PhD Course

**Introduction to the grand debates of political behaviour: Established and promising seminal works**

**Practicalities**

* PhD course (5 ECTS) under Department of Political Science, Aarhus University.
* Eligibility: The course is open to PhD candidates involved in a relevant field, e.g., Political Behavior.
* Sign-up: Mail to Louise Halberg Nielsen ([lhn@ps.au.dk](mailto:lhn@ps.au.dk)) before December 15th, 2023.

**Short description:**

The course Political Behavior is structured as a five-session course series with introduction to grand debates in the field of Political Behavior. We will cover the grand debates around partisan motivated reasoning, out-group prejudice and intolerance, political representation, social groups in politics as well as social media, deliberation and political polarization. Within these grand debates we will cover both seminal work and key theoretical perspectives as well as more contemporary work and recent contributions within the themes.

Each session has approximately 100 pages of readings that participants must read and engage with before class as preparation. At each session we will engage with and discuss the readings and apply these on contemporary examples. For each course session a senior lecturer from Department of Political Science, Aarhus University will be brought in to teach the topic relevant to his/her expertise. After each session the participants will reflect on the session’s contents and their relation to his or her PhD project in a reflection paper. These reflections will constitute the final exam paper of the course.

The overarching goal of the course is to teach participants a robust understanding of selected themes within the field of political behavior and the contemporary research within these themes.

**Learning objectives**

* Participants will acquire a fundamental understanding and wide introduction to the field of political behavior with a special focus on political representation, social groups in politics, partisanship and polarization, prejudice and tolerance, and deliberation on social media.
* Participants will be able to apply the foundational theories within the themes on current debates and topics from today’s society.
* Participants will be able to discuss seminal work within the themes against contemporary empirical applications of the theories.
* Participants will be able to critically assess work from the field of political behavior with a special focus on political representation, social groups in politics, partisanship and polarization, prejudice and tolerance, and deliberation on social media.

**Exam**

The exam will consist of a 3-page reflection paper where each participant reflects on the themes and debates covered during the course and the relevance of these to their PhD project. The reflection paper will be assessed by one of the external presenters.

# Session 1: Partisan-motivated reasoning

# 18th December 2023 (13-16): 1323-118

**External presenter:** Martin Bisgaard and Love Christensen

**Description of the session**: Partisan-motivated reasoning has been one of the leading theoretical accounts when trying to explain and understand public opinion formation. This perspective is compatible with the findings of numerous studies showing that the partisanship of voters shapes their political beliefs and attitudes. However, while offering a compelling and intuitive explanation to these patterns, partisan-motivated reasoning has become subject to skepticism with several studies offering pushback both from a methodological and an empirical angle. In this session, we will engage with some of the newer articles in this field in discussion of the following questions which will structure the session:

* i) What is partisan-motivated reasoning, and what evidence supports the theory?
* ii) What are the boundary conditions of partisan-motivated reasoning?
* iii) Is the support of partisan-motivated reasoning really that clear and can the implications of the theory be disentangled from other more rational accounts of public opinion formation?

**Readings**

* Bisgaard, Martin. 2019. "How getting the facts right can fuel partisan‐motivated reasoning." American Journal of Political Science 63.4: 824-839. (16 pages)
* Krishnarajan, Suthan. 2023. "Rationalizing democracy: the perceptual bias and (un) democratic behavior." American Political Science Review 117.2: 474-496. (23 pages)
* Druckman, James N., Erik Peterson, and Rune Slothuus. 2013. "How elite partisan polarization affects public opinion formation." American political science review 107.1: 57-79. (23 pages)
* Parker-Stephen, Evan. 2013. "Tides of disagreement: How reality facilitates (and inhibits) partisan public opinion." The Journal of Politics 75.4: 1077-1088. (12 sider)
* Tappin, Ben M., Gordon Pennycook, and David G. Rand. 2020. "Thinking clearly about causal inferences of politically motivated reasoning: Why paradigmatic study designs often undermine causal inference." Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences 34: 81-87. (7 pages)
* Coppock, Alexander. 2022. Persuasion in parallel: How information changes minds about politics. University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1. (16 pages)
* Graham, Matthew H., and Shikhar Singh. 2023. "An Outbreak of Selective Attribution: Partisanship and Blame in the COVID-19 Pandemic." American Political Science Review: 1-19. (19 pages)

(Total 116 pages)

**Session 2: Out-group prejudice and (in)tolerance**

**5rd January 2024 (9-12): 1330-018**

# External presenter: Kristina Bakkær Simonsen (tbc)

**Description of the session:** Throughout history, inter-group conflicts have shaped politics and societal debates - and so do they today. In recent years, open hostility and violence against different minority groups have seen a drastic increase. Though problematic in and of itself, this development further threatens democratic cohesion in increasingly diverse societies. Therefore, we will discuss different causes of out-group intolerance and what we can do against it, all while looking at different contexts and using various empirical methods.

