

Political Geography: Spatial Inequality and Political Divides in Contemporary Democracies

Course title

Political Geography: Spatial Inequality and Political Divides in Contemporary Democracies

Course catalogue number

7324D102IY

Credits

9 EC

Entry requirements

A background in (comparative) political science, (political) geography or (political) sociology can be useful, but is not required to follow this course.

Instruction language

English

Time Period(s)

2025-2026, semester 1, block 2&3.

Location

Roeterseilandcampus

Lecturer

Dr. T. (Twan) Huijsmans

Email: t.m.huijsmans@uva.nl

Office: REC B10.00

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes

In this course we study geographic cleavages across advanced industrialized democracies, with a focus on urban-rural and centre-periphery divergence in electoral outcomes and political attitudes. We focus on literature about spatial inequalities that may underlie these divides to get a deeper understanding of how (changing) places affect individuals' political outlooks, and what this means for contemporary politics.

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;
- Adopt a macro-micro perspective when analyzing geographic political divides. That is, to theoretically connect contextual-level spatial inequalities to individual-level political attitudes;
- Understand place-sensitive policy directions to deal with spatial inequalities
- Engage with causes and potential consequences of (increasing) geographic political cleavages in democratic societies, understand policy debates, 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, and writing a coherent paper about a political science topic from a geographic angle.

Course Contents

In recent years, the political divide between urban and rural areas has become increasingly visible, fueling debates about deepening spatial polarization in democratic societies. Major electoral outcomes such as Brexit, the elections of Donald Trump, and the rise of far-right parties across Europe have spotlighted potential political consequences. The alleged discontent in so-called “places that don’t matter” raises urgent questions about democratic representation and spatial justice.

This course provides a critical and comparative examination of geographic political cleavages. We cover geographic political divides across a broad set of countries with different political-institutional and geographic contexts, explore different typologies of geographic cleavages (e.g. urban–rural, core–periphery), and investigate how they are theorized and measured across contexts.

The course adopts a macro-micro analytical lens to investigate how structural spatial inequalities — for example, regarding demographic decline, economic marginalization, and local culture — intersect with individual-level political attitudes and identities. We further examine how elites, parties, and media discourses construct and mobilize spatial identities, and how these place-based narratives can have political consequences.

Finally, we assess normative and policy implications. Can place-sensitive policies address the root causes of spatial political discontent? How can policies targeted at 'shrinking regions' foster territorial cohesion and democratic legitimacy?

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 (10 %) & preparatory memos (10%)*

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.

For the first 5 seminars students are required to write preparatory memos. This memo is **minimum ¾ to maximum 1 page (line spacing up to 1.15 & font size up to 12 points)**. It relates to questions regarding the week's topic and literature. For each memo, the detailed course overview below provides instructions and suggestions 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. During the first five seminars, 3-4 students will briefly present the content of their memo (see presentations below).

The preparatory memos 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 10% of the final grade. Participation in general accounts for another 10%.

2. *Final paper: Research proposal (60%)*

The final paper asks you to design a research proposal on a topic related to the geographic dimensions of politics. The goal is not to carry out the research itself, but to show that you can take insights from the course literature and translate them into a focused, feasible, and meaningful research project. You will formulate a clear research question, situate it within existing debates, develop theoretical expectations, and think through possible data and methods. In doing so, the paper should demonstrate both scientific motivation (how your project builds on and contributes to the academic literature) and societal relevance (why the question matters beyond academia). (*Length: 3,500 words (+/- 10%), excluding references.*)

Before class 7 students will hand in an outline of their research proposal idea. To write this, they follow the instructions for the research proposal assignment as outlined at the end of the course manual. For a short instruction on the outline itself see Class 7 in the overview of seminars and readings.

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. The presentation schedule will be

shared on Canvas before the first class, so that every student knows in which seminar to present. If you cannot present on your assigned date, contact the lecturer well in advance to reschedule

In the first five seminars, each student will once briefly (max. 5 minutes) 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 seminar 6 and 7, each student will give a short presentation on their outline for the final paper. The presentation will again be max. 5 minutes and 2-3 slides. The aim is to learn from each other's ideas and to receive some feedback on the outline from other students and the instructor.

Examination scheme

Assessment form	Deadline	Type of assessment	Weight (%)	Compensable (Yes/No)	Resit (Yes/No)
Participation and preparatory memos	Day before each seminar (weeks 1-5)	Grade for the 5 memos combined	10% + 10%	Yes	No
Presentations	Presentation schedule has been shared on Canvas	Grade for the two presentations combined	20%	Yes	No
Assignment: Final paper	January 16th, 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>.

