

Place and Politics: Cities versus the rest?

Course title

Place and Politics: Cities versus the rest?

Course catalogue number

7323D045FY

Credits

6 EC

Entry requirements

Core module comparative politics. The course is also available to students who have not followed the Comparative Politics core module. Remedial readings are available on request.

Instruction language

English

Time Period(s)

2024-2025, semester 1, block 1.

Location

Roeterseilandcampus

Lecturer

Dr. T. (Twan) Huijsmans

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Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

In this course we study (the revival of) geographic cleavages across advanced industrialized democracies, with a focus on urban-rural and centre-periphery divergence in electoral outcomes and political attitudes, and a deeper understanding of how place affects individuals' political outlooks.

Throughout the course, students learn to:

- Understand the main concepts and theoretical discussions in the literature on geographic cleavages, such as urban-rural and centre-periphery divides, place-based identities and resentment, and spatial inequalities;
- Understand to what extent inhabitants of different types of places within countries have diverged in their political outlooks;
- Theoretically connect contextual-level spatial inequalities to individual-level political attitudes;
- Engage with causes and potential consequences of (increasing) geographic political cleavages in democratic societies, and formulate potential policy directions based on this;
- Further develop their academic skills, including presenting a case study and embedding this in the broader literature, engaging in discussions on these topics in a classroom setting, engaging with empirical studies and relating these to broader theoretical discussions, and writing a coherent paper about a political science topic from a geographic angle.

Course Contents

Where we live matters for how we see the world and politics. It appears that cities are increasingly bulwarks of progressive and cosmopolitan voters, with rural areas growing more conservative. Indeed, several consequential elections – like the Brexit referendum in the UK or the election of Trump in the US – have sparked the idea of a revival of geographic political divides within democratic societies. As the most recent manifestation, across Europe we see increasingly large and frequent farmers' protest that suggest reviving urban-rural polarisation. The lifestyles, identities and experiences differ between cities and the countryside, leading to fears that these two groups are on different planets in political terms. Many voters in “fly-over” areas feel their region and way of life is not valued by elites in the city, and rise to protest against these elites by supporting the far right.

In general, this idea of (reviving) geographic political cleavages is supported by empirical evidence from primarily the US and other majoritarian democracies. However, geographic cleavages are not equally salient everywhere as recent comparative studies have shown. Geographic divergence is nevertheless argued to have important consequences for the functioning of democracies. How do these geographic divides in the UK and the US compare to countries with other political-institutional and geographic contexts, and how has this developed over the last decades? What types of conflicts underly these electoral divides? And how does ‘place’ affect individuals' political attitudes?

In this course, we study how geographical divides shape politics, and we do so by engaging with the burgeoning literature in political science (but with important insights from geography and sociology) that covers these (and more) questions. We first look at the types of geographic divides that are studied in this literature (e.g. urban-rural, centre-periphery) and how these are theorized and operationalized, before we get an overview of how geographic political divides have developed over time and across countries. Then we go deeper into existing explanations for current divides by incorporating a macro-micro perspective that enables us to understand how spatial inequalities may translate into individual-level political attitudes. In doing so, we focus on the role of place-based group identities, grievances and resentment. Subsequently, we look at the (strategic) roles that elites may play: what strategies do political parties and

candidates employ, and how are, for example, 'the city' and 'the countryside' covered and portrayed in media and popular culture? Finally, we address whether we could or should address these geographic cleavages from a policy perspective, and cover potential implications for democracy.

Teaching methods/learning formats

Weekly seminars, which require intensive preparation in the form of handing in short memos about the week's literature, and during which we discuss and synthesize the weekly readings in relation to the broader scientific literature and apply the insights from the readings.

Manner & Form of Assessment and Assessment Requirements & Criteria

The assessment takes place in the following ways.

1. Participation & preparatory memos (20%)

Class attendance is compulsory. Students are not allowed to miss more than two seminars. If you are going to miss a class, please notify the lecturer in advance (you do not have to state a reason). Insufficient preparation and/or a lack of active participation counts as an absence too.

Out of the first 6 seminars students are required to write 5 preparatory memos. This memo is about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 page (maximum) and relates to questions regarding the week's topic and literature. For each memo, the detailed course overview below provides instructions and suggestion regarding the content of the memo. Students can pick from these instructions and suggestions and are expected to hand in a coherent memo that shows engagement with the required readings and an explicit connection to at least one of the readings.

