

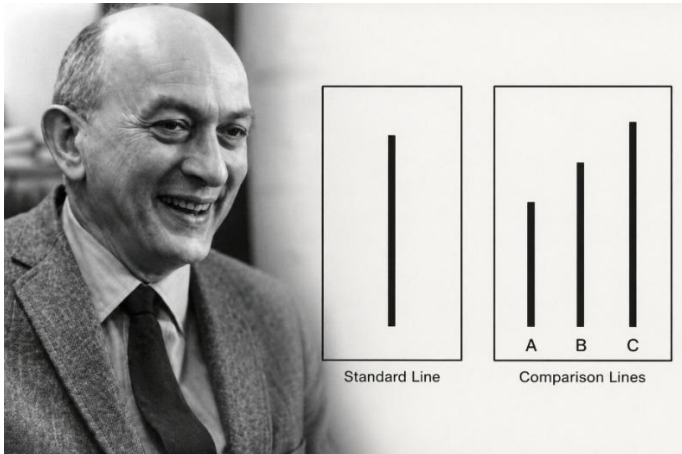
FREE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MOLDOVA



**Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Doctoral School of Free International University of Moldova**

International Scientific Colloquium

70 Years after Solomon Asch's Experiments



**Social Influence, Conformity and Civic Courage in
Pluralistic Democracies**

**19 June 2026
Chişinău, Republic of Moldova**

WELCOME

Seventy years after Solomon Asch's pioneering experiments, the study of social influence, conformity, independence, and civic courage continues to occupy a central place in contemporary social psychology. The profound social, political, and technological transformations of recent decades have generated new contexts in which these phenomena can be examined and reinterpreted.

This International Scientific Colloquium brings together scholars from the United Kingdom, Israel, Ukraine, Romania, and the Republic of Moldova to discuss contemporary theoretical and empirical perspectives on social influence and its implications for democratic societies.

We welcome all participants and wish them a productive and stimulating scientific exchange.

ABOUT THE COLLOQUIUM

The International Scientific Colloquium *70 Years after Solomon Asch's Experiments: Social Influence, Conformity and Civic Courage in Pluralistic Democracies* is dedicated to the scientific legacy of Solomon Asch and its continuing relevance for understanding individual and collective behaviour in contemporary societies.

The programme addresses a broad range of topics, including conformity and nonconformity, social identity, public opinion, democratic participation, civic courage, collective behaviour, media influence, and the emerging challenges associated with digital communication and artificial intelligence.

The colloquium also seeks to reconsider classical concepts of conformity and social influence in light of contemporary developments, including political polarization, collective identities, civic engagement, democratic resilience, misinformation, and algorithmically mediated forms of communication. Particular attention is devoted to the role of individual judgment and civic responsibility in preserving democratic values within increasingly complex social environments.

The colloquium aims to promote international academic dialogue and interdisciplinary reflection on the psychological, social, and civic dimensions of influence in democratic contexts.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

HONORARY MEMBERS

Alin GAVRELIUC

Professor of Social Psychology, West University of Timișoara, Romania

Stephen REICHER

Professor of Psychology, University of St Andrews, United Kingdom

Mihai ȘLEAHTIȚCHI

Professor, Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova

Ithamar THEODOR

Professor of Hindu Studies, Zefat Academic College, Israel

Vadym VASIUTYNSKYI

Professor, Chief Researcher, Institute for Social and Political Psychology, National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine

MEMBERS

Neli BALODE

Associate Professor, Free International University of Moldova

Silvia BRICEAG

Associate Professor, Alecu Russo State University of Bălți, Republic of Moldova

Irina CAUNENCO

Associate Professor, Free International University of Moldova

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Vice-Rector for International Cooperation, Director of the Center for International Cooperation, Free International University of Moldova

Svetlana HARAZ

Associate Professor, Responsible for Public Relations and Project Management, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova

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Vice-Rector for International Relations, Danubius University, Galați, Romania

