



**Political Inequality in Europe – GOVT 4608-01
Georgetown University – Spring 2024**

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Class times/location: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30 PM - 01:45 PM, ICC 205A

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 – 3.30 PM, appointment is recommended – office number will be shared at a later stage.

Course outline: The contemporary concept of democracy is built on the universal grant of political rights to the citizens of a given polity. However, this formal equality often fails to manifest fully in reality. The likelihood of individuals participating in elections, expressing their voices in demonstrations, or engaging in online debates is highly influenced by various asymmetries, such as gender, ethnicity, geographical origin, socioeconomic status, or educational level. These disparities can result in certain segments of the population being overrepresented in decision-making bodies, creating political representation inequalities.

Moreover, the magnitude of these asymmetries varies globally. Some democracies exhibit relatively high levels of societal participation, as seen in countries like Sweden and Belgium, while others display lower participation levels combined with moderate to high political inequality, as observed in Portugal and Romania. The presence of women, and to a lesser extent minorities and different stigmatized groups, in decision-making bodies also varies considerably. Alongside these variations, common trends affect numerous mature democracies, including the widespread decline in voter turnout and the rise of alternative forms of political action, such as political consumerism and participation in online debates.

This course examines the evolution of these patterns of asymmetries in political participation and representation across Europe. We focus on a diverse set of European countries for two main reasons. First, Europe offers a kaleidoscope of institutional arrangements and diverse political cultures, enriching the comparative perspective

of the course and allowing us to test multiple theories. Second, a significant portion of European citizens share, to some extent, a relevant core of political values and are subject to decisions stemming from a quasi-federal set of institutions. This provides a rich and far from monolithic political landscape for us to explore.

Goals of the course: Upon successful completion of this course, students will be better equipped to comprehend and assess various outcomes in comparative politics, specifically within the context of European politics. By the end, students should be able to:

- Understand how ordinary European citizens engage with their political systems.
- Examine the extent to which the perspectives of politically engaged citizens may or may not be representative of those who are not engaged, depending on the context.
- Articulate the primary theoretical explanations concerning the origins and sources of different forms of political participation and asymmetries of representation.
- Evaluate participation asymmetries among various population groups across multiple countries using simple to intermediate data analysis and visualization techniques.

Course materials, preparation and class-style:

Students are required to go through the materials outlined in the class schedule provided below. On average, there will be approximately 50 pages of reading each week, and it is expected that you complete the assigned readings before each session. These readings will be supplemented with hands-on practice and training focusing on tasks related to the collection, visualization, and analysis of data on political behavior in Europe.

Classes are structured to incorporate a variety of instructional methods, including lectures by the instructor, discussions on the assigned readings, semi-structured debates and practical exercises on data analysis.

Students should actively participate in discussions, sharing their perspectives in a constructive manner while exercising their intellectual freedom and curiosity. If you have any questions or doubts about this, feel free to reach out to the instructor either in person or via email.

Course grading and requirements:

In addition to class participation, you will be required to write two papers of roughly 12 pages (5000 words approx.) each. The first is a paper due **March 15** and should be of a conceptual/theoretical nature. You should send me a proposal of the topic of this first paper until February 5. The second paper is due **April 15** and should be more empirically oriented. Send me an email until March 11 with your proposed topic. I'll give you feedback regarding your picked topics so you can adjust accordingly; individual meetings can be scheduled at this point.

This course is a "Department seminar". Learning to write for the discipline culminates in at least one required "Department Seminar," taken during the junior or senior year, during which each major undertakes substantive

research and a significantly longer paper (generally 25 pages or more) while completing the reading on the course topic. Any course designated as a “Department Seminar” in a given semester carries the registration attribute: COL/GOVT DEPTSEM. By completing a Department Seminar, capped at fifteen students, a GOVT major fulfills the College’s graduation requirement for an “Integrated Writing Course” in the major. In this particular case, rather than writing one long paper you are expected to write two smaller papers (around 5000 words each).

Your final grade is computed as follows: 25% of it will be based on your participation in class; 35% on the first paper; 10% on your presentations of your second paper in class; and 30% on the second paper.

The grade ranges are defined following the guidelines of GU’s Undergraduate Bulletin (available at <https://bulletin.georgetown.edu/regulations/studying/>): A: 4.00; A-: 3.67; B+: 3.33; B: 3.00; B-: 2.67; C+: 2.33; C: 2.00; C-: 1.67; D+: 1.33; D: 1.00; F: 0.00

Academic resources:

Georgetown University offers academic resources including:

- Georgetown University Writing Center (Lauinger Library, 217A; 202-687-4246; <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>)
- Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>)

Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (ARC) (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow their office time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

Academic Integrity:

Students must follow the University Honor Code, which states:

In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system:

- *To be honest in every academic endeavor, and*
- *To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.*

Failure to comply with the Honor Code will result in a grade of F in the course. Additional information concerning Georgetown’s honor system is available at:

<https://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/system/policies/#>.

