

(RE)THINKING SOCIAL IDENTITIES: NATIONALISM, ETHNICITY AND POLITICS

Professor: Adam Lenton

Session 2

Language of instruction: English

Number of hours of class: 14

Objective of the Course

The objective of this course is to help you to think critically about how social identities both shape and are shaped by politics. After taking this course you will be able to: a) understand the main theoretical approaches used to study social identities in politics, with a particular focus on nationalism, ethnicity, and race; b) critically assess these approaches' benefits and drawbacks; and c) apply these insights to real-world issues across countries. As such, this course will provide you with several tools with which to engage critically with questions of identity and politics, whether in academic, political, or social settings

Course summary

Whether considering the rise of populist nationalism in Europe, racial injustice in the United States, or civil wars and conflicts across the globe, identity is of central importance for social scientists and citizens alike. But what is an identity? Why do some identities become politically important? And how do identities influence political behavior?

This course will provide you with insights and perspectives from across the social sciences and humanities to think about and engage meaningfully with this important concept.

In our seven-session course we will focus predominantly on nationalism, ethnicity, and race. Whilst these identities are distinct, together they contribute a rich set of perspectives for thinking about issues of culture, societal organization, and human diversity. Each session will be structured around a key theoretical question and an important contemporary political issue.

We will start by asking what identities are and what functions they fulfil. Then, the course turns to ask how politics has influenced these identities. As social constructions, ethnicity, race, and nation did not naturally or inevitably emerge: we will explore how processes of industrialization and colonization profoundly affected - and continue to affect - identities today. The second part of the course asks how these identities impact politics. We will examine how identities impact political parties, voting behavior, and participation in social movements and protests, drawing upon and discussing the role of identity in contemporary political events across Europe and the United States, such as the rise of populist parties, anti-immigrant sentiment, separatism, and racial injustice.

The final part of the course looks beyond ethnicity, race, and nationalism. We will investigate how other identities - such as gender, class, and religion - intersect with these identities, and we will consider whether we are moving towards a post-ethnic/racial/national world.

Professor Biography



Adam Lenton is a doctoral candidate in political science at the George Washington University, in Washington, D.C. His research interests include nationalism, political integration, and the politics of symbols and historical memory, with a regional focus on the former Soviet Union, the EU, and the United States. He previously received a dual master's degree in international security from Sciences Po Paris and the Moscow State Institute of International Affairs..