (there were 10 in person events for the College of Arts and Sciences) brought a special guest! We were pleased to welcome one of our alumni, Mr. Larry Emert '71, BA Political Science who joined us on the 50th anniversary of his graduation and for the first time ever, wore a cap and gown. Receiving his degree in January 1971, Mr. Emert was unable to attend the May 1971 Commencement ceremony, as he was serving our country to fulfill his military commitment. We were honored to have Mr. Emert join us to finally celebrate this important milestone -- in Stony Brook regalia!

Hear an interview with Larry [here](#).

## Department Convocation

We also hosted a virtual Department convocation to specifically recognize the hard work and achievements of our undergraduates and graduates of the Class of 2021. The program below highlights the award recipients and honorees, including the presentation of the Distinguished Alumni Award to **Jennifer Nassour '93.** Congratulations to our alumni and lifelong Seawolves!



## Stony Brook University

### Department of Political Science

**Convocation and Awards Ceremony**
Thursday, May 20, 2021 - 1:00 PM

*Welcoming Remarks*
Dr. Leonie Huddy, Professor and Chair

*Presentation of Departmental Awards*

*Presentation of the Distinguished Alumni Award*
Dr. Leonie Huddy, Professor and Chair

Recipient:    Jennifer Nassour, Class of 1993

*Presentation of the Frank Myers Undergraduate Teaching Award*
Dr. Leonie Huddy, Professor and Chair

Recipient:    Dr. John Ryan, Associate Professor

*Presentation of the Dr. Martin B. Travis Award*
Ambassador Harsh Bhasin, Visiting Professor

Recipient:    Brandon Dixon, Magna Cum Laude, Pi Sigma Alpha

*Recognition of Honors Society Inductees and Honor Theses in Political Science*
Dr. John Ryan, Director of Undergraduate Studies

*Farewell Address*
Taylor Esposito, Summa Cum Laude, Pi Sigma Alpha

*Awarding of Graduate Degrees*
Dr. Yanna Krupnikov, Director of Graduate Studies

*Awarding of Undergraduate Degrees*
Dr. John Ryan, Director of Undergraduate Studies

*Closing Remarks*
Dr. Leonie Huddy, Professor and Chair

## Senior Honor Theses in Political Science

**Paul Dreyer**
Topic: "The Silent Health Policy Crisis: Correcting State Deinstitutionalization Policy"
Advisor: Mr. Jason Rose

**Imad Rafi**
Topic: "Qui Tam Lawsuits in the Healthcare Industry: The Case For Narrowing the Scope of the False Claims Act"
Advisor: Mr. Robert Alessi, Esq.

**Taylor Esposito**
Topic: "De facto segregation in New York City schools"
Advisor: Dr. Peter Salins

**Khadija Saad**
Topic: "The Political Potency of Muslim Americans"
Advisor: Dr. John Ryan

**Jonathan Garcia**
Topic: "German Soldier Morale in World War I"
Advisor: Dr. Helmut Norpoth

## 2020-2021 Department Scholarship Recipients

*Scholarships were awarded in Fall 2020 for the 2020-2021 year.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Alumni Pre-Law Scholarship** | Recipient: Haya Farid |
| **Davidson Family Scholarship** | Recipient: Yvette Williams |
| **Patricia A. Gramer Memorial Scholarship** | Recipient: Paul J. Dreyer |
| **Robert Clasen Scholarship** | Recipient: Mariam Malik |
| **Scott D. Middleton Scholarship** | Recipient: Ryan Magill |

## Honors Society Inductees and Members

**Phi Beta Kappa Honors Society, Alpha Beta Chapter Graduating Members**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ashley Molano | Gurpreet Singh | Allison Strauss | Claudia Simmons |
| Agnes Poplawski | | | |

**Pi Sigma Alpha Honor Society, Eta Theta Chapter Graduating Members**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Oreoluwa Adewale | Taylor Esposito | Mohsinali Mohamedali | Khadija Saad |
| Mahima Alam | Emily Fisch | Jaclyn Murano | Gabrielle Silverstrim |
| Celia Allen Smith | Lena Gluck | Jennifer Parlow | Huntley Spencer |
| Shyanne Blake | Declan Graham | Ayushi Raj | Allison Strauss |
| Christopher Brunner | Jaclyn Gurevich | Austin Richardson | Ian Surace |
| Michelle Cina | Thomas Keenan | Kevin Rogers | Justin Ullman |
| Brandon Dixon | Nicholas Lamari | | |

**Summa Cum Laude – 3.85 GPA or higher**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Deanna Bassaragh | Paul Dreyer | Declan Graham | Lucas McCauley |
| Donovan Bush | Nicolette Endres | Djamilie Jules | Nicole Messina |
| Michelle Cina | Taylor Esposito | Jennifer Kim | Gurpreet Singh |

**Magna Cum Laude – 3.70-3.84 GPA**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sam Ayala | Jaclyn Gurevich | Raymond Janis | Khadija Saad |
| Brandon Dixon | Lily Hayes | Kevin Rogers | Katie Xie |
| Jonathan Garcia | | | |

**Cum Laude – 3.50-3.69 GPA**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nicholas DeRosa | Jaclyn Murano | Michael Ruggiero | Allison Strauss |
| Madeleine Doerr | Austin Richardson | Patrick Scharf | Ian Surace |
| Abigail Farias | Garrett Richter | Caitlyn Shu | Justin Ullman |
| Thomas Keenan | Lily Robinson | Gabrielle Silverstrim | Andy Xu |
| Shaheer Khan | | | |

# Thank you for your support!

We are very proud of our distinguished faculty and the successes of our undergraduate, Master's, and PhD students. I do not need to tell you, however, that we face tough times ahead. The coming year will be a challenge on many fronts. The Department of Political Science depends on our alumni and friends to offer scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students, recruit excellent students, as well as maintain faculty and graduate student attendance at national and international research conferences. We are especially concerned about providing financial support to undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom will face new obstacles as they pursue their education in the coming years. Please consider investing in our students and faculty by making a gift today or speaking with Christopher Scarpati, Director of Development, at (631) 632-1202 or Christopher.Scarpati@stonybrook.edu.

We hope you enjoyed reading our latest news. Please stay in touch!

Best wishes,

**Leonie**

**Stony Brook University**
College *of* Arts and Sciences

**Follow the Department of Political Science on social media!**
Stay up to date with our semester events and research activity.