In the first part of the session, we start by reviewing the classical explanations of out-group prejudice and intolerance, including realistic group conflict, psychological predispositions, and social identity theory. Building upon this, we will discuss two recent studies applying these theories in real-world contexts.

While these explanations focus on relatively stable factors causing out-group intolerance, we will look at the dynamics of out-group intolerance in the second part of the session. In particular, we will discuss the role of inter-group contact in reducing prejudices, as well as the influence of political elites.

**Readings:**

*First part: Classical explanations of prejudice and out-group tolerance*

* Kinder, D. R., & Kam, C. D. (2010). *Us against them: Ethnocentric foundations of American opinion*. *Chapter 1: Four Theories in Search of Ethnocentrism*. University of Chicago Press. (24 pages)
* Duckitt, John. "Differential effects of right wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation on outgroup attitudes and their mediation by threat from and competitiveness to outgroups." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 32.5 (2006): 684-696. (13 pages)
* Homola, Jonathan, Miguel M. Pereira, and Margit Tavits. "Legacies of the Third Reich: Concentration camps and out-group intolerance." *American Political Science Review* 114.2 (2020): 573-590. (18 pages)

*Second part: Dynamics of prejudice and out-group tolerance*

* Enos, Ryan D. "Causal effect of intergroup contact on exclusionary attitudes." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111.10 (2014): 3699-3704. (6 pages)
* Weiss, C. M. (2021). Diversity in health care institutions reduces Israeli patients’ prejudice toward Arabs. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *118*(14), e2022634118. (6 pages)
* Newman, B., Merolla, J. L., Shah, S., Lemi, D. C., Collingwood, L., & Ramakrishnan, S. K. (2021). The Trump effect: An experimental investigation of the emboldening effect of racially inflammatory elite communication. *British Journal of Political Science*, *51*(3), 1138-1159. (22 pages)

Total: 89 Pages

# Session 3: Political Representation

# 5th January 2024 (13-16): 1330-018

**External presenter**: Helene Helboe Pedersen

**Description of the session:** Political representation is at the core of every representative democracy and holds important implications for various aspects of political behavior and society. In the session, we will cover three general topics:

* Classical and contemporary conceptualizations of representation
* Experimental studies of representation
* Innovation in the measurement of representation

The first topic unpacks the conceptualization of representation by visiting both classical and more contemporary definitions of the concept. We’ll cover various conceptualizations and their intricate relations to concepts such as responsiveness, descriptive representation, substantive representation, and symbolic representation, as well as recent definitions. The second topic discusses recent developments in how experimental designs can be used to study the causal effects of representation using audio and video treatments. The third and final topic covers the innovations in measuring representation, specifically using text and audio data from parliamentary speeches and images on social media.

**Literature:**

* Topic 1 (21+14=35 pages):
  + Schwindt-Bayer, Leslie A., and William Mishler. "An integrated model of women's representation." *The Journal of Politics* 67.2 (2005): 407-428.
  + Wolkenstein, Fabio, and Christopher Wratil. "Multidimensional representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 65.4 (2021): 862-876
* Topic 2: (17+23=40 pages)
  + Zárate, Marques G., Enrique Quezada-Llanes, and Angel D. Armenta. "Se Habla Español: Spanish-Language Appeals and Candidate Evaluations in the United States." *American Political Science Review* (2023): 1-17.
  + Clayton, Amanda, Diana Z. O'Brien, and Jennifer M. Piscopo. "Founding Narratives and Men's Political Ambition: Experimental Evidence from US Civics Lessons." *British Journal of Political Science* (2023): 1-23.
* Topic 3 (21+11=32 pages):
  + Dietrich, Bryce J., Matthew Hayes, and Diana Z. O’Brien. "Pitch perfect: Vocal pitch and the emotional intensity of congressional speech." *American Political Science Review* 113.4 (2019): 941-962.
  + XI, Nan, et al. Understanding the political ideology of legislators from social media images. In: *Proceedings of the international aaai conference on web and social media*. 2020. p. 726-737.

