Introduction to political psychology

Lene Aarøe, associate professor, Department of Political Science, Aarhus University (leneaaroe@ps.au.dk)

Course content: Political psychology is a booming interdisciplinary research field that integrates knowledge from psychology and political science to advance our understanding of political behavior and the psychological mechanisms that shape it. Political psychology draws on insights from diverse fields such as neuroscience, personality, intergroup relations, social psychology, evolutionary psychology, developmental psychology and cognitive psychology. This PhD course provides an introduction to political psychology.

The course provides an overview of central theoretical and methodological approaches that have established the foundations of the field. The course also presents recent cutting-edge developments. The course will be structured in four blocks. The first block provides a general introduction to the field of political psychology and the intellectual foundation of the field. In the second block, we will focus on how insights from social psychology on social identities and research on heuristics can advance our understanding of political preferences and partisan polarization in modern democracies. The third block focuses on how insights from evolutionary psychology, biology, and personality psychology shape public opinion formation on issues such as immigration, social welfare policies and trust in political candidates. Finally, the fourth block will focus on the emerging field of the political psychology of mitigation of climate change. We will discuss how insights from political psychology can help advance more climate friendly behavior and policies and explain why effective mass mobilization on climate change mitigation is often difficult.

How we will work: The blocks will combine very short lectures and seminar discussions as well as small group discussions of the readings. The aim of the lectures will be to provide an overview of the subject matters and place assigned readings in a broader research context. The aim of the seminar discussions will be in-dept discussion and analysis of key readings and the questions they raise for future research.

Required preparations: Participants are expected to read the assigned readings for each session prior to the course. Participants are expected to be able to take active part in seminar discussions and group discussion of these readings. A total approximately 4-6 journal articles will be assigned for the course.

Programme

2:00-2:15PM: Welcome, presentation, and course overview

2:15-3:15PM: Module 1: Political psychology – introduction to a research field

- *Module content:* In this module, I will provide an introductory lecture that presents the research field of political psychology and the central theoretical and methodological approaches that have established the foundations of the field.

- *Required readings:*
    - Huddy, Leonie, Sears, David O., & Levy, Jack S. (2013). "Introduction. Theoretical foundations of political psychology." In *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology.* Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press (pp. 1-22).

- *Suggested additional literature (not required readings)*
    - Jost, John H & Sidanius, Jim (2004). *Political Psychology. Key Readings.* New York & Hove: Psychology Press (pp. 1-32)

3:15-3:30PM: Break

3:30-6:00PM Module 2: Group identities and partisan motivated reasoning

- *Module content:* In this module we will focus on the role of group identities and partisan motivated reasoning in shaping preference formation and political polarization in modern democracies. I will open the module with a short lecture on group identities and partisan motivated reasoning in modern mass politics. From there, we will move on to discuss in smaller groups and plenary sessions to what extent partisanship constitutes a social identity and key implications for modern politics focusing the article of Huddy, Mason & Aarøe 2015 and Iyengar et al 2019.So it is important to read these articles carefully in advance.

- *Required readings:*
    - Huddy, L., Mason, L., & Aarøe, L. (2015). Expressive partisanship: Campaign involvement, political emotion, and partisan identity. *American Political Science Review*, *109*(1), 1-17.
    - Iyengar, S., Lelkes, Y., Levendusky, M., Malhotra, N., & Westwood, S. J. (2019). The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States. *Annual Review of Political* Science, 22, 129-146.

- *Suggested additional literature (not required readings)*
    - Taber, C. S., & Lodge, M. (2006). Motivated skepticism in the evaluation of political beliefs. *American Journal of Political Science*, *50*(3), 755-769.

8:30-11:00AM: Module 3: Biology, evolutionary psychology, and modern mass politics
- *Module content:* In this module we will discuss how insights from biology and evolutionary psychology can inform our understanding of public opinion formation and political conflict in modern mass politics. Lene Aarøe will open the module with a short lecture introducing key concepts. From there we will zoom in on the role of disgust sensitivity in shaping opinions on immigration. We will discuss the article by Aarøe et al 2017 in smaller groups and plenary sessions. So it is important to read this article carefully in advance.

- Required readings:
  - Aarøe, L., Petersen, M. B., & Arceneaux, K. (2017). The behavioral immune system shapes political intuitions: Why and how individual differences in disgust sensitivity underlie opposition to immigration. *American Political Science Review*, *111*(2), 277-294.

- Suggested additional literature (not required readings)
  - Petersen, M. B., & Aarøe, L. (2012). Is the political animal politically ignorant? Applying evolutionary psychology to the study of political attitudes. *Evolutionary Psychology*, *10*(5), 147470491201000504.
  - Aarøe, L., & Petersen, M. B. (2014). Crowding out culture: Scandinavians and Americans agree on social welfare in the face of deservingness cues. *The Journal of Politics*, *76*(3), 684-697.
  - Aarøe, L., & Petersen, M. B. (2020). Cognitive biases and communication strength in social networks: the case of episodic frames. *British Journal of Political Science*, *50*(4), 1561-1581.

11:00-11:15AM: Break

11:15AM-12:30PM: Political psychology and mitigation of climate change
Module content: In this module we will discuss how insights from political psychology can contribute to our understanding of how to mitigate climate change. The aim of the session will be to apply a political psychology perspective to illuminate psychological barriers and cognitive biases that complicate mitigation of climate change. We will discuss the article by Nielsen et al (2021) in smaller groups so it is important to read it carefully in advance.

- *Required readings:*
  - Nielsen, K. S., Clayton, S., Stern, P. C., Dietz, T., Capstick, S., & Whitmarsh, L. (2021). How psychology can help limit climate change. *American Psychologist*, *76*(1), 130-144. 10.1037/amp0000624 file. Can be downloaded from https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/129447/1/Whitmarsh.%20How%20psychology.pdf
- *Suggested additional literature (not required readings)*
  - Markowitz, E. M., & Guckian, M. L. (2018). Climate change communication: Challenges, insights, and opportunities. In *Psychology and climate change* (pp. 35-63). Academic Press.
  - Moser, S. C. (2010). Communicating climate change: history, challenges, process and future directions. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 1(1), 31-53.