The goal of the memos is for the student to understand an article, theory, concept, or social-political phenomenon better, and collectively the memos serve as input for in-class conversations about the literature and the social phenomena under discussion that week.

This means that some (parts from) submitted preparatory memos will return during the seminar as a basis for discussion, so students can be asked to elaborate on their memo briefly. The preparatory memo's should be handed in on Canvas, at the latest at 23.59 the day before the corresponding seminar. The five memos together will be graded and account for 20% of the final grade.

2. Assignment: Paper (60%)

In the second part of the course students write a final paper on a puzzling social phenomenon that is relevant to the broader topic of the course. This could be an election outcome, a political party or candidate, a geographically polarized issue, a political-geographical development in a specific (type of) country, etc.

Students pose a research question about the specific phenomenon under study and aim to answer this by applying insights from the literature discussed in this course. They explicitly apply at least 3 readings from the required literature in total. These 3 readings should not all be assigned in the same week, to guarantee a broader perspective on the phenomenon under study. Moreover, students explicitly apply insights from two *additional* readings that were *not* assigned under the required readings (so they look these up themselves). They conclude their assignment with a brief reflection on how well the phenomenon under study can be explained by applying the literature to it, and what this learns us in terms of new research questions and/or caveats in the current state of the literature.

The paper will account for 60% of the final grade. The length of the paper should be in the range of 2000-2500 words. Elaborate instructions on the paper assignment will be made available on Canvas in due time.

3. Presentations (20%)

Each student gives two short presentations during the course (max. 5 min each). The average grade of the two presentations will count for 20% in the final grade of the course. In the first seminar, we will schedule the presentations so that every student knows in which seminar to present.

In the first part of the course, each student will once briefly present the content of their memo that was handed in on the day before the seminar, in max. 2 or 3 slides. On the final slide, the student poses 2 questions to start off a broader in-class discussion about the literature that was applied in the memo.

In the second part of the course, students start to work on the proposal for the final paper, and subsequently on the paper itself. Each student will give a short presentation on either the proposal or the paper-in-progress (depending on in which session the student's presentation is scheduled). The presentation will again be max. 5 minutes and 2-3 slides. The aim is to receive some feedback on the (proposal of) the paper-in-progress from other students and the instructor.

Examination scheme

Assessment form	Deadline	Type of assessment	Weight (%)	Compensable (Yes/No)	Resit (Yes/No)
Preparatory memos	Day before each seminar, first 3 weeks (min. 5)	Grade for the 5 memos combined	20%	Yes	No
Presentations	Presentations will be scheduled in first meeting	Grade for the two presentations combined	20%	Yes	No
Assignment: Final paper	October 23rd, 23.59h.	Grade	60%	Yes	Yes

Rules regarding Fraud and Plagiarism

The provisions of the Regulations Governing Fraud and Plagiarism for UvA Students apply in full. Access this regulation at <https://student.uva.nl/en/topics/plagiarism-and-fraud>.

Literature/materials

See the full bibliography in the week-by-week programme below. We will read several chapters from the book *The Rural Voter* (Jacobs & Shea, 2023). This book can be accessed through the UvA library, following https://lib.uva.nl/permalink/31UKB_UAM1_INST/gq32c0/alma9942007632105131, when on the UvA campus or using UvA-VPN. All other texts are available through Google Scholar (often requiring UvA-VPN too).

Date Final Grade

The final grade will be available 15 working days (maximum) after the last assignment is handed in.

Weekly schedule

Week	Class	Date	Topic	Remarks
36	1	Sept 2	Introduction & course overview	Deadline memo 1: sept 1, 23.59h. <i>Scheduling of presentations</i>
	2	Sept 4	Introduction of concepts	Deadline memo 2 sept 3, 23.59h
37	3	Sept 9	Geographic divides in comparative perspective I : elections	Deadline memo 3: sept 8, 23.59h
	4	Sept 11	Geographic divides in comparative perspective II: attitudes and values	Deadline memo 4: sept 10, 23.59h
38	5	Sept 18*	Macro-micro perspective I: composition and context explanations	
	6	Sept 20*	Place-related attitudes I: identities and stereotypes	Deadline memo 5: sept 19, 23.59h
39	7	Sept 23	Place-related attitudes II: grievance and resentment	
	8	Sept 25	Macro-micro perspective II: residential context, place-based attitudes and geographic divides	
40	9	Sept 30	Supply side I: political discourse	
	10	Oct 2	Supply side II: media and culture	
41	11	Oct 7	Spatial inequalities, justice and policy I	
	12	Oct 9	Spatial inequalities, justice and policy II	
42	13	Oct 14	Wrap-up: integration & implications for democracy	
	14	Oct 16	Wrap-up: gaps in the literature, remaining questions + course evaluation	
43	No classes			Deadline paper: Oct 23, 23.59