Stela MILICENCO

Associate Professor, Moldova State University

Elena PRUS

Professor, Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and Doctoral Studies, Free International University of Moldova

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Professor of Psychology, University of Hamburg, Germany

Svetlana RUSNAC

Associate Professor, Dean, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova

Antonio SANDU

Professor, Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava; President of LUMEN Association, Romania

Mykola SLIUSAREVSKYI

Director, Institute for Social and Political Psychology, National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine

Cristina-Maria STOICA

Associate Professor, Petre Andrei University of Iași, Romania

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Associate Professor, Head of the Nicolae Sali Department of Social Work, Free International University of Moldova

Aliona GUȚUL

Associate Professor, Vice-Dean, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova

Aliona MELENTIEVA

Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova

Natalia MUSIENCO

Lecturer, Free International University of Moldova

PARTNERS



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Danubius University, Galați, Romania

Faculty of Education, Educational Psychology and Psychology, University of Hamburg, Germany

Faculty of Psychology, Educational Sciences and Social Work, Petre Andrei University of Iași, Romania

Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University of Chișinău, Republic of Moldova

Moldova State University, Republic of Moldova

O. P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, Haryana, India

South Ukrainian National Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushynsky, Ukraine

Unilevel University, Georgia

Zefat Academic College, Israel

PROGRAMME

08:30–09:00

Participant Registration

Mediateca ULIM, 4th Floor

OPENING SESSION (09:00–09:30)

Moderator:

Neli BALODE, *Associate Professor, Responsible for International Relations, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova*

Welcome Addresses

- **Valentina CIUMACENCO**, Vice-Rector for International Cooperation, Director of the Center for International Cooperation, Free International University of Moldova
- **Svetlana RUSNAC**, Associate Professor, Dean, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova

Academic Tribute to Professor Adrian Neculau (1938–2017)

One of the most influential Romanian social psychologists and a distinguished mentor of generations of researchers

Speaker: **Mihai ȘLEAHTIȚCHI**, Professor, Moldova State University

SESSION I (09:30-13:10)*

09:30–10:10

KEYNOTE LECTURE 1

Ithamar THEODOR (Israel)

Strengthening Democracy through Implementing Gandhian Ideology in the Galilee

10:10–10:50

KEYNOTE LECTURE 2

Stephen REICHER (United Kingdom)

On the Misuses of the Conformity Concept and the Consequent Danger to Democracy

10:50–11:30

KEYNOTE LECTURE 3

Alin GAVRELIUC (Romania)

Conformity: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives in Cross-Cultural Research

11:30–12:10

* All keynote lectures include 30 minutes for presentation and 10 minutes for discussion. All lectures include 25 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes for discussion.

KEYNOTE LECTURE 4

Mihai ȘLEAHTIȚCHI (Republic of Moldova)

Warnings of Solomon Asch: A Remarkable Framework for Analysing the Era of Total Disinformation

12:10–12:50

KEYNOTE LECTURE 5

Vadym VASIUTYNSKYI (Ukraine)

Conformity and Nonconformity among Believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Adaptation to Contemporary Military and Political Conditions

12:50–13:10

Discussion and General Debate

13:10–14:00

Lunch Break

SESSION II (14:00-17:00)

14:00–14:30

LECTURE 6

Natalia COJOCARU (Republic of Moldova)

Polemical Social Representations and Active Minorities: Theoretical Connections and Reflections

14:30–15:00

LECTURE 7

Lidiia CHORNA, Iryna HUBELADZE & Mykola SLIUSAREVSKYI (Ukraine)

Public Opinion on the Influence of Ukrainians on the Socioeconomic and Political Situation in the Country

15:00–15:30

LECTURE 8

Irina CAUNENCO & Lucia GAȘPER (Republic of Moldova)

Group, Identity and Future: Contemporary Research in the Context of Solomon Asch's Ideas

