# Psychology of Political Behavior

## Draft syllabus

**Semester & Location:** Summer 3 2018 - DIS Stockholm  
**Type & Credits:** Core Course - 3 credits  
**Study Tour:** Berlin  
**Major Disciplines:** Psychology  
**Faculty Members:** Ebba Karlsson  
**Program Director:** Carla Caetano, Ph.D - cca@dis.dk  
**Time** TBD

## Description of Course

This course emphasizes the psychological mechanisms affecting political reasoning and behavior, such as how psychological biases affect our cognition, information-processing, and political behavior. Comparisons between U.S. and Swedish political contexts are explored, specifically examining how the political mind is embedded in social frameworks. This course is based on theory and research from the field of political psychology, an interdisciplinary academic field studying the relationships between psychological and political processes. The course also includes a study tour to Berlin,
Germany. With its turbulent history from WWII, the Holocaust and the Cold War, Berlin has been the center for extreme populist governments to the more Democratic forces of today. However, present challenges like Brexit, the refugee crisis and the rise of right wing populism in Europe is causing political shifts in the country with growing and diverse public reactions. On this study tour, we will analyze and discuss the historical and psychological mechanisms triggering the current political situation and behaviors. The academic visits will give you a forum to discuss and debate cultural differences, analyze the connection between policy and practice, and investigate the psychology of political behavior in a European context.

Learning Objectives

- To understand and describe principles and concepts related to political cognition such as information processing, decision-making, and perception.
- To apply theory and analyze political phenomena in daily life from a psychological perspective.
- To critically evaluate scientific methods and research within the field of political psychology.
- To contrast and consider cultural differences between American and European political contexts.
- To understand the dominant political ideologies in Sweden and how they differ from the US
- To engage with Swedish political groups to learn more about their underlying moral values and perspectives
- To gain a deeper understanding from a psychological perspective of historical and contemporary political issues in an European context

Faculty

Ebba Karlsson, M.Sc.
M.Sc. in Clinical Psychology (Stockholm University, 2015), B.A. in Philosophy (Stockholm University, 2013). Visiting student in Politics and Public Policy at New York University, and research internship at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University. Founder of Poplar, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving political civility in society. Also working as a clinical psychologist and organizational consultant, focusing on leadership development, stress resilience and well-being. With DIS since 2016.

Readings

Books:

Selected chapters from:
Articles:


Field Studies

Field Study 1 – Visiting the think tank Timbro
- **Topic:** Understanding the Swedish political system and contemporary political context, outside of a governmental context.
- **Objective:** To learn about how a Swedish think tank operates and aims to influence public opinion and politicians. To identify and understand the differences between the political landscape and public opinion in a Swedish context compared to the US.
- **Description:** We will visit the Swedish think tank Timbro, where we will learn about their work and mission as well as the Swedish political system. More information about Timbro can be at www.timbro.se/en.

Field Study 2 - Visiting the Swedish Parliament
- **Topic:** Understanding Swedish political system and contemporary political context, focusing on government and the legal system.
- **Objective:** To learn how the Swedish government and parliamentary system works, with both historical and contemporary perspectives. To identify and understand cultural differences between the political system in Sweden and the US.
- **Description:** We will visit the Swedish parliament, where we will get a tour of the parliament building as well as meeting with a Swedish MP.

Guest Lecturers (if known)
Robert Örell, Exit
Robert Örell is the founder of Exit, a non-profit organization which aims to help and provide support to those who wish to leave a nationalistic/racist/nazi oriented groups and movements. Exit provide hands-on support for persons wanting to leave a neo nazi or racist environment by cooperating with various housing corporations, the police, social services, legal system and also with the client’s own
family and friends. During this lecture the students will get first-hand experience and extensive knowledge about real life application of theory related to extremism and radicalization processes. More information about Exit can be found here: http://exit.fryshuset.se/english/

Approach to Teaching (if faculty known)
A variety of teaching methods will be used, including lectures, class discussions, group presentations, interactive classroom activities and multi-media to facilitate the understanding of theory, research and their cultural implications. Psychological applications will be explored using case examples.