Laptop use

The course is organized with multiple sessions that necessitate the use of your laptop, although flexibility can be accommodated based on individual student circumstances. I encourage you to perceive this requirement as a chance for learning and skill development, rather than as an opportunity to indulge in social media or read the news (both of which may be important activities outside of class). If you struggle to resist accessing specific websites, consider utilizing browser extensions that limit access to user-defined websites for a specified duration.

Methodological readings

The course requires students to engage in empirical analysis at a beginners' level. Depending on the software of choice and desired level of expertise, are different reference books that students may use. The instructor will provide details at a later stage.

Tentative schedule of topics

Date	Topics	Reading requirements
Jan 11	<p><u>Introduction and welcome.</u></p> <p>In the first session students and instructor will lay out their expectations for the course. Relevant dates, deadlines, and course policies will be discussed. A brief quiz will be taken for the instructor to grasp the level of prior knowledge of students.</p>	Syllabus
Jan 16 Jan 18	<p><u>Foundations: a survey of contemporary European politics</u></p> <p>Europe comprises a wide diversity of political systems. We'll conduct an overview of European politics considering its internal variations and similarities, as long as regional clusters. This historically informed overview sets the stage for the empirical analyses that will follow in the following weeks.</p>	Magone (2019, chaps 1, 2, 3)
Jan 23 Jan 25	<p><u>Concepts and practices of democracy and political participation</u></p> <p>What is political participation and why does it matter? And to what extent is it inextricably linked to democracy? Answers to these questions are not as straightforward as one might expect. We start by reviewing the most influential versions of the concept of democracy and by discussing the impact that seemingly minor theoretical nuances bring into the study of participation. We will also introduce the notion of "modes of participation", which will be helpful to later understanding how and why some people might be involved in some types of political activities but not in others.</p>	<p>Dahl (1967)</p> <p>Coppedge et al (2020)</p> <p>van Deth (2014)</p> <p>Kitschelt and Rehm (2020)</p> <p>Teorell, Ramón Montero, and Torcal (2007)</p>
Jan 30 Feb 01	<p><u>The concepts and practices of representation</u></p> <p>Representation serves as a fundamental pillar in democratic systems, making it possible (at least theoretically) for individuals to have a voice and influence in decision-making processes. We'll study the intricate relationship between representation and democracy, following Hanna Pitkin's typology of understandings of democracy (formalistic, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive).</p>	<p>Pitkin (1967, chap. 1)</p> <p>Dovi (2006)</p> <p>Dovi (2020)</p>
Feb 06 Feb 08	<p><u>(In)equalities of participation and why they matter</u></p> <p>While the contemporary notion democracy is founded upon the equality of citizens, its functioning in practice is characterized by highly asymmetrical access to political resources. For instance, we know that not everyone is equally likely to turn out to vote in elections, and also that some people have an easier time in making their voices heard by decision-makers. We'll discuss the notions of political (in)equality and what they imply to the practical functioning of democracies.</p>	<p>Dahl (2006, chaps 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)</p> <p>Andrews, Janko, and Vo (2022)</p>
Feb 13 Feb 15	<p><u>Bootcamp: Sources and methods in the empirical study of political participation in Europe</u></p>	

