# Three 2-year Postdoctoral positions at Aarhus University: Projects on personality cults and strategic communication in autocracies

The Department of Political Science at Aarhus University invites applications for three two-year full-time postdoctoral researchers to join a research team studying the logic and consequences of strategic communication and leadership cults in contemporary autocracies. The projects are headed by Associate Professors Jakob Tolstrup (Aarhus University) and Alexander Baturo (Dublin City University). Start date is flexible throughout September 2026-February 2027, or upon mutual agreement.

## The Research Projects

The postdoctoral positions are embedded in two large research projects:

CULTS is a €800K 5-year research project (2026-2030) funded by the Danish private fund, the *Velux Foundation*. The project is about the drivers, characteristics, and consequences of personality cults in contemporary autocracies. CULTS aims to produce the first-ever systematic analysis of the dynamics of authoritarian personality cults and their consequences. Utilizing, among others, the latest advances in text-as-data methods, it will provide: i) detailed descriptions and explanation of leadership cults in contemporary Russia and China, including a systematic inquiry centering on how public communication of political elites plays in fostering, nurturing, and consolidating cults around the dictator; ii) new cross-country measurements of personality cults and/or leader glorification; and iii) comparative analysis of the causes and consequences of cults across larger samples of authoritarian regimes in the post-Cold War period.

Communicating Dictators is a €830K 4-year research project (2026-2029) funded by the *Independent Research Fund Denmark*. The project examines how dictators, the central actors in every autocracy, communicate in public. It sets out to better understand how autocrats – through the things they say and do in public – try to influence perceptions of regime strength, durability, and resolve among their supporters and opponents to secure and consolidate their position. The project analyzes both rhetorical and performative aspects of dictators' communication, and it seeks to explain how and why such communication changes across different strategic contexts (such as during different types of crises). Utilizing, among others, text-as-data methods, and survey experiments, the project will engage in: i) Fine-grained data collection of a subset of post-Cold War autocrats' (primarily from the post-Soviet region) public rhetoric (speeches, statements, comments) and appearances (whom they meet with, when, and where); ii) Within-case and cross-case analyses of how dictators' public communication changes across different strategic contexts; and iii) State-of-the-art survey experiments on how the public in autocracies respond to the various types of communicative signals from the dictator.

## The specific postdoc tracks

We welcome applications for one (or more) of the following tracks:

- *Postdoc 1 (text-as-data methods)* will primarily be attached to the *Communicating Dictators* project but may also assist with conducting research tasks related to the CULTS project. Main tasks include scraping (from open sources), organizing, and analyzing large amounts of rhetorical and behavioral communication (text data) of (primarily) post-Soviet autocrats (but extending also to select authoritarian rulers in other regions). The goal is to better understand how dictators use rhetorical and performative communication, and how such use varies across different strategic contexts. Russian language proficiency and research expertise on the post-Soviet region will be an advantage, but strong candidates without language skills will also be considered. Excellent skills in text-as-data and relevant data science skills are considered a must.

- *Postdoc 2 (survey experiments)* will primarily be attached to the *Communicating Dictators* project but may also assist with conducting one or two studies related to the CULTS project. Main tasks include designing, conducting, and analyzing online survey experiments in post-Soviet autocracies and potentially beyond this region. The goal is to better understand how citizens in autocracies respond to

rhetorical and behavioral communication cues from dictators. Experience with all phases of survey experiment research is a must.

- *Postdoc 3 (text-as-data methods)* will primarily be attached to the *CULTS* project but may also assist with conducting one or two studies related to the *Communicating Dictators* project. Main tasks include collecting, organizing, and analyzing large amounts of text data from speeches, statements, social media posts, etc., of Xi Jinping and Chinese elites, as well as Chinese media. The goal is to better understand the main drivers behind the personality cult emerging around Xi Jinping and how it has developed over time, possibly in comparison with other, previous Chinese leaders. Chinese language proficiency and research expertise in contemporary Chinese politics are a must.