Expectations of the Students (if faculty known)
Students are expected to have done the readings and come prepared with relevant questions and notes for each class. This will give us material to generate conversation. When responding to questions in class, make reference to our readings to support the points you are making. Students are expected to challenge themselves and their worldviews with an investigative mindset and curiosity, seeking to understand the topics at hand as well as how they relate to themselves as individuals and the world around them.

Evaluation
Engaged Participation (10%):
Your participation grade reflects the importance of being active in this course, which relies in great part on the reflections, discussions, and exercises in class. Students are expected to come prepared with relevant questions for discussion pertaining to the topic, as well as making contributions with relevant analytical insights and critical evaluations. The participation grade also takes into consideration punctuality.

Moral Psychology Fieldwork (35%):
This task was originally developed by Jonathan Haidt (author of The Righteous Mind, 2012) and has been adjusted to suit this class. Working in groups, your assignment is to step out of your moral matrix and into another. Immerse yourself in a network of meanings and values that conflicts with your own, acting like an anthropologist trying to understand them accurately and fairly. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz said that the goal of fieldwork is not to become a native but to converse with the natives, and in the process, to "figure out what the devil they think they are up to."

You will be provided with a set-up meeting with a person representing a political party in Sweden. You will then conduct an interview to further your understanding of their and their party’s moral matrix and attitudes. You should put together an interview template and run that by me before you conduct the interview. The interview would take approximately 30-45 minutes.

After conducting the interview, you will write up a paper consisting of two parts. Part I should be purely descriptive, explaining what the aims of the group, their values and attitudes, without evaluation and only minimal interpretation. Part II should attempt to extract or describe the underlying moral worldview or commitments of the people/group you studied. You should present them as sympathetically as possible, in a form that they might recognize as a fair statement of what they are up to, and of why they say and believe the things that they do. But then be sure to go deeper; try to figure out why or how they came to have the particular moral matrix they have, when others nearby have a different one.
Part 1 should consist of one to two pages (1.5 spaced with a maximum of 2 pages). Part 2 should consist of 3-5 pages (1.5 spaced with a maximum of 5 pages). Quality is more important than quantity, meaning that more text do not necessarily entail a higher grade. Be sure to draw on some of the readings and analytical tools you have acquired so far in the course and include references.

Last but not least, you will present your paper to the rest of the class and facilitate a related group discussion. The time allocated for each group is 25min.

Your grading will be based on four parts: how well you structured the interviews (20%), the descriptive part of the write up (15%), the depth and insight you provide in your second section, the analysis (50%), and your presentation to the class (15%). See Canvas for more detailed instructions.

In-class exam (20%)
There will be a re-cap quiz covering the theories and concepts that has been discussed so far in the course.

Final Paper (40%):
The course will conclude with an individually written final paper which should demonstrate an integration of course material and research findings with the topic of your choice, related to political phenomena in real life. The topic must be approved by the instructor. The paper should be around 6-7 pages 1.5 spaced (excluding references) and be conducted using APA style. The references should include class readings and independent sources. See Canvas for more detailed instructions.

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral Psychology Fieldwork and Presentation</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-class exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Course Summary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tue Jun 12, 2018</td>
<td>Session 1: Introduction to political psychology and scientific methods</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>within the field</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Information about the course</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is political psychology – history and overview</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scientific methods in political psychology</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
• Bias within social psychology

Required Readings

Canvas:

Recommended readings

Text:

Newspaper:

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Session 2: Moral and political cognition, the moral matrix

- Intuitionism and rationalism
- The evolution of morality
- The moral matrix
- Cultural differences between US and European moral values
- Introduction to Moral Psychology Fieldwork Assignment

Required Readings

Text:

Recommended extramaterial

Visual/Youtube clip:

**Recommended**

**Visual/Youtube clip:**

**Audio:**

**Session 3: Motivated Reasoning**
- Cognitive biases
- Naïve realism

**Required Readings**

**Canvas:**

**Recommended extramaterial**

**Magazine:**

**Audio:**
- McRaney, David (Show host). (2015, November 9). Why you often believe people who see the world differently are wrong [Audio podcast].