Specific rules for AI-use

1. All written work handed in for assessment should be authored in its entirety by the student. In other words, no text can be included that is written by artificial intelligence (AI) or someone else, unless this is in the form of a quote.
2. It is permitted to have someone else assist with copy- editing of the text after writing a first draft. This draft must be retained and kept available for future inspection. The editing assistance may come from a natural person or from AI. Any copy-edited text should be reread and if necessary, re-edited by the submitting student. The student alone is responsible for the quality of the work.
3. Any search for empirical material or academic literature may also be assisted by natural persons as well as tools such as search engines, AI or other tools. The student should be aware that the information gathered in such a manner may contain biases, omissions, may not be up to date or contain other inaccuracies. Regardless of where information was found, information used in assignments must always be referenced with sources that have been carefully studied by the student

Literature/materials

See the full bibliography in the week-by-week program below. Most texts are available through Google Scholar (often requiring UvA-VPN). We will read several chapters from the book *The Rural Voter* (Jacobs

& Shea, 2023), which will be distributed through Canvas, and so will the book chapter by Cramer (2016). If you have trouble accessing the literature, immediately let the lecturer know.

Date Final Grade

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

Weekly schedule

Class	Date	Topic	Remarks
1	31-10	Introduction & course overview <i>Who is who? What are we going to do? Introduction of important concepts</i>	<i>3-4 students present their memo and lead a short discussion</i>
2	07-11	Geographic divides in a comparative perspective <i>How do geographic electoral and attitudinal divides compare across countries and over time?</i>	<i>3-4 students present their memo and lead a short discussion</i>
3	14-11	Macro-micro perspective <i>Compositional and contextual explanations, identities, and macro-level divides</i>	<i>3-4 students present their memo and lead a short discussion</i>
4	21-11	The supply side <i>Political discourse, media and popular culture</i>	<i>3-4 students present their memo and lead a short discussion</i>
5	28-11	Spatial inequalities and spatial justice	<i>3-4 students present their memo and lead a short discussion</i>
6	05-12	Policy directions & presentations	<i>Half of the class presents their outline for the research proposal assignment</i>
7	12-12	<i>No class</i>	Deadline: Hand in the outline of your research proposal before 14-12, 23.59h. *
8	19-12	Wrap-up & presentations Place, polarization, and implications for democracy <i>Hybrid set-up: possibility to join online if abroad</i>	<i>Half of the class presents their outline for the research proposal assignment</i>
No classes: work on your final paper			
	16-01	Deadline final paper: 23.59h.	<i>To be handed in on Canvas</i>

*Half of the students will present their outlines a week before the deadline, the other half a week after the deadline when already having received some feedback. That will be taken into account when evaluating the presentations. Students in the first group are not expected to have the final version of their outline ready; they will just present a draft of a full outline and collect some feedback. Students in the second group will have had more time to work on their outline, and the opportunity to make use of the general feedback given in the first presentation session. They will present the final outline that they handed in, possibly with some adjustments based on received feedback if they had time to incorporate this.

Overview of seminars and readings

Below you find the assigned readings for every seminar. To help you navigate the readings, for some articles/chapters I have specifically noted where to focus on, and which parts to even skip if you want. In general, it is important to focus on the key takeaways of the readings and not to get stuck in less relevant details. There are a few general guidelines below.

Reading guidelines

1. *Start with the big picture*

Read the abstract, introduction, and conclusion carefully. These sections usually contain the central research question, main findings, and contribution to the literature.

2. *Focus on the argument, not every detail*

Your goal is to understand what the authors are trying to show and why it matters, not to memorize every regression specification or robustness check. Therefore, for this course you can skim the method/empirical strategy sections. Pay attention only to the general design (e.g., survey, experiment, observational study, case study) and the intuition behind it.

3. *Look for the key evidence*

In the results section of empirical articles, identify the main tables/figures that support the authors' claims. Focus on the headline results rather than every coefficient.

4. *Think critically, not passively*

While reading, ask yourself: What is the main question? Why is this question important? Do the results convincingly support the argument? And, *importantly*, how does this article connect to the other readings or to broader debates?

5. *Use selective depth*

If you find a particular methodological approach, or sidenote in an article very relevant for your own work or just very interesting, feel free to dig deeper and to ask further questions about it. Ultimately, it is not only about what I think is important to take away from the readings, but also what *you* think is interesting, relevant and important. The instructions above are just meant to help you prepare for class, but everything you want to do more is of course highly encouraged.

Besides readings, in most weeks you are also expected to write *a short preparatory memo of minimum 3/4 page and maximum 1 page*. The instructions for these memos are also in the overview below. In general, it is good to keep in mind that you are not expected to answer all the questions in the instructions in detail in your memo, because you should keep it at max. 1 page. Therefore, pick a few of the questions you think are interesting, or most fitting to your case, and focus on these.

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? How do you conceptualize geographic divides?

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.

- 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>
- Chapter 2: 'Who and What is 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.
 - Focus on p. 23-29 about the difficulties of measuring 'rurality'
 - Then skip to p. 56-58 on 'Reconsidering the urban-rural divide'
- 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 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. Comparative patterns in geographic political divides

Have urban-rural political divides increased over time? How does that differ between countries? What are common underlying socioeconomic and demographic 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>.
- 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>
 - Focus on the theoretical motivations for why these attitudes may differ between types of places, briefly look at how centre-periphery was operationalized, and read the conclusion and discussion
- 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>
- 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>
 - Focus on the first three paragraphs
- 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.

