

Political ideas in global workplaces: Role of I-O in politically-charged environments

SIOP Select Session
In association with the
Alliance for Organizational Psychology

Meet Your Panel



KRISTEN SWIGART
Penn State University



KIRA FOLEY
George Washington University



Dr. M. GLORIA GONZALES-MORALES
Claremont Graduate University



Dr. DANA BORN
Harvard Kennedy School

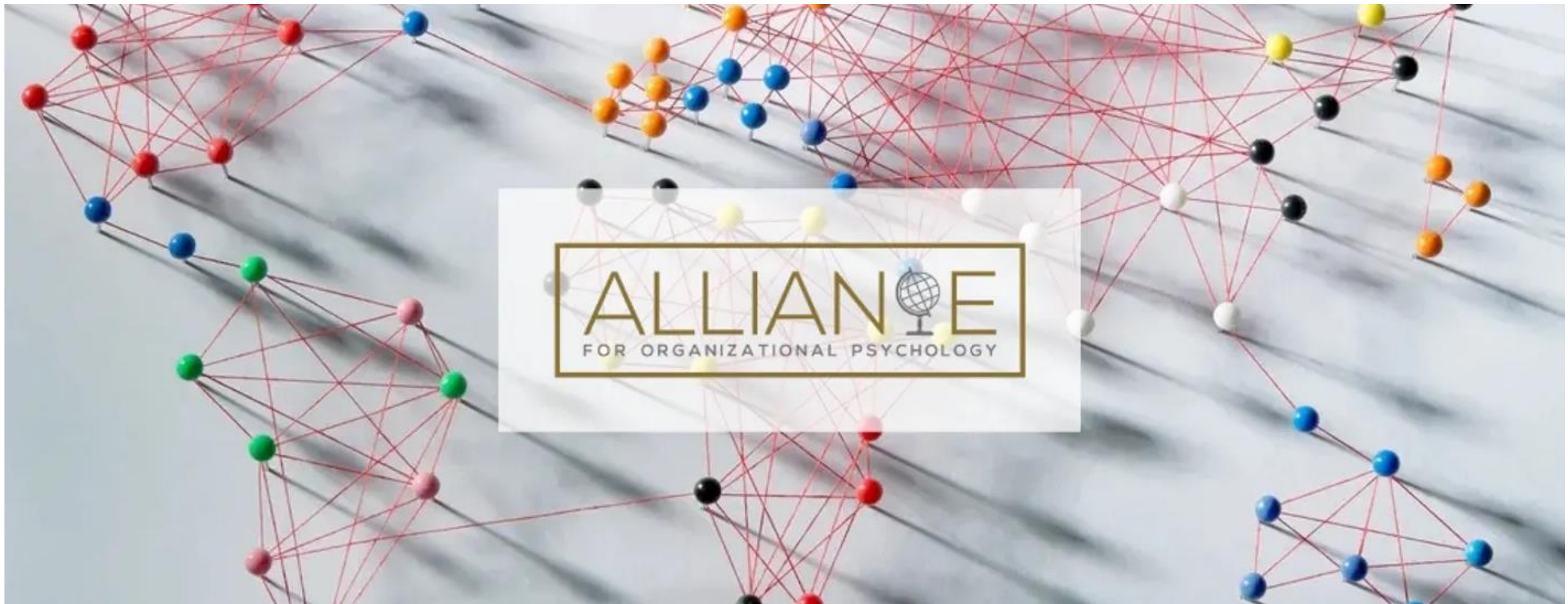


Dr. P MATTHIJS BAL
University of Lincoln, UK



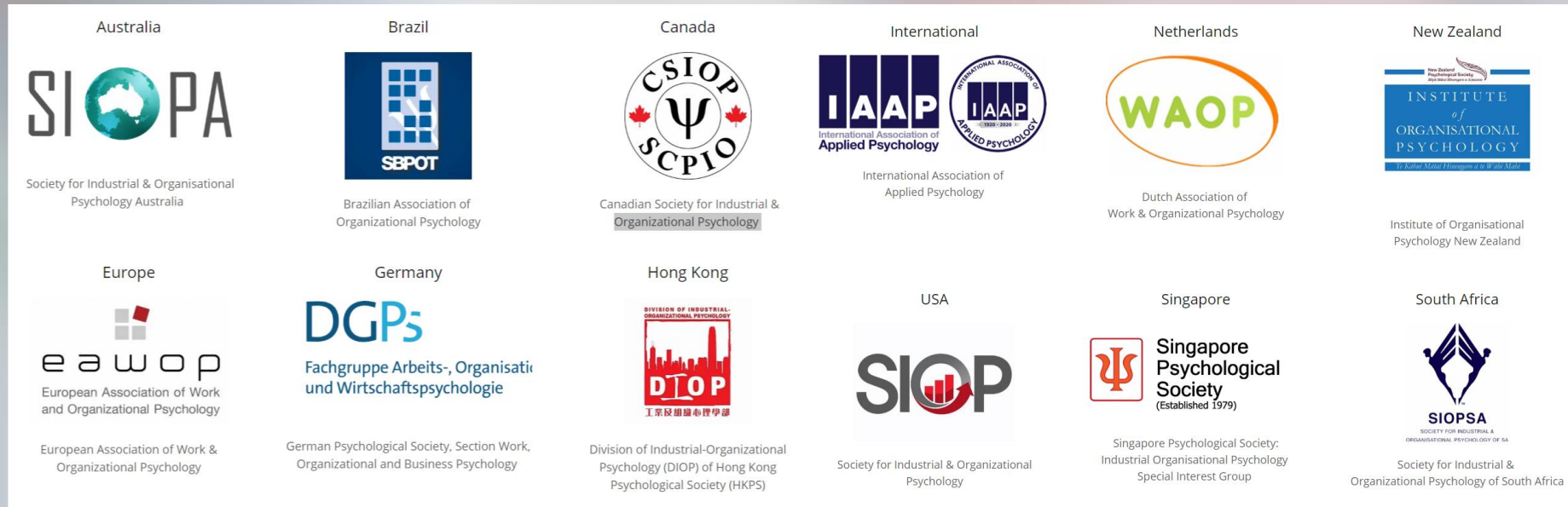
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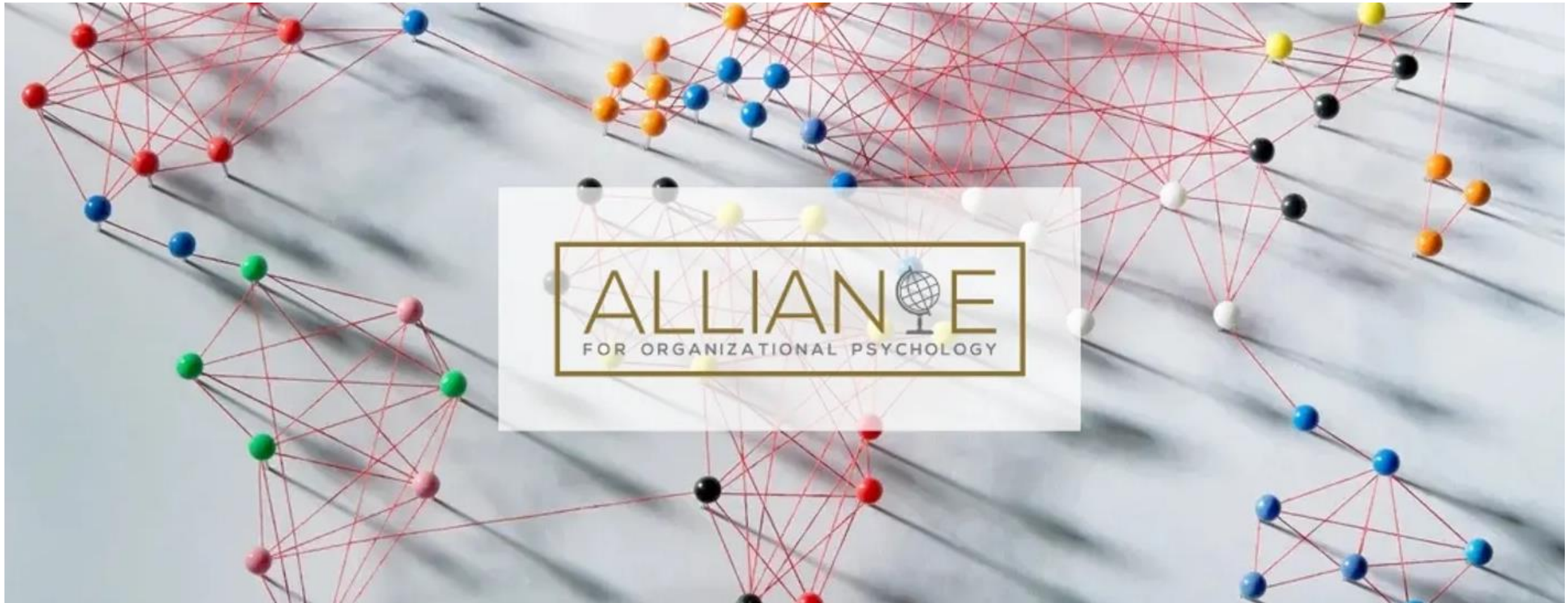
A Federation of Work, Industrial, and Organizational Psychology societies from around the world