* Note that classes 5 and 6 in week 38 take place on Wednesday and Friday, be sure to check times and locations carefully in your online schedule

Overview of seminars and readings

Class 1. Introduction and course overview

Who are my fellow classmates? Who is the lecturer? What are the aims of this course? Which topics are we going to discuss and why? What are the rules and regulations for this course? Who is going to present what and when?

Readings:

- *Introduction Chapter, p.1-11* from Jacobs, N. F., & Shea, D. M. (2023). *The Rural Voter: The Politics of Place and the Disuniting of America*. Columbia University Press.
- Scala, D. J., & Johnson, K. M. (2017). Political Polarization along the Rural-Urban Continuum? The Geography of the Presidential Vote, 2000–2016. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 672(1), 162–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716217712696>
- Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2020). The Rise of Populism and the Revenge of the Places That Don't Matter. *LSE Public Policy Review*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.4>

Preparatory memo:

Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you cover the following questions: what (political) news events from the last few years did inspire you to follow this course? (Why) is this an example of a geographic political divide? Which research questions do you have based on this? Is there anything you are really curious about that you didn't see covered in the course overview?

Class 2. Introduction of concepts

What are we talking about when we discuss geographic political divides? How can we conceptualize and operationalize this?

Readings:

- Chapter 2: 'Who and What is Rural America?', p. 23-29, from Jacobs, N. F., & Shea, D. M. (2023). *The Rural Voter: The Politics of Place and the Disuniting of America*. Columbia University Press.
- Kühn, M. (2015). Peripheralization: Theoretical Concepts Explaining Socio-Spatial Inequalities. *European Planning Studies*, 23(2), 367–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.862518>
- Nemerever, Z., & Rogers, M. (2021). Measuring the Rural Continuum in Political Science. *Political Analysis*, 29(3), 267–286. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2020.47>
 - Specific focus on paragraphs 1, 2, 3 & 7. You can skim through paragraphs 4, 5 and 6.

Preparatory memo:

Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you cover (some of) the following questions: Based on the assigned readings, think about your place of birth, would you 'objectively' describe it as urban or rural and why, how do you think most inhabitants identify, how does it shape how they perceive politics? Based on this, is anything lacking in the conceptualization? Would different conceptualizations/dimensions of urban-rural or centre-periphery in the articles lead to different classifications of your home town?

Class 3. Comparative patterns in geographic political divides I: Elections

Have urban-rural political divides increased over time? How does that differ between countries? What are common underlying trends that can explain these patterns?

Readings:

- Huijsmans, T., & Rodden, J. (2024). The Great Global Divider? A Comparison of Urban-Rural Partisan Polarization in Western Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241237458>.
- Storper, M. (2018). Separate Worlds? Explaining the current wave of regional economic polarization. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 18(2), 247–270. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lby011>
- Lee, B. A., & Sharp, G. (2017). Ethnoracial Diversity across the Rural-Urban Continuum. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 672(1), 26–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716217708560>
 - You can skip the 'other variables' subsection in the Methodology section
 - You can skip the subsections 'diversity exposure' and 'accounting for diversity' in the Results section.
- Sevincer, A. T., Kitayama, S., & Varnum, M. E. W. (2015). Cosmopolitan cities: The frontier in the twenty-first century? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6(OCT). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01459>

Preparatory memo:

Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you cover the one of the two following sets of questions:

Option 1: Which country or type of country has not been studied longitudinally and should be very interesting to include? What patterns would you predict there? What could we learn from including it, in light of potential explanations for urban-rural political divides?

Option 2: what kinds of societal processes are not mentioned in this week's readings, that may be very important for explaining urban-rural political divides? Why do you think so?

Class 4. Comparative patterns in geographic political divides II: Attitudes

What underlies geographic divides in voting behaviour? On which types of issues do inhabitants of different places diverge in their opinions?