## Job description

We invite applications for three positions at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University, Denmark. The postdoctoral researchers will join a research team and are expected to engage in collaborative research with the project leaders, Jakob Tolstrup and Alexander Baturo, and the other members of the research team. While Jakob Tolstrup will be based at the University of Aarhus for the duration of the project, Alexander Baturo, based in Dublin, Ireland, will visit Aarhus on a regular basis and will engage with the team via electronic communication outside of periodic research visits; in exceptional circumstances, Postdoc's travel to Dublin may be arranged, if required. The postdoctoral researchers will be part of a cutting-edge research project and a vibrant and supportive research team, with opportunities leading to collaborative, co-authored work arising from research project(s). The postdoctoral researchers will be expected to take a leading role in developing, designing, coordinating, and publishing research in high-impact journals. Moreover, as part of the research team, they are expected to support project-related organizational and administrative tasks.

There will be excellent opportunities for intellectual growth and mentoring, as well as for developing an independent research agenda. The project envisages funding for data collection, workshops, conferences, additional training, and opportunities for developing a strong academic network. In addition to the outlined research tasks, the position entails developing, organizing, and teaching the equivalent of one MA course per year as part of the Political Science program at Aarhus University.

## Your qualifications

Applicants are expected to hold (or be close to completing) a PhD in political science or another field relevant to the project. Applicants from various disciplines, e.g., Political Science, Communications and media studies, Data Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Economics, are encouraged to apply if they possess the required skills. More specifically, we will prioritize applicants with the following qualifications:

1) *General research expertise in autocracy research*, or related fields in comparative or international politics, and in particular  the following subfields:

- Authoritarian propaganda, legitimation, and strategic communication

- Personalist regimes and personalization in autocracies

- Public opinion and elections in authoritarian regimes

2) *Regional Research expertise* in autocracies within relevant regions

- We prioritize expertise in the *post-Soviet region* and/or *China Studies*

- But we also welcome applications from candidates with expertise on other regions of relevance for contemporary autocracy research (Sub-Saharan Africa, the MENA region, or Asia)

3) Relevant *language proficiency*

- High-level professional English is obligatory for all applicants

- Additional proficiency in reading and speaking Russian/Chinese/Arabic is considered an advantage, depending on the specific project tasks

4) *Methodological skills*

- Research expertise with designing, conducting, and analyzing survey experiments, and in particular with handling potentially sensitive questions and

addressing social desirability bias, in non-democratic contexts

- Research expertise with collecting, organizing, and analyzing large text corpora, including text-as-data methods, relevant data science skills, scraping, and coding in R and Python
- Experience with building and analyzing large datasets

5) *Other preferred qualities*

- The ability to independently organize and potentially initiate research activities of relevance for the projects
- Experience with co-authorship
- Experience with research collaboration across a team

Note that applicants are <u>not expected to hold expertise in all areas</u>. The goal is to create a research team that collectively commands all the qualifications required for the project's success. Please specify your qualifications in the application.

## What we offer

- Projects that study highly relevant and societally important issues using innovative methods
- A work environment at one of Europe's leading political science departments with a vibrant, supportive, and collegial atmosphere
- Excellent development opportunities and research support, including funding for conferences/travel and research assistance
- Competitive salary
- Possibility of an additional 1-year extension for one-two out of the three  positions

## Who we are

Jakob Tolstrup is an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University, Denmark. He is a specialist in authoritarian and post-Soviet politics, with publications in top cross-disciplinary journals such as *Science Advances*, as well as leading political science journals including the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Political Studies*, and *European Journal of Political Research*.

Alexander Baturo is an Associate Professor at the School of Law and Government, Dublin City University, Ireland. He works at the intersection of comparative politics and data science and has published extensively on comparative authoritarianism, personalization, post-Soviet politics, and UN politics with esteemed publishing houses such as *Oxford University Press* and in various leading Political Science journals such as *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *World Politics*, and *Comparative Political Studies*.