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- Advance the science and practice of organizational, industrial, and work psychology internationally
- Develop more effective communication and collaboration among the federated societies
- Enhance the contributions of organizational psychology to global society through improvements to the quality of work life and the effectiveness of individuals and organizations

We hope you enjoy this Special Alliance Session!



Agenda

- Introduction of the topic
- Panelist introductions and opening statements
- Panel Q&A
 - What we know from the literature
 - What we see in practice
 - Nuances (or not) within each – e.g., sector, culture, topic
 - SIOP's role
- Closing thoughts

Anecdotal or Trend?

- A US marketing company told employees that it's firm will no longer do business with anyone who is a registered Republican or Trump supporter
- Numerous British employees who weren't supportive of Brexit were threatened with their losing their jobs, according to the Alliance of British Entrepreneurs
- PepsiCo's then CEO Indra Nooyi was asked about her reaction to the 2016 election just days after was quoted "I had to answer a lot of questions, from my daughters, from my employees – they were all in mourning. Our employees are all crying and the question they are asking is 'are we safe'? I never thought I'd have had to answer those questions." Such comments got her, and the company, negative media attention and highlights the risks for corporate leaders who take political sides
- Ogilvy, an advertising agency recently made headlines for being hired to do PR work for the US Customs and Border Protection, which has been harshly criticized for failing to ameliorate, if not exacerbating, the humanitarian crisis that is playing out on the US-Mexico border
- A US employee was fired after a picture went viral on social media of her giving the "middle finger" as the presidential motorcade passed by
- COVID-19 crisis has created Asian-American bigotry, conspiracy theories, and divisiveness over when to open

Politics in the Workplace

A recent (2019) SHRM survey of a sample of working US employees found that:

- Over half say politics and the discussion of political issues have become more common in the last 4 years
- Almost half have personally experienced political disagreements in the workplace
- 1 in 10 say they have personally experienced either differential treatment because of their political views or political affiliation bias
- Over a third say that their workplace is not inclusive of differing political perspectives
 - Almost a third who said their workplace is not totally inclusive say their organization is not working to become more inclusive
- Only 24% said their organizations have a written policy and 8% have an unwritten policy about political activities in the workplace