	<p>How can we measure and evaluate how widespread different modes of political participation are in the European context? In this hands-on pair of sessions, we will review the most relevant surveys and other datasets at our disposal for the study of participation. With guidance from the instructor, students are expected to start exploring and getting familiarized with these various datasets (European Social Survey, Eurobarometer, World Values Survey, IDEA dataset) and their potential for uncovering inequalities of participation in Europe.</p>	<p>Anduiza and Tormos (2022) de Rooij and Burch (2022)</p>
<p>Feb 21 Feb 23</p>	<p><u>Voter participation: trends, macro-level factors, and the contextual determinants of voter turnout</u></p> <p>Free and fair elections are the central cornerstone of representative of democracy. But for elections to be consequential they need not only to be held; they also require participation by citizens. Voter turnout in Europe varies heavily between and within countries, depending on a large number of contextual and individual-level variables. In this session we will address the most important of these factors and will specifically try to understand the origins of the decline in turnout across Europe.</p>	<p>Blais and Daoust (2020) Blais and Rubenson (2013) Smets and van Ham (2013)</p>
<p>Feb 27 Feb 29</p>	<p><u>Involvement in party activism</u></p> <p>Despite all the technical innovations that have, political parties remain the core institutions bringing together like-minded ordinary citizens into decision-making bodies across Europe. How has party membership evolved in recent decades? What type of citizens are more likely to join parties and how do different types of parties? To what extent are there differences between the membership of new challenger parties and mainstream parties? And how has the function and role fulfilled by parties in democracy evolved over time? We will cover these and other questions as we examine the current prospects for party politics in European democracies.</p>	<p>Mair (2013, chaps 1, 2 and 3)</p>
<p>Mar 12 Mar 14</p>	<p><u>Taking part in demonstrations and social movements</u></p> <p>Informal modes of political participation have acquired notoriety in recent decades in different parts of Europe, particularly among young people. Two examples that stand out in the last decade have been the social movements protesting at the impact of the financial crises and the struggle for climate action. This session will look into the theory and geography of social protests in Europe, and examine the extent to which this mode of political participation attracts a particular type of citizen.</p>	<p>Porta and Portos (2020) Giugni and Grasso (2022)</p>
<p>Mar 19</p>	<p><u>Political consumerism and online participation</u></p> <p>Increasingly, politics is understood not as a self-contained activity which takes place in an impervious arena, but rather as a process occurring in multiple social spaces, including the market. As an increasing number of citizens takes the options to deliberately consume (or boycott) certain products, it is important to understand how widespread this mode of action is becoming and what are its implications. We will also assess the extent to which different types of online behaviors might qualify as political participation and how widespread they are. We will try to address one seemingly simple question: to what extent do online modes of participation foster political equality or, on the contrary, deepen inequality?</p>	<p>Lorenzini and Forno (2022) Earl and Kenski (2022)</p>

Mar 21	<p><u>Should we attempt to increase political participation and improve representation? A normative debate</u></p> <p>In this session we will discuss the arguments in favour and against tackling political inequality. Should there be an active effort to mobilize those who typically would not vote nor engage in other modes of participation? Or is there a risk in pushing citizens who lack knowledge and autonomous will to participate into public matters? A semi-structured debate will be held with two teams defending opposing sides.</p>	Brennan and Hill (2014)
Mar 26	<p><u>Can political participation be increased, and inequalities reduced?</u></p> <p>Regardless of where we normatively stand on the desirability to decrease political inequality, a number of institutional innovations have proved to be highly effective in reducing it. In this session we discuss the potential of various policies aimed at increasing the diversity of the pool of participatory citizens, looking in particular into how underrepresented groups might become more engaged in the political realm.</p>	Borge (2017) Zhuravskaya, Petrova, and Enikolopov (2020)
Apr 02 Apr 09	<p><u>Inequalities of political representation: asymmetries of gender, social class, and ethnic background among European decision-makers</u></p> <p>Do inequalities of participation translate into asymmetries of representation? In these two sessions we will address the extent to which different groups are (under)represented in European politics. We will also explore how different sorts of inequality might intersect or crosscut one another.</p>	Ares and Häusermann (2023) Phillips (2020) Paxton, Hughes, and Painter (2010) Ruedin (2020)
Apr 11	<p><u>Implications of political inequality: linking asymmetries in participation to policy outcomes</u></p> <p>Political inequality is not merely a theoretical concept: in this session we delve into the mechanisms translating inequality of political participation into specific policy outcomes. We will see how differences in the likelihood to vote and participate in other ways by members of different groups of the population have important implications for the type of policies that are eventually adopted and implemented.</p>	Gallego (2015, chap. 7) Elsässer and Schäfer (2023)
Apr 16 Apr 18	<p><u>Challenges ahead and the future configurations of political inequality</u></p> <p>In this final sessions of the course, we will discuss what lies ahead for the study of political participation in Europe and elsewhere. We will specifically look at how increasing levels of participation in Europe might benefit some segments of the society at the expense of others. We will also try to understand if populist parties which are currently disrupting European party systems are able to offset political inequality and contribute, even if partially, to deeper democracies.</p>	Dalton (2022) Della Porta and Portos (2022) Ford and Jennings (2020) Ruth-Lovell and Grahn (2023)
Apr 23 Apr 25	<p><u>Paper discussions</u></p> <p>In these sessions we will discuss the second (empirical) paper of each student. Each paper will be assigned to a fellow student peer reviewer that will contribute to the discussion by highlighting its major points and room for improvement in a constructive manner.</p>	Each student will be assigned a paper from one of their colleagues in order to serve as a discussant.
Apr 30	Wrapping up.	

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