15:30–16:00

LECTURE 9

Svetlana RUSNAC (Republic of Moldova)

Beyond Conformity: Emotions, Civic Identity and Democratic Participation in the Republic of Moldova

16:00–16:30

LECTURE 10

Zinaida GRIBINCEA (Republic of Moldova)

Collective Obedience in Pluralist Democracies: Between Social Cohesion, Institutional Legitimacy, and Civic Autonomy

16:30–17:00

LECTURE 11

Angela CALANCEA & Leonardo CALANCEA

Seventy Years after Solomon Asch: Algorithmic Conformity, Cognitive Freedom, and Democratic Resilience in Digital Societies

CLOSING SESSION (17:00–17:30)

Presentation and Adoption of the Colloquium Resolution

Final Remarks

Closing of the International Scientific Colloquium

VENUE

Free International University of Moldova (ULIM)

Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences

52 Vlaicu Pârcălab Street

Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

Mediateca ULIM, 4th Floor

KEYNOTE LECTURE 1

09:30–10:00

Strengthening Democracy through Implementing Gandhian Ideology in the Galilee

Prof. Ithamar Theodor (Israel)

Professor of Hindu Studies, Zefat Academic College, Israel

Graduate Supervisor, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Short Bio

Ithamar Theodor is Professor of Hindu Studies at Zefat Academic College, Israel, and also teaches and supervises graduate students at Bar-Ilan University. He graduated from the Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford, and is a Life Member of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge.

His research focuses on Hindu philosophy, comparative religion, ethics, and intercultural dialogue. Among his major publications are *Exploring the Bhagavad-gītā: Philosophy, Structure and Meaning* (2010), *Brahman and Dao: Comparative Studies in Indian and Chinese Philosophy and Religion* (2014), *The Fifth Veda in Hinduism* (2016), *Dharma and Halacha* (2018), *The Bhagavad-gītā: A Critical Introduction* (2021), and *The Philosophy of the Bhagavad-gītā* (Cambridge University Press, 2025).

Abstract

This presentation explores the potential of Gandhian ideology as a framework for strengthening democracy and addressing contemporary ecological and social challenges, with particular attention to its relevance for the Galilee region.

The paper argues that Gandhi's legacy offers an alternative worldview rooted in non-violence (*ahimsa*), social responsibility, and ecological awareness, providing a meaningful response to the limitations of the contemporary consumerist-industrial paradigm.

Special attention is given to the principal sources of Gandhi's thought, including the *Bhagavad Gita*, Jain philosophy and ethics, and the Sermon on the Mount. These traditions contributed to the development of Gandhi's distinctive philosophy of action (*satyagraha*), self-rule (*svaraj*), truth (*sat*), and non-violent social transformation.

The presentation further situates Gandhian thought within the broader intellectual history of modern India and proposes the concept of "Neo-Dharma" as a universal ethical framework capable of integrating ecological responsibility, interreligious dialogue, and social justice. Drawing upon the ethical principles of classical yoga (*yama* and *niyama*), the paper demonstrates their continuing relevance for democratic participation, civic responsibility, and personal transformation in contemporary societies.

Discussion and Questions

10:00–10:10



KEYNOTE LECTURE 2

10:10–10:40

On the Misuses of the Conformity Concept and the Consequent Danger to Democracy

Prof. Stephen Reicher (United Kingdom)

Wardlaw Professor of Psychology, University of St Andrews, United Kingdom



Short Bio

Stephen Reicher is Wardlaw Professor of Psychology at the University of St Andrews, United Kingdom. He is a former Vice-President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Fellow of the British Academy, Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, Honorary Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and Fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.

His research focuses on the relationship between social identity and group processes. Over the course of his career, he has conducted influential research on crowd behaviour, intergroup relations, leadership, social influence, collective action, and obedience to authority. His work has contributed significantly to the development of the social identity approach in psychology and has shaped contemporary understandings of conformity, leadership, and democratic participation.