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KRISTEN SWIGART

- Doctoral Candidate at Penn State University
- First author of ***Working While Liberal/Conservative: A Review of Political Ideology in Organizations***, published in the Journal of Management (February, 2020).
 - Reviews all relevant research from political science, management & I/O psychology to answer the question ‘How does political ideology impact work’?
- **Opportunities & Challenges for I-O**
 - We can leverage our understanding of *psychological processes* to provide evidence-based recommendations to organizations dealing with political ideologically-based conflict.
 - However, we must be cognizant of how our own political ideologies – as researchers, practitioners, and decision makers – influence the choices that **we** make.
 - Includes: the questions that we ask, the interpretations that we draw, and the people that we hire, mentor, etc.

Kristen's Opening Statement

Politics – “the activities associated with the governance of a country, especially the debate or conflict among individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power.”

- Think: **Issues** that impact society on which people's perspectives differ
 - *Examples:* Gun Control, Abortion, COVID-19 Response, Gay Marriage, etc.

Political Ideology – “a schema of interconnected attitudes, beliefs, and values that people use to organize and process social and political information”

- Think: **Values**
 - *Examples:* liberalism = egalitarianism & social change; conservatism = meritocracy & traditionalism
- Think: **Social Identities & Group Affiliations**
 - *Examples:* Liberal *vs.* Conservative, *Political Parties* (e.g., Democrat *vs.* Republican in USA)

Kristen's Opening Statement

How does Political Ideology influence our thoughts & actions? Glasses as a Metaphor

- Often forget that you are wearing your glasses (*they are mostly invisible to us, but are always there*)
- Easy to see other's glasses on them (*stereotyping/recognition of other's bias, but not our own*)
- Our prescriptions (e.g., the 'thickness' of our lenses) differ (*strength of our identities/values may differ by individual*)

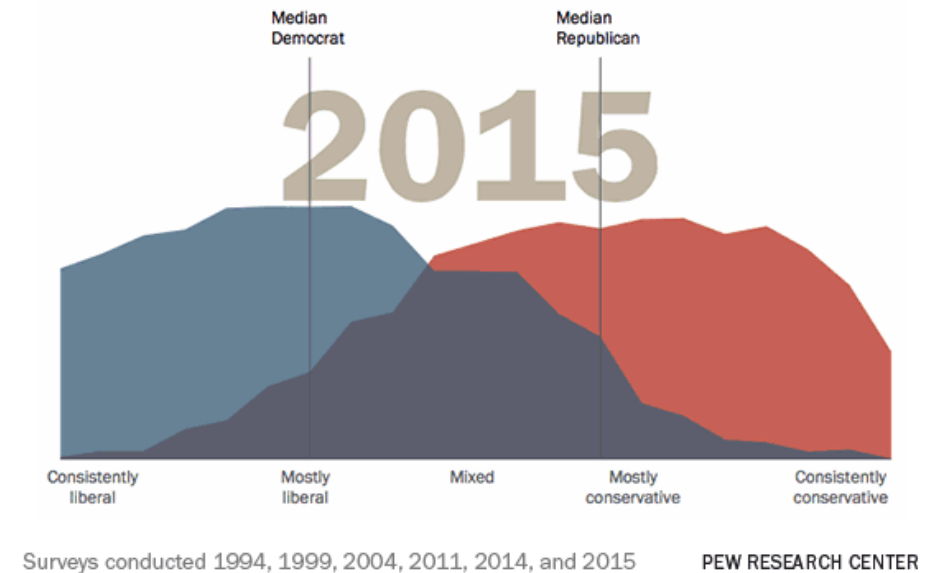
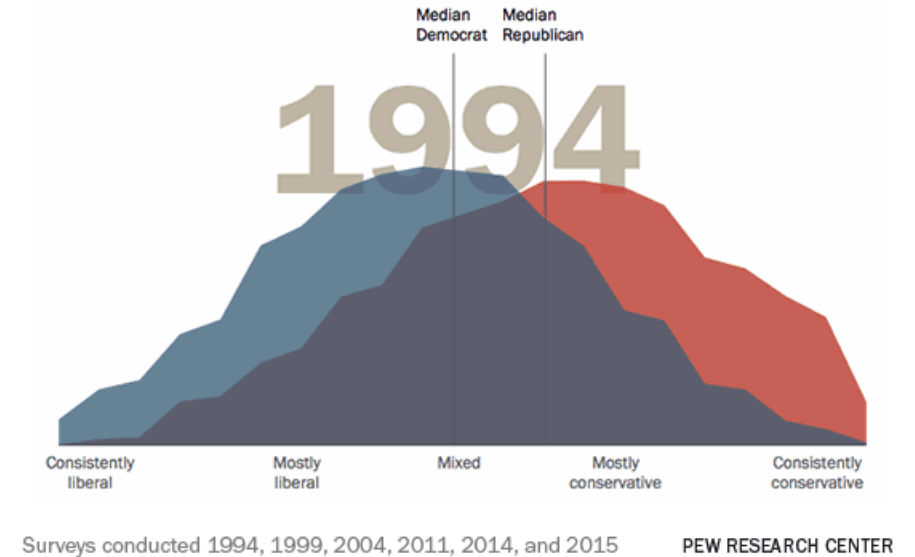


