



# The CommUUnicator

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## Reflections from PSYC 497: Political Psychology

By Ben Blankenship

A few months ago, I [wrote in this space](#) about the idea of voting as something sacred. I suggested that, rather than treating it as just another item to check off a list, we might approach voting as an intentional act that reflects what we value and how we understand our connection to others. I've returned to that idea recently as I've sat with my students in my political psychology capstone course this semester. In this class, I have the pleasure of sitting with twelve seniors at JMU once per week, reading journal articles, discussing recent events, and connecting them to what they've learned over the past four years.

For the most part, my students could be characterized as highly skeptical and critical of many overtly political acts. For instance, none of my students attended the most recent No Kings protests. Quite a few thought the movement was simply too "cringe" (second-hand embarrassment at people being overly eager), while others questioned whether protests actually change anything—it was at this point that I pointed them to research showing that they do. Similarly, although most of them seem likely to vote in the forthcoming redistricting referendum, they did not seem particularly enthusiastic. I am also guessing that those who decide to stay home on April 21 will do so for similar reasons.

At this point, many of you may be thinking of someone you care about deeply but want to shake (metaphorically and physically) out of their apathy. Trust me, I was right there with you. However, in the case of my students, one of our conversations gave me a greater understanding of where they are coming from.

Recently, our weekly topic was *Religion and Politics*. Many students, expectedly, expressed concern about the rise of Christian nationalism, particularly the ways it can be tied to exclusion, dehumanization, and policies that harm vulnerable communities. At the same time, they reflected on a broader sense of disconnection that has lingered since the COVID-19 pandemic. They fully understood why many in their generation, especially young men, feel the pull toward Christian nationalism. As a result, many expressed the tension of feeling connected to their various faiths, alongside deep concerns about the imperfections and problematic tendencies of those same traditions, as many of their fellow practitioners are being pulled toward exclusionary beliefs. I am sure this sounds all too familiar to many UU's reading this. Despite these points of tension though, among those who shared (not mandatory or even encouraged, specifically), most were unwavering in their commitment to a *personal* expression of faith that combined spiritual fullness with a commitment to respecting human dignity.

I came away from that conversation feeling a new sense of optimism for my students and their peers. Therefore, echoing my comments from November, I sincerely hope they come to accept something similar is true for political acts as for the sacred acts and traditions that are already meaningful to them. They were able to recognize that such practices and beliefs can feel ineffectual, imperfect, and full of contradiction at times. Yet these students still practice them and find them meaningful, because it is the hope in their transformative potential and the awe in their mystery that gives these acts their power. I hope they come to find the same is true of political acts they may find "cringe" right now. I hope they find that the standard for engaging in protest, voting, petitioning, and otherwise causing "good trouble" is not their perfection, sensibility, or effectiveness, but their ability to produce hope, peace, and love in our world and within ourselves.



Teams of volunteers set up the room with tablecloths and fine china, and assembled 36 tiered trays filled with sweet and savory bites.

A team of volunteer "foodies" made the goodies, which received rave reviews.



### Photos from the Tea Party



Upon arrival, 72 paid participants had the opportunity to rent a hat, if they didn't wear one, and buy chances to win raffle prizes.



The packed Fellowship Hall buzzed with conversation and laughter. For a large number of guests, it was their first visit to our facility.