(Total pages: 107)

# Session 4: Social media, deliberation, and political polarization

# 11th January 2024 (9-12): 1330-018

**External presenter:** Michael Bang Petersen

**Description of the session:** Discussions in heterogenous groups are seen as central to the normative model of deliberative democracy. Everyday political discussions between citizens take place on a large scale on social networking sites. These have the components of deliberative conversations, but they tend to go sour, and there is therefore a rising skepticism towards the potential of social networking sites as public spheres for political deliberation. Some research finds that online interactions between heterogenous groups exacerbate polarization, while others find that it reduces polarization.

In this session we will address questions such as: How does opinion diversity influence participants’ experiences of deliberative discussions? Is like-minded deliberation sometimes preferable? And what is it that makes online deliberation so difficult - and how might we fix it?

**Literature**

**Review (22 p):**

Barberá, P. (2020). Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization. In J. A. Tucker & N. Persily (Eds.), Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform (pp. 34–55). Cambridge University Press.<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/social-media-and-democracy/social-media-echo-chambers-and-political-polarization/333A5B4DE1B67EFF7876261118CCFE19> **(22 p.)**

**Do interactions between heterogenous groups exacerbate or reduce polarization (66 p.) :**

Nyhan, B. et al. (2023) ‘Like-minded sources on Facebook are prevalent but not polarizing’, Nature, pp. 1–8. Available at:<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-023-06297-w>. (24 p.)

Druckman, J. N., Klar, S., Krupnikov, Y., Levendusky, M., & Ryan, J. B. (2022). (Mis)estimating Affective Polarization. The Journal of Politics, 84(2), 1106–1117.<https://doi.org/10.1086/715603> (5 p.)

Brady, W. J., McLoughlin, K. L., Torres, M. P., Luo, K. F., Gendron, M., & Crockett, M. J. (2023). Overperception of moral outrage in online social networks inflates beliefs about intergroup hostility. Nature Human Behaviour, 7(6), Article 6.<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01582-0> (14 p.)

**Polarization and social media affordances (38 p.)**

Jaidka, K., Zhou, A., & Lelkes, Y. (2019). Brevity is the Soul of Twitter: The Constraint Affordance and Political Discussion. Journal of Communication, 69(4), 345–372.<https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqz023> (27 p.)

Combs, A., Tierney, G., Guay, B., Merhout, F., Bail, C. A., Hillygus, D. S., & Volfovsky, A. (2023). Reducing political polarization in the United States with a mobile chat platform. Nature Human Behaviour, 1–8.<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01655-0> (11 p.)

Total: 103 pages

# Session 5 - Social groups in politics

# 17th January 2024 (13-16): 1330-038

**External presenter**: Rune Stubager

**Description of the session:** In the session we will read and discuss the very broad topic of social groups in politics. We will focus on some broader theoretical perspectives and discussion concerning group identity, affect and relations in politics. First, we discuss some general different theoretical perspectives how and why social groups affect political behavior. The second topic relates to how inter-group perceptions play out politically on the voter-level. Finally, we discuss some perspectives on how political parties can trigger and activate group-based thinking among voters.  
  
**Literature**

Key theoretical perspectives (18 pages)

* Kinder, Donald R., and Allison Dale-Riddle. The End of Race? : Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America, Yale University Press, 2012. ProQuest Ebook Central,<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/asb/detail.action?docID=3420936>. (Chapter 1, pp. 8 – 25)

Bottom-up perspectives – what constitutes inter-group conflict in the public (35 pages)

* Zollinger, D. (2022). s. American Journal of Political Science. doi:10.1111/ajps.12743
* Cramer, KJ. (2012). Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective. American Political Science Review, 106(3), 517-532. doi:10.1017/S0003055412000305

Top-down perspectives – How parties activate group-based thinking (48 pages)

* Swigger, N. (2012). What You See Is What You Get: Drawing Inferences From Campaign Imagery. Political Communication, 29(4), 367-386. doi:10.1080/10584609.2012.722174
* Robison, J., Stubager, R., Thau, M., & Tilley, J. (2021). Does Class-Based Campaigning Work? How Working Class Appeals Attract and Polarize Voters. Comparative political studies, 54(5), 723-752. doi:10.1177/0010414020957684

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