KIRA O. FOLEY

- Doctoral Candidate, The George Washington University
- Research Fellow, U.S. Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI)
- **Connection to Topic**: Interested in political ideology as an observable, social category that may invite discrimination and interpersonal conflict at work. For example, conducted master's thesis on employees' perceived similarity with their supervisor's political ideology as an issue of person-supervisor fit.
- **Opportunities & Challenges for I-O**
 - There are many opportunities for future organizational research at the micro-level (e.g., political ideology as a social identity relevant to diversity and inclusion) and macro-level (e.g., how do global politics, such as political polarization, shape business ethics?).
 - As both researchers and practitioners, IOs will be challenged by their own ideological biases, the need to be more proactive and less reactive, and ambiguity in political ideology as a social & value-based characteristic.

Kira's Opening Statement

- Politics has always been divisive
 - “*Man is by nature a political animal.*” – Aristotle
 - But we’re more polarized than ever before
- Today, politics is named a key source of stress (at least for Americans) by:
 - 52% of Americans before 2016 election
 - 57% (Dem: 55%, Rep: 59%) after Trump’s win
 - 56% before 2020 election
- Politics is no longer a taboo topic
 - Home → Work: Now we’re talking about politics at work, which leads to arguments and avoidance of coworkers with political differences.
- What does this mean for workplace diversity and inclusion?



M. GLORIA GONZALEZ-MORALES

- Associate Professor, Organizational Psychology
- Connection to the topic:
 - Research on workplace incivility and interpersonal work stressors
 - Diversity and inclusion
- Initial thoughts on challenges and/or opportunities for I-O
 - Diversity and inclusion are a political issue
 - Inclusion paradox: do we include exclusionary views?
 - Political rights vs. basic human rights (equality, discrimination)
 - Civility vs Respectful engagement (HQC, Dutton, 2003)

DANA H. BORN

Current Positions

- Co-Director, Center for Public Leadership, Kennedy School of Government
- Retired Brigadier General, United States Air Force

Connection to the Topic

- Teach and research Authentic Leadership and Public Narrative influences
- Faculty Chair for a Senior Executive Fellows program for global senior federal employees
- Interested in workplace wellness, stress, growth mindset, self-concept clarity, and purpose in life
- Provide workshops on negotiating Difficult and Courageous Conversations