Readings:

- McKay, L., Jennings, W., & Stoker, G. (2023). What is the geography of trust? The urban-rural trust gap in global perspective. *Political Geography*, 102, 102863. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.102863>
- Luca, D., & Kenny, M. (2024). Drifting further apart? Europe's trends of urban-rural political polarisation should not be overstated. *Political Geography*, 114, 103181. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2024.103181>
- Arndt, C., Halikiopoulou, D., & Vrakopoulos, C. (2023). The centre-periphery divide and attitudes towards climate change measures among Western Europeans. *Environmental Politics*, 32(3), 381–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2022.2075155>
- Stein, J., Buck, M., & Bjørnå, H. (2021). The centre-periphery dimension and trust in politicians: the case of Norway. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 9(1), 37–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2019.1624191>

Preparatory memo:

Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you cover (some of) the following questions: what kinds of politically relevant attitudes did you not see in this week's literature and why would you want to see this studied, what would you expect? Through what underlying explanations that are discussed in this week's literature would this divide (potentially) emerge? Or would we need alternative explanations? Do you see any signs of such a divide in the news, politics, or in the academic literature?

Class 5. A macro-micro perspective on geographic divides I: introduction, context and composition

How do residential contexts affect individuals' political attitudes? What can we infer about individuals' beliefs and attitudes when we look at contextual data?

Readings:

- Maxwell, R. (2019). Cosmopolitan immigration attitudes in large European cities: Contextual or compositional effects? *American Political Science Review*, 113(2), 456–474. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000898>
- Hartevelde, E., van der Brug, W., de Lange, S., & van der Meer, T. (2022). Multiple roots of the populist radical right: Support for the Dutch PVV in cities and the countryside. *European Journal of Political Research*, 61(2), 440–461. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12452>
- Schraff, D., & Szczepanski, R. (2022). United or divided in diversity? The heterogeneous effects of ethnic diversity on European and national identities. *European Union Politics*, 23(2), 236–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14651165211063770>

Preparatory memo:

Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you cover (some of) the following questions: Take a place (or region) you've ever lived, describe how it developed over the last few decades in terms of some contextual factors covered in this session's literature, and/or in terms of the demographic composition. If available, refer to some regional or local statistics to substantiate your claims. Based on the literature, formulate expectations about how the 'political color' of this place has evolved over time as a consequence of these changes. If available, check election results to see whether it matches your expectations. If not, what other factors may be of importance, that you haven't seen in this session's literature?

Class 6. Place-based attitudes I: identities and stereotypes

How do identification processes help to explain why local contexts can affect individuals' political attitudes? What images do people hold about people from other types of places?

Readings:

- Lyons, J., & Utych, S. M. (2021). You're Not From Here!: The Consequences of Urban and Rural Identities. *Political Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09680-3>
- Zollinger, D. (2024). Place-based identities and cleavage formation in the knowledge society. *Electoral Studies*, 88, 102768. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2024.102768>
- Hegewald (2024) → link will be shared later

Class 7. Place-based attitudes II: group consciousness, grievances and resentment

Beyond merely identification: the role of consciousness, grievances and resentment for understanding geographic political divides

Readings:

- Chapter 5: 'Down and Out in Rural America?', from Jacobs, N. F., & Shea, D. M. (2023). *The Rural Voter: The Politics of Place and the Disuniting of America*. Columbia University Press.
 - You can skip the paragraphs 'Rural economy then and now' & 'The current state of the rural economy'.
- Chapter 3: "The Contours of Rural Consciousness", in Cramer, K. J. (2016). *The Politics of Resentment: Rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
 - You can skip over the transcripts of the conversations, except for:
 - The transcripts on pages 68/69
 - The short transcript on page 78
- de Lange, S., van der Brug, W., & Harteveld, E. (2022). Regional resentment in the Netherlands: A rural or peripheral phenomenon? *Regional Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2022.2084527>
- Hegewald, S. (2024). Locality as a safe haven: place-based resentment and political trust in local and national institutions. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31(6), 1749–1774. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2291132>

Class 8. Macro-micro perspective II: contextual inequalities, place-based attitudes & political attitudes

Bringing it all together: How can we theorize from geographic inequalities to geographic polarization via the individual level?