Professor Reicher has also served as an advisor to the Scottish and UK Governments, as well as to numerous national and international organizations on issues related to social cohesion, public behaviour, leadership, and crisis management.

Abstract

In this presentation, three main arguments are advanced.

First, despite the emphasis traditionally placed on obedience and conformity, most responses in Asch’s studies—and in other classic studies of obedience—were, in fact, non-conformist. Although Asch himself recognized this, subsequent interpretations have often misrepresented his findings and contributed to the widespread belief that people are “blindly obedient”.

Second, the presentation introduces an “engaged followership” analysis of obedience, showing that responses to authority depend upon a sense of identification and common cause with the authority source.

Third, it is argued that when politicians and governments view the public as sheep-like conformists, this contributes to disidentification and rejection of influence, thereby fostering a growing wave of anti-political populism.

In sum, the presentation argues that the concept of obedience represents a distortion of Asch’s original ideas, lacks empirical foundation, and may itself constitute a threat to democracy.

Discussion and Questions

10:40–10:50

KEYNOTE LECTURE 3

11:10–11:40

Conformity: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives in Cross-Cultural Research

Prof. Alin Gavreliuc (Romania)

Professor of Social Psychology, Department of Psychology

*Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences
West University of Timișoara, Romania*



Short Bio

Alin Gavreliuc, PhD, is Professor of Social Psychology at the West University of Timișoara, Romania. His areas of expertise include social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, social identity, collective memory, and intergroup relations.

He serves on the CNATDCU Commission for Psychology and Behavioral Sciences and chairs the ARACIS Commission for Administrative Sciences, Educational Sciences and Psychology. He is the author or co-author of nine books and more than sixty scientific publications and is a member of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP).

Abstract

Seventy years after Solomon Asch's landmark experiments, conformity remains one of the central concepts of social psychology and one of the most frequently re-examined phenomena in contemporary research.

The presentation offers a critical review of major theoretical and empirical developments in the study of conformity, beginning with classic research on majority influence and independence of judgment (Asch) and extending to studies of conformity, nonconformity, and social deviance (Schachter). Particular attention will be given to the explanatory models of conformist behaviour, their implications for group functioning, and the limitations of traditional approaches.

The presentation also explores contemporary cross-cultural perspectives on conformity, including recent findings from a large-scale study conducted across 28 national cultures by Smith and colleagues (2025), which includes data from Romania. The findings suggest that patterns of emotional conformity vary significantly across cultures and cannot be explained solely through the traditional individualism–collectivism framework.

The presentation highlights the continuing relevance of conformity research for understanding the dynamic relationships between individuals, groups, and culture.

Discussion and Questions

11:40–11:50

KEYNOTE LECTURE 4

11:50–12:20

Warnings of Solomon Asch: A Remarkable Framework for Analysing the Era of Total Disinformation

Prof. Mihai Şleahiţchi (Republic of Moldova)

Professor, Department of Psychology, Moldova State University



Short Bio

Mihai Şleahiţchi is Professor at the Department of Psychology, Moldova State University, Doctor Habilitatus in Social Psychology, Doctor of Psychology, and Doctor of Educational Sciences. He completed academic training and research fellowships in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Egypt, Romania, Ukraine, and Russia.

Professor Şleahiţchi is one of the leading specialists in social psychology and social representations in the Republic of Moldova. He is the author, co-author, or editor of 18 academic books and more than 250 scientific publications. His most recent works include *The Mechanics of Disinformation: Why and How We Are Misled* (2026), *Imaginabilis: An Introduction to the Theory of Social Representations* (2020), and *Manipulation in Post-Totalitarianism* (2008).

His research interests include social psychology, political psychology, organizational psychology, educational psychology, social representations, and research methodology in the social sciences.

Abstract

The presentation examines a series of warnings formulated by Solomon Asch following his classic studies of conformity. These warnings concern not only the tendency of individuals to conform but also the alarming ease with which social pressure can distort truth, logic, and individual autonomy.