Thoughts Opportunities & Challenges for I-O

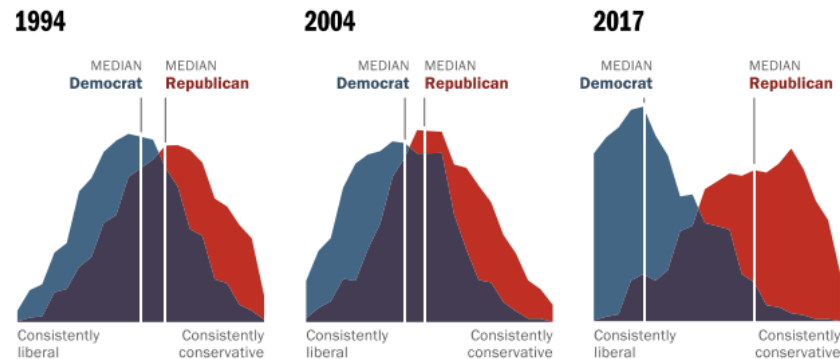
- We seem to focus on “this vs. that” (how might that impact polarization?)
- What might happen if we focused on the “and”(i.e., “this & that”)
- There is also importance in “bridging” navigating the “messy middle”
- How do we develop and measure, “curiosity” “reflective engagement” “learning stance”?

Dana's Opening Statement

- “Learning & Leadership are Indispensable to Each Other.” – JFK
- Power of “AND” and the value of the middle
- Parents are more supportive of a child marrying someone of different race/ethnicity/religion than Political Party.

Democrats and Republicans more ideologically divided than in the past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see methodology). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents; the red area of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple.

Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Would you be unhappy if your son or daughter married someone who...

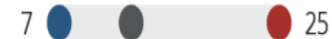
Is a supporter of the Democratic Party



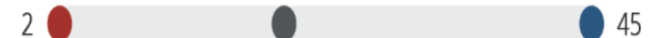
Belongs to a different religious group



Is a different race or ethnicity



Is a supporter of the Republican Party



Democrat

All Americans

Republican

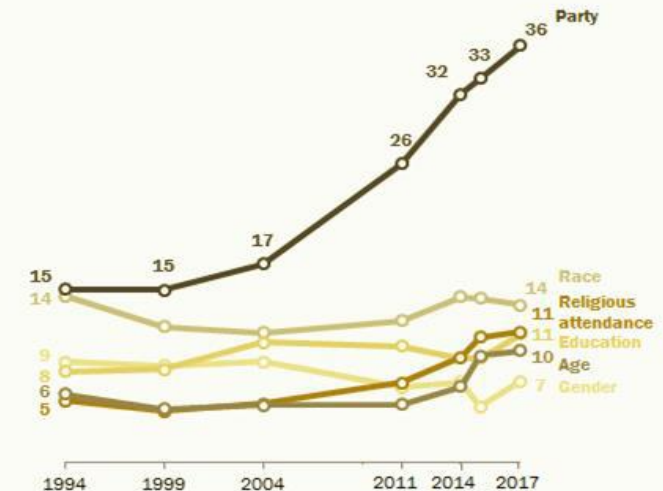
Dana's Opening Statement (con't)

- WHY to find a way to bridge differences
 - Expectations
 - Authenticity
- WHAT topics to not discuss at the dinner table
 - Sex, Religion, Politics
- HOW to navigate the “messy middle”
 - “Reflective Engagement” / “Curiosity” / “Learning Stance”
 - Perceptions (What Happened; Feelings; Identities)
 - 3rd Story; Their Story & Yours; “Win-Win” / “Compromise”
 - What works? “Political Correctness”?