Readings:

- Huijsmans, T. (2022). Place resentment in 'the places that don't matter': explaining the geographic divide in populist and anti-immigration attitudes. *Acta Politica*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-022-00244-9>
- Lunz Trujillo, K. (2022). Rural Identity as a Contributing Factor to Anti-Intellectualism in the U.S. *Political Behavior*, 44(3), 1509–1532. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09770-w>
- Arzheimer, K., & Bernemann, T. (2023). 'Place' does matter for populist radical right sentiment, but how? Evidence from Germany. *European Political Science Review*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773923000279>

Class 9. The Supply Side I: strategies and discourse of political elites

How do parties and politicians talk about place? What role does geographic backgrounds of candidates play for voters?

- Chapter 3: 'Manufacturing the myth of 'Real America'', from Jacobs, N. F., & Shea, D. M. (2023). *The Rural Voter: The Politics of Place and the Disuniting of America*. Columbia University Press.
- Schulte-Cloos, J., & Bauer, P. C. (2021). Local Candidates, Place-Based Identities, and Electoral Success. *Political Behavior*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09712-y>

- Munis, B. K., & Burke, R. (2023). Talk Local to Me: Assessing the Heterogenous Effects of Localistic Appeals. *American Politics Research*, 51(5), 655–669.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X231173402>
- Rooduijn, M. & De Lange, S.L. (2023). The Resurgence of Agrarian Populism. *The Loop, ECPR's Political Science Blog*. <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/the-resurgence-of-agrarian-populism/>

Class 10. The Supply Side II: portrayals of the urban and the rural in media and popular culture

How does the media and popular culture (books, tv shows, movies, etc.) portray the urban and the rural? What does that matter for how people perceive these places, and how inhabitants of these places perceive politics?

Readings:

- Chapter 7: 'Clinging to their Guns and Religion?', from Jacobs, N. F., & Shea, D. M. (2023). *The Rural Voter: The Politics of Place and the Disuniting of America*. Columbia University Press.
- Jansson, A. (2013). The hegemony of the urban/rural divide: Cultural transformations and mediatized moral geographies in Sweden. *Space and Culture*, 16(1), 88–103.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331212452816>
- Eriksson, M. (2010). "People in Stockholm are smarter than countryside folks" – Reproducing urban and rural imaginaries in film and life. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 26(2), 95–104.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2009.09.005>

Class 11. Theories of spatial justice and objective spatial inequalities

How can we think about just distributions of resources, representation and recognition across places? How do these types of objective inequalities relate to inhabitants' perceptions?

Readings:

- van Vulpen, B., & Bock, B. (2020). Rethinking the Regional Bounds of Justice: A scoping review of spatial justice in EU regions. *Romanian Journal of Regional Science*, 14(2).
<https://research.rug.nl/en/publications/rethinking-the-bounds-of-regional-justice-a-scoping-review-of-spa>
- Huijsmans, T. (2023). Why some places don't seem to matter: Socioeconomic, cultural and political determinants of place resentment. *Electoral Studies*, 83, 102622.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.102622>

Class 12. Spatial inequalities and potential policy directions

Readings:

- Iammarino, S., Rodriguez-Pose, A., & Storper, M. (2019). Regional inequality in Europe: Evidence, theory and policy implications. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 19(2), 273–298.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lby021>
- van Vulpen, B. (2022). The 'right' policy for regional development: seeking spatial justice in the Dutch case of the region deals. *European Planning Studies*, 1–19.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2022.2140584>
- Chapter 11: 'Bridges across the Urban-Rural Divide', from Jacobs, N. F., & Shea, D. M. (2023). *The Rural Voter: The Politics of Place and the Disuniting of America*. Columbia University Press.

Class 13. Wrap-up: integration of the assigned literature and potential implications for democracy

In this class we summarize and integrate the literature that we have covered in the previous six weeks, and we zoom in on some topics based on the interests expressed by the students in the preparatory memos and in the in-class discussions. We also discuss what the findings from the literature could imply for the functioning of contemporary liberal democracies. Finally, there will be some time to ask questions about your final paper that you have started working on already.

Readings:

- Readings may be assigned (in due time) based on questions that came up in previous class meetings

Class 14. Wrap-up: Remaining questions and gaps, plus course evaluation

In this class we conclude the course by discussing any remaining questions that students may have about the topics covered in the course, there will be time for individual questions about the students' final papers, and we discuss some of important gaps that remain in the vastly expanding literature on geographic political divides. Also, we take some time to evaluate the course.