The paper argues that Asch's findings provide a particularly valuable framework for understanding the contemporary era of disinformation. Rather than focusing solely on the content of misinformation, Asch's perspective directs attention to the psychology of those who are influenced by it. Disinformation succeeds not because it is necessarily credible, but because it exploits the fundamental human need for social acceptance and belonging.

The presentation discusses key arguments demonstrating the continuing relevance of Asch's ideas for understanding contemporary mechanisms of influence, manipulation, and collective belief formation, and concludes with several recommendations for strengthening critical thinking and individual autonomy in democratic societies.

Discussion and Questions

12:20–12:30

KEYNOTE LECTURE 5

12:30–13:00

Conformity and Nonconformity among Believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Adaptation to Contemporary Military and Political Conditions

Prof. Vadym Vasiutynskyi (Ukraine)

Chief Researcher, Institute for Social and Political Psychology, National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine

Short Bio

Vadym Vasiutynskyi is Doctor of Psychological Sciences, Professor, and Chief Researcher at the Institute for Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine (Kyiv).

His research focuses on social and political psychology, mass political consciousness, community psychology, psychology of power, psychology of poverty, and gender psychology. He is the author of more than 470 scholarly publications and has participated in over 280 national and international scientific conferences and congresses.

Abstract

The presentation examines conformity and nonconformity among believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (formerly affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate) in the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 150 believers from three regions of Ukraine, the study identifies three major patterns of attitudes toward the current status and future of the Church.

The first pattern reflects private acceptance of pro-Ukrainian positions, including support for linguistic and canonical Ukrainization, expectations of a complete break with the Russian Orthodox Church, and openness to cooperation with the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

The second pattern represents public conformity, characterized by uncertainty, support for symbolic changes, recognition of the Church's formal Ukrainian identity, and passive adaptation to current circumstances.

The third pattern reflects overt nonconformity, including support for preserving or restoring ties with the Russian Orthodox Church, minimizing the issue, or concealing pro-Russian sympathies.

The findings illustrate the complex interplay between religious identity, social influence, conformity, and adaptation under conditions of war and social transformation.

Discussion and Questions

13:00–13:10



LECTURE 6

14:00–14:30

POLEMICAL SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND ACTIVE MINORITIES: THEORETICAL CONNECTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Dr. Natalia Cojocaru (Republic of Moldova)

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Moldova State University



Short Bio

Natalia Cojocaru, PhD, is Associate Professor at the Department of Psychology, Moldova State University. She earned her PhD in Psychology from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania, under the supervision of Professor Adrian Neculau, with research focused on the social representations of protest movements.

Her postdoctoral research examined the relationships between controversial issues, polemical social representations, and intergroup relations, with applications to collective memory, social movements, and pandemics. She is a member of the European Association of Social Psychology (EASP) and the Romanian Association of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (APIO). She has held research and academic positions in several European countries, including Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, and the United Kingdom. Her research interests include social psychology, social representations, intergroup relations, and qualitative research methods.

Abstract

This presentation explores the relationship between two influential theoretical frameworks in social psychology: Moscovici's theory of active minorities and the theory of social representations, with particular emphasis on polemical social representations.

The connection between these approaches lies in their common focus on social change and on the processes through which new ideas challenge established forms of social consensus. Through interaction with majority groups, active minorities introduce alternative viewpoints that question dominant representations and contribute to the emergence of polemical representations.

Polemical social representations may be understood as symbolic and discursive expressions of conflicts between majority and minority groups. They reflect ongoing social controversies and reveal the dynamics through which minority influence shapes public debate and intergroup relations.

The presentation discusses the theoretical links between minority influence and polemical representations and highlights their relevance for understanding contemporary social conflicts and processes of social change.