## The Department of Political Science at Aarhus University

With around 130 academic staff members and 40 PhD students, the Department of Political Science is among Europe's largest political science departments. The research at the department covers most political science disciplines, including public administration, and represents a variety of methodological approaches. We are among Europe's highest-ranked departments, and our broad research profile enables us to focus on societal problems as they appear in the national and international political arena and allows us to contribute actively to the development of the discipline. We offer a lively and ambitious research and teaching environment characterized by pluralism and openness. We expect active participation in the activities of the department, which includes being present at the department at least three days per week. For more information about the Department of Political Science, please see here.

## Further information

If you have questions regarding the position or want to learn more about the project and specific tasks prior to the application, please do not hesitate to contact Associate Professor Jakob Tolstrup at tolstrup@ps.au.dk.

If you need help uploading your application or have questions about the recruitment process, please contact HR supporter Astrid Valdgård Schmidt (e-mail: avs@au.dk).

## Place of work

Department of Political Science, Bartholins Allé 7, DK-8000, Aarhus C, Denmark.

### International applicant?

Aarhus University offers a broad variety of services for international researchers and accompanying families, including relocation service and career counselling to expat partners. Please find more information here: https://internationalstaff.au.dk/relocationservice/

Please find more information about research opportunities at Aarhus University here: http://international.au.dk/research/

Aarhus University also offers a Junior Researcher Development Programme targeted at career development for postdocs at AU. You can read more about it here: http://talent.au.dk/junior-researcher-development-programme/

### Terms of employment

The appointment is made in accordance with the Memorandum on Job Structure for Academic Staff at Danish Universities as well as the circular on the Collective Agreement for Academics Employed by the State (in Danish).
The job content and qualification requirements are described in further detail in the Ministerial Order on the Appointment of Academic Staff at Universities.

### Application procedure

When you apply for this position it is mandatory to attach the following:

1. *Cover letter* (1-2 pages) motivating why you are interested in joining the relevant project(s). Please indicate which of the three postdoc position(s) you are applying for. Applicants are allowed to apply for one or multiple postdoc positions, but the number of positions applied for will not affect the evaluation of the candidate.

2. A short *research proposal* (2-3 pages) that outlines your idea for a specific study within the scope of the relevant project(s). The proposal should briefly outline (1) the gap and contribution, (2) the argument, and (3) the research design and data collection. If multiple postdoc positions are applied for, the application should still include only one research proposal, but it should be made clear which of the three postdoc tracks it targets.

3. *Curriculum Vitae*. Note, you are also encouraged to declare any periods of leave without research activity, including, for example, parental leave, since your research activities are assessed in relation to your actual research time

4. *Education* (copies of diplomas for master's degree and PhD).

5. *List of publications*. This includes published work, working papers, and PhD theses. The enclosed publications (see 6, below) must be clearly marked on the list of publications.

6. *Publications*. Up to three publications can be submitted with the application. This includes published work, working papers, and sample chapters from PhD theses. In the event of several authors, the publications must be accompanied by a co-author statement concerning the applicant's share of the collaborative work, with the consent of the co-authors. This template may be used for this purpose.

7. *Teaching portfolio*. The specific requirements regarding the documentation can be found here

Read more about how to apply for an academic post at Aarhus BSS here

### The evaluation process

After the application deadline, an assessment committee is appointed. Please note that the assessment of applicants is based solely on the material received prior to the application deadline. For further information, see Guidelines for Assessment Committee, Aarhus BSS.

Aarhus University's ambition is to be an attractive and inspiring workplace for all and to foster a culture in which each individual has opportunities to thrive, achieve and develop. We view equality and diversity as assets, and we welcome all applicants.

*The application must be submitted via Aarhus University's recruitment system, which*

*can be accessed under the job advertisement on Aarhus University's website.*

## Aarhus University

*Aarhus University is an academically diverse and research-intensive university with a strong commitment to high-quality research and education and the development of society nationally and globally. The university offers an inspiring research and teaching environment to its 37,000 students (FTEs) and 8.700 employees and has an annual revenue of EUR 1.106 billion. Learn more at [www.international.au.dk/](www.international.au.dk/)*