**Field study**
- Location: Swedish Parliament
- Time: 9-12.00
**Topic:** Understanding Swedish political system and contemporary political context, focusing on government and the legal system.  
**Objective:** To learn how the Swedish government and parliamentary system works, with both historical and contemporary perspectives. To identify and understand cultural differences between the political system in Sweden and the US.  
**Description:** We will visit the Swedish parliament, where we will get a tour of the parliament building as well as a meeting with a Swedish MP.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Required Readings</th>
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| Fri, Jun 15, 2018 9-12:00 | Session 4: Motivated reasoning from an evolutionary perspective  
- Cultural cognition theory  
- Identity-protective cognition | **Text:**  
**Canvas:**  
| Fri, Jun 15, 2018 13-15:00 | Session 5: The political psychology of groups  
- Social identity theory  
- Social categorization theory | **Text:**  

**June 18-22**  
**Study tour Berlin**

**Mon, June 25, 2018**  
**In class exam**  
**Time:** 9-10
There will be a re-cap quiz covering the theories and concepts we have covered so far in the course.

### Session 6: Political Ideology

- Overview of political ideologies
- Understanding the Right and Left
- Cultural aspects and comparisons between ideology in Sweden and the US

**Required readings**

**Text:**

**Canvas:**

### Session 7: Personality, Genes, and Politics

- What is personality?
- Do our genes determine our politics?

**Required readings**

**Text:**

**Canvas:**

### Session 8: Mass Politics, persuasion and media

- Voting behavior
- What role does traditional and social media play in politics
Cultural comparisons between US and Swedish media climate and voting behavior

Required Readings

**Text:**

**Canvas:**

**Newspaper:**

**Youtube**

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**Tues, Jun 26, 2018 13-15:00**

**Session 9: Political Polarization in the US**
- Symptoms and causes of political polarization in the US
- What can be done to improve the situation?
- Cultural comparisons between polarization in the US and Sweden

**Required Readings**

**Canvas:**

**Newspaper:**

**Visual/Youtube clip:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed, Jun 27, 2018</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td><strong>Field study</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Thurs, Jun 28, 2018</th>
<th>9-10:30</th>
<th><strong>Session 10:</strong> <strong>Authority and Obedience / Evil</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why do people commit evil acts?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How does situational factors influence human behavior?</strong></td>
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**Required Readings:**

**Canvas:**

**Recommended**

**Visual/YouTube clip:**


**Thurs, Jun 28, 2018**

10:00-11:30  
**Session 11: Extremism and radicalization**

Guest lecture by Robert Örell from Exit

Robert Örell is the founder of Exit, a non-profit organization which aims to help and provide support to those who wish to leave a nationalistic/racist/nazi oriented groups and movements. Exit provide hands-on support for persons wanting to leave a neo nazi or racist environment by cooperating with various housing corporations, the police, social services, legal system and also with the client’s own family and friends. During this lecture the students will get first-hand experience and extensive knowledge about real life application of theory related to extremism and radicalization processes. More information about Exit can be found here: [http://exit.fryshuset.se/english/](http://exit.fryshuset.se/english/)

**Fri, Jun 29, 2018**

10-12.00  
**Session 12: Ending on a positive note – behavioral change**

This class will focus on what can be done to change behaviors and attitudes and work towards less polarization and bias. You will get some insights from clinical psychology and Applied Behavior Analysis, a theory and intervention that can also be used outside of a clinical context. Summary and review before final paper.

**Required readings:**


DIS - Study Abroad in Scandinavia - www.DISaborad.org