Discussion and Questions

14:25–14:30

LECTURE 7

14:30–15:00

Public Opinion on the Influence of Ukrainians on the Socioeconomic and Political Situation in the Country



Lidiia Chorna, PhD in Psychology
Senior Researcher



Iryna Hubeladze, Doctor of Psychological Sciences
Senior Researcher, Acting Deputy Director for Research



Mykola Sliusarevskiy, Candidate of Psychological Sciences
Corresponding Member of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine, Director

Institute for Social and Political Psychology National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine)

Abstract

The phenomenology of social influence spans a wide range of manifestations, from small-group interaction to society as a whole, including not only pressure exerted by authorities or majorities but also the influence of individuals, minorities, communities, and social groups on broader societal processes.

Drawing on representative public opinion surveys conducted by the Institute for Social and Political Psychology between 2014 and 2025, the presentation examines how Ukrainians perceive their ability to influence the socioeconomic and political conditions affecting their lives.

The findings indicate that a majority of Ukrainians remain dissatisfied with their opportunities to influence social and political developments. Similar patterns emerge in evaluations of major influence agents, including political leaders, governments, and international actors. At the same time, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, volunteer organizations, and opposition political forces are perceived as exerting a positive influence on societal developments.

The authors propose the concept of accepted conformism to describe a situation in which citizens negatively evaluate their own agency while demonstrating relatively low levels of civic engagement. Simultaneously, current developments in Ukrainian society are interpreted as a process of emerging subjecthood among various social and political actors.

Discussion and Questions

14:55–15:00

LECTURE 8

15:00–15:30

Group, Identity and Future: Contemporary Research in the Context of Solomon Asch's Ideas



Dr. Irina Caunenco (Republic of Moldova)

Associate Professor, Free International University of Moldova



Dr. Lucia Gașper (Republic of Moldova)

Leading Researcher, Moldova State University

Short Bios

Irina Caunenco, PhD in Psychology, is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova. Her research interests include social psychology, ethnic identity, intergenerational relations, ethnopsychology, and intercultural communication. She is the author of numerous scientific publications and supervisor of doctoral research in social psychology.

Lucia Gașper, PhD in Psychology, is a leading researcher and one of the most prominent specialists in social and ethnic psychology in the Republic of Moldova. Her research focuses on ethnic identity, intergroup relations, socialization, and social development processes in multicultural societies.

Abstract

The presentation examines contemporary developments in the study of groups, social identity, and future-oriented social processes through the lens of Solomon Asch's scientific legacy.

Particular attention is paid to the role of group influence in shaping social identities, the dynamics of belonging and differentiation, and the ways individuals negotiate their positions within changing social environments. The authors discuss current psychological approaches to identity construction and transformation in contexts marked by social uncertainty, migration, intercultural interaction, and rapid societal change.

Drawing upon contemporary research in social psychology, the presentation highlights the continuing relevance of Asch's ideas for understanding the relationships between individual judgment, group influence, social belonging, and collective visions of the future.

Discussion and Questions

15:25–15:30

LECTURE 9

15:30–16:00

Beyond Conformity: Emotions, Civic Identity and Democratic Participation in the Republic of Moldova

Assoc. Prof. Svetlana Rusnac, PhD (Republic of Moldova)

*Dean, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Free International University of Moldova*

Short Bio

Svetlana Rusnac, PhD in Psychology, is Associate Professor, Dean of the Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences at the Free International University of Moldova, psychologist and psychotherapist. Her research interests include social psychology, civic and political participation, social influence, intergroup relations, psychological counselling, psychotherapy, and educational sciences.

She is the author and co-author of approximately 380 scientific publications, including books, university textbooks, conference proceedings, and methodological works. She has coordinated and participated in numerous national and international research and educational projects and has extensive experience in academic leadership, higher education quality assurance, and doctoral supervision.

Abstract

Seventy years after Solomon Asch's pioneering studies, social influence remains one of the central themes of social psychology. Contemporary democratic societies require a broader perspective that extends beyond conformity and obedience toward understanding the psychological foundations of civic participation and democratic engagement.

