

# POLITICS AND THE LIFE SCIENCES

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOR, ETHICS, AND POLICY

## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

### DISGUST AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

#### GUEST EDITORS:

Michael Bang Petersen, Aarhus University

Joshua Tybur, VU Amsterdam

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We invite researchers across the social sciences to submit study proposals for inclusion in a special issue of **Politics and the Life Sciences**, entitled “Disgust and Political Attitudes”. With this special issue, we seek to contribute to research on how, why and when the emotion of disgust shapes political attitudes and behaviours. Our aim is to publish novel research ideas, executed with strict adherence to all principles of reproducible research. To facilitate this aim, we are calling for proposals that tackle important research questions on the links between disgust and politics and that outline studies where data has yet to be collected. The Association for Politics & The Life Sciences will fund up to \$1,500 of the data collection expenses with the Cambridge University Press journal **Politics and the Life Sciences** making the final publication decision independent of outcomes. Thus, the special issue welcomes both replications and null findings. In return, you must pre-register your study and make all materials public by the publication of the special issue.

The emotion of disgust is one of the most basic of human emotions (Tybur et al., 2009). It is a powerful motivator; it develops in infancy; its facial expression is recognized across cultures; and markers of associated states such as nausea and vomiting can be observed among non-human animals. While disgust is traditionally elicited in the context of food, sex and infections, recent research suggests that its effects reach into the domain of politics. For example, research shows that disgust responses are an important psychological factor underlying prejudice against different groups such as the homeless, immigrants and homosexuals (e.g., Aarøe et al., 2007; Clifford & Piston, 2017; Inbar et al., 2009). Other research suggest that the sensitivity of people’s disgust systems are associated with their ideological leanings, such that less disgust sensitive individuals tend to be liberal rather than conservative (e.g., Smith et al., 2011; Terrizzi et al., 2010). And research also show that disgust shapes the processing of political arguments more generally such that people feel disgust and other aversive emotions in the face of political arguments they disagree with, motivating them to avoid careful consideration of opposing viewpoints (MacKuen et al., 2010). This research is thus challenging the long-standing view that people’s political views are grounded in cold rational considerations. Instead, political attitudes and behaviors is seemingly tied to deeply emotional and biological processes.

While the political relevance of the emotion of disgust seems well-established, there are several debates in the current literature about how, why and when disgust and politics is linked. These debates include, for example, questions such as:

- *What is the relationship between the emotion of disgust and political ideology?* Some studies have argued that there is a strong association between individual differences in pathogen disgust sensitivity and political ideology (e.g., Smith et al., 2011; Terrizzi et al., 2010). Other studies have argued that there is no such relationship or that is confounded by other such as

individual differences related to sexual strategies (e.g., sexual disgust or sociosexuality; Tybur et al., 2015).

- *Why and how do feelings of disgust produce prejudice?* Findings suggest that individuals who are higher in disgust sensitivity are more likely to be prejudiced towards a range of groups, including homosexuals and foreigners (e.g., Inbar et al., 2009; Aarøe et al., 2017). Some researchers have interpreted these results as indicating that the disgust system is designed to generate avoidance of outgroups (e.g., Faulkner et al., 2004). Other researchers have argued that disgust motivates avoidance of all other individuals, whether outgroup or ingroup (e.g., van Leeuwen & Petersen, 2018). And some researchers argue that the primary mechanism relates to increased conformity with local norms (Navarrete & Fessler, 2006).
- *How does the emotion of disgust relate to support for health care?* The emotion of disgust evolved, at least in part, to help our ancestors avoid individuals with contamination risk (Tybur et al., 2009). At the same time, there is substantial anthropological evidence for health care towards sick and injured individuals (Steinkopf, 2017). Does attention to sickness also generate support for modern-day health care institutions? At present, very little research has explored such political effects of disgust sensitivity.
- *How do different types of disgust shape political attitudes?* Most existing research on disgust and politics has focused on pathogen-related disgust reactions. But people also feel disgust towards views they see as morally wrong or towards sexual behaviors (Tybur et al., 2009). At present, we know very little about how these other types of disgust shapes political attitudes. For example, what is the role of moral disgust in partisan conflict and polarization? Does it encourage indirect aggression and reputational attacks (e.g., Molho et al., 2017). Or: do individual differences in propensity to experience sexual disgust track attitudes on political issues related drug policy, sex, and marriage (e.g., Kurzban et al., 2010)?
- *Are the effects of disgust similar across cultures?* Most work on disgust and politics has been conducted on Western populations and, hence, we know little about how well the political associations of disgust responses generalize more broadly. Existing cross-cultural work points in different directions. One large-scale study found that individual differences in support for traditional political values and individual differences in disgust sensitivity are fairly similar across 30 different nations (Tybur et al., 2016). Another study found that individual differences in disgust sensitivity is only related to avoidance of outgroups in some but not only populations (van Leeuwen & Petersen, 2018).

This list of current debate is far from exhaustive and we invite contributors to develop studies that shed light on any important question regarding the links between disgust and politics.

### **Submission Process**

*Funding proposals are due 30 September 2018.* Researchers seeking to apply for these grants should submit (1) a short vita of two pages or less listing five representative publications and (2) a proposal of no more than 1500 words in which the proposed research is outlined. Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of how theoretically important and how feasible the proposed research is, and they are expected to have the following components:

1. Identification of key research questions based upon salient literature, with directional hypotheses where feasible;

2. Research design, measures, data collection methodology, and data analysis methods;
3. Timeline for the research collection and analysis;
4. Description of facilities where research will be carried out.

*Funding decisions will be made during the first week of November 2018* with allocation of funding occurring upon evidence of Open Science Framework pre-registration. For funding to occur on a timely basis, pre-registration must occur prior to 4 January 2019. By accepting funding, the researchers are obligating themselves to carry out the proposed research with deliverables of: a publishable manuscript and the data set and statistical application code (SPSS, R, Systat, etc.) upon which the findings are based. The data set and duplication code will be made public upon print publication of the special issue.

*Manuscripts are to be submitted for blind review by the first week of October 2019* with final publication decisions made on the basis of manuscript quality and research rigor.

Please submit research proposals and short CVs, preferably in MS Word or pdf format, and direct queries to Patrick A. Stewart, Ph.D. (pastewar@uark.edu).

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