As partisan divides over political values widen, other gaps remain more modest

As partisan divides over political values widen, other gaps remain more modest

Average gap in the share taking a conservative position across 10 political values, by key demographics



Notes: Indicates average gap between the share of two groups taking the conservative position across 10 values items. Party=difference between Rep/Lean Rep and Dem/Lean Dem. Race=white non-Hispanic/black non-Hispanic. Education=college grad/non-college grad. Age=18-49/50+. Religion=weekly+ religious service attenders/less often. Source: Survey conducted June 8-18 and June 27-July 9, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

P MATTHIJS BAL

- Matthijs Bal, professor of Responsible Management, LIBS, Lincoln, UK
- Interested in politics and ideology in the workplace ([Bal & Doci, 2018](#): Neoliberal ideology in work and organizational psychology)
- ‘Classic’ distinctions between conservative-progressive-liberal do not suffice anymore
- But we are also confronted with post-neoliberal society, workplace, no clear-cut neoliberalism anymore

Matthijs's Opening Statement

- Globally, we are confronted with the absurdity and its normalization in both society and the workplace (e.g., racism, misogyny etc.).
- Covid-19 shows the incompetence of absurd leaders (US, Brazil, UK, Russia...)
- So there is no 'neutral' question about 'politics in the workplace' – not a matter of Democrat/Republican – but about our core values in society and the workplace.
 - This is simply a matter of life and death
- The question for IO Psychology is: what are fundamental (human) values that can be agreed upon?
 - Eg. APA Ethics code: “respect for the integrity and dignity of individuals” ([Bal, 2017](#))

SARA P. WEINER

- Independent Consultant and Advisor with Glint and Uplevel
- Advisory Board for the University of Arizona Psychology Department
- APA Council of Representatives for SIOP, and SIOP Executive Board
- Career: IBM, Kenexa, IBM/Kenexa, and Glint
- Connection: an observer and participant in a workforce embedded in an explosive political environment. Clear camps have formed worldwide in support of or against political leaders, political policies, and the handling of Covid-19.
- Thoughts, Challenges, and Opportunities for I-Os: study the effect of this external environment on behavior at work; advise company leaders on communications and ACTIONS to support camaraderie, teamwork, engagement, and performance.

Sara's Opening Statement

I-Os contribute by:

- using employee surveys to monitor employee sentiment and levels of engagement
- ensuring issues are identified and encouraging leaders to
TAKE ACTION THAT MATTERS, COMMUNICATE, and REPEAT FREQUENTLY
(continuous listening and action taking)
 - study the effect of the politically-charged external environment on behavior at work
 - study how COVID-19 is affecting workers: e.g., telework benefits and challenges; work/life navigation; personal illness or anxiety about others' illnesses or risks of illness; anxiety about economic fallout; confidence in organization's future
 - provide guidance for company leaders on policies/communications/interventions
 - promote adherence to diversity, inclusion, and belonging practices even when it comes to political ideology that does not align with one's own

Sara's Examples

Examples from the trenches:

- An intern displayed a Trump poster in his cubicle in 2016. A leader in that company said the intern was offending people; HR said free speech was welcomed but asked if the intern wanted to make that a "personal brand."
 - Would it have been the same reaction to a Hillary Clinton poster?
 - Should HR remind everyone not to bring divisive politics into the workplace?
- CEO in one company stated his support of Trump in an all-hands meeting
 - Should any company leader state their support of one candidate or another in employee meetings? Or one political position or another (e.g., Brexit)?

Sara's Examples

Examples from the trenches:

- At height of #MeToo movement one company focused communication efforts on being a more inclusive company, with adjusted wording for different cultures
- One company CEO added a vague sentence in his quarterly webcast about worker safety and did not directly mention a recent mass casualty shooting in their state for fear of a backlash regarding different political camps on gun regulations and laws
 - Should the CEO have directly addressed the incident and then spoken about increased efforts in worker safety?
- Refusing to wear masks in public because one feels one's liberty is being infringed or feeling the virus is exaggerated or even a hoax

Sara's Examples

Statement options:

- Example from one company: “We choose not to remark on political issues that are not related to the business dealings of the company or the well-being of our employees.”
- Example from one employee to another: “I won’t talk about politics at work because it’s too distracting and makes me uncomfortable.”

Recommended reading

- Bal, P. M., & Dóci, E. (2018). Neoliberal ideology in work and organizational psychology. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(5), 536-548.
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Additional Reading & References

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