The presentation examines the relationships among civic identity, civic-political emotions, and democratic participation in the Republic of Moldova. Particular attention is given to the role of social identification, collective emotions, perceptions of legitimacy, and citizens' sense of belonging in shaping civic engagement and participation in democratic processes.

Drawing on empirical research on civic and political participation in the Republic of Moldova during the 2024 presidential elections and constitutional referendum, the presentation discusses the psychological mechanisms linking emotions, identity, trust, and civic behaviour.

The presentation highlights the importance of strengthening civic identity and democratic resilience in societies facing social uncertainty, polarization, and rapid social change.

Discussion and Questions

15:55–16:00



LECTURE 10

16:00–16:30

Collective Obedience in Pluralist Democracies: Between Social Cohesion, Institutional Legitimacy, and Civic Autonomy

Zinaida Gribincea (Republic of Moldova)

*Assistant Lecturer, Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences
Free International University of Moldova*



Short Bio

Zinaida Gribincea is Assistant Lecturer at the Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences, Free International University of Moldova, and a doctoral candidate at the Doctoral School of Sociology, University of Oradea, Romania.

She holds Master's degrees in Journalism and Psychology and has extensive teaching experience in journalism, communication, and social sciences. Her research interests focus on mass media, public opinion, social influence, democratic participation, civic culture, and the role of media in the social construction of democracy. She is a frequent expert contributor to public debates and media projects addressing democracy, propaganda, social behaviour, and civic engagement.

Abstract

This presentation examines collective obedience as a complex phenomenon situated at the intersection of social cohesion, institutional legitimacy, and civic autonomy in contemporary pluralist democracies.

While obedience is often associated with authoritarian contexts, democratic societies rely on citizens' voluntary acceptance of laws, norms, and institutional decisions in order to ensure social cooperation and the effective functioning of democratic institutions. The presentation explores the psychological and social mechanisms that foster such compliance, including trust in institutions, perceived legitimacy, and the internalization of civic values.

Particular attention is devoted to the limits of democratic obedience and to the risks associated with excessive conformity, weakened critical thinking, and the delegation of moral responsibility. In the context of digital media, social polarization, and rapid social change, collective obedience is viewed as a dynamic process shaped by the ongoing tension between social integration and individual autonomy.

The presentation argues that democratic obedience should be understood not as a restriction of freedom but as an expression of civic responsibility and commitment to shared democratic values.

Discussion and Questions

16:25–16:30

LECTURE 11

16:30–17:00

Seventy Years after Solomon Asch: Algorithmic Conformity, Cognitive Freedom, and Democratic Resilience in Digital Societies



Angela Calancea, PhD (Republic of Moldova)

Associate Professor, Free International University of Moldova; Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University of Chişinău



Leonardo Calancea (The Netherlands)

Bachelor's Student in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, Leiden University

Short Bios

Angela Calancea, PhD in Psychology, is Associate Professor at the Free International University of Moldova and the Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University of Chişinău. She is a clinical psychologist and Jungian-oriented psychotherapist whose research focuses on analytical psychology, psychotraumatology, personality development, and integrative approaches to psychotherapy.

Leonardo Calancea is a Bachelor's student in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence at Leiden University (The Netherlands). His academic interests include artificial intelligence, algorithmic systems, and the societal impact of digital technologies.

Abstract

Seventy years after Solomon Asch's classic studies, digital technologies and artificial intelligence have transformed the ways social influence operates in contemporary societies.

The presentation examines the concepts of algorithmic conformity and cognitive freedom, exploring how algorithmic personalization, information overload, emotional contagion, and digital environments shape individual judgments and behaviours. Particular attention is given to the capacity of individuals to maintain independent thinking under conditions of continuous informational influence.

The authors argue that critical thinking, media literacy, and cognitive autonomy represent essential psychological resources for democratic resilience in the digital age.

Discussion and Questions

16:55–17:00