Preparatory memo:

Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you cover (some of) the following questions: Based on last week's readings, think about your place of birth, would you 'objectively' describe it as urban or rural or

something in between – and where would you situate it at the centre-periphery continuum – and why? How do you think most inhabitants identify? Based on this, is anything lacking in the existing conceptualizations? Would different conceptualizations/dimensions of urban-rural or centre-periphery in the articles lead to different classifications of your home town? If you look at electoral patterns in your home town, does it fit with the general trends in this week's readings? Conclude by briefly mentioning what we learn from closely studying the geographic characteristics and electoral patterns in your home town.

Class 3. A macro-micro perspective on geographic divides

How do places affect individuals' political outlooks? And how do the people affect the political colour of a place?

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>
- Hartevelt, 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>
- 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
- 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’.
- 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>

Preparatory memo:

Pick a place. For example, a place or region you’ve ever lived, or just a place that you find interesting. Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you cover (some of) the following questions: Describe how this place 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 4. The Supply Side: discourse of political elites and portrayals of place in popular culture and media

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

- You may skip the paragraph ‘Fighting abortion, amnesty, and acid: The politics of conservation reaction since 1960’ (p.99-106)
- 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/>
- 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.
 - You may skim through the analyses on p. 249-270. Just make sure to get the general implications.
 - Focus on the paragraphs ‘Rural culture in mass entertainment’ and ‘The dangers of stereotypes’.
- 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>

Preparatory memo:

Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you cover (some of) the following questions: Can you think of a recent political speech, campaign, or media portrayal (film, TV, music, social media, etc.) where “place” was invoked? How does it resonate with the arguments in this week’s readings? How are urban and rural places portrayed in the example you picked? Do you see stereotypes at work, or efforts to challenge them? If applicable, what role do local origins or “place-based” appeals play for the political candidate or party in your example? Based on this week’s readings, what are the possible consequences of the ways in which politicians and popular culture talk about places in your example for how people perceive those places, and how inhabitants themselves perceive politics? Conclude by briefly reflecting on how studying this supply side example (politicians, parties, and cultural/media portrayals) adds to our understanding of geographic political divides.

Class 5. Spatial inequalities and spatial justice

In what ways can we approach the question of fair distribution of resources, political voice, and symbolic recognition across different places? How do such measurable inequalities connect to how residents themselves experience and interpret them?

Readings:

- Zahl-Thanem, A., & Rye, J. F. (2024). Spatial inequality in higher education: a growing urban–rural educational gap? *European Sociological Review*, 40(6), 1067–1081. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcae015>
- Gingrich, J. (2025). Regional Inequality and the Knowledge Economy: North America and Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287241312110>
- Morris, K., & Oesch, D. (2025). Uneven shifts: the geography of occupational change in France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom, 1992–2018. *European Societies*, 27(1), 4–30. https://doi.org/10.1162/euso_a_00015
- Cremaschi, S., Rettl, P., Cappelluti, M., & de Vries, C. E. (2024). Geographies of discontent: Public service deprivation and the rise of the far right in Italy. *American Journal of Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12936>
- Rico, G., García del Horno, R., & Hernández, E. (2025). Rural representation in Europe: The presence of place in national parliaments. *Electoral Studies*, 96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102962>
- 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>

Preparatory memo:

Write a short memo (3/4 to 1 page max.) in which you apply insights from this week's readings to a party program of your choice (national or regional). Motivate briefly why it is interesting to look at this specific party program. In your memo, cover (some of) the following questions: Which kinds of spatial policies can you identify in the program? (e.g. education, jobs, infrastructure, public services, representation, rural support, urban renewal) What types of inequalities do these policies seek to address—material, political, symbolic, or a combination? What ideas of justice seem to underlie the proposals? Are they mainly about redistribution of resources, giving voice and representation, or recognition of particular places and identities? How do the policies you found compare with the challenges and debates discussed in the readings (e.g. educational divides, occupational change, public service deprivation, rural representation, place resentment)? Conclude with a brief reflection: do you think the party's approach meaningfully addresses spatial inequalities, or does it risk leaving certain dimensions unaddressed?

Class 6. Place-based policies + presentations

How do governments and supranational institutions attempt to address uneven development across regions? How effective have spatial policies been in tackling persistent regional inequalities? How do residents perceive these interventions? The first half of the group briefly present their paper outline

- MacKinnon, D., Kinossian, N., Pike, A., Béal, V., Lang, T., Rousseau, M., & Tomaney, J. (2025). Spatial policy since the global financial crisis. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 32(3), 243–260. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09697764241287376>
 - You may skim through the paragraph “The evolution of spatial policy since 2008”
- 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>
- Maneuvrier-Hervieu, P., Azzollini, L., & Jeannet, A.-M. (2025). Cultivating trust? The role of European Union investments in bridging rural-urban divides. *Electoral Studies*, 98, 102987. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ELECTSTUD.2025.102987>

No preparatory memo

Hand-in a first outline in bullet points and short sentences for your final paper on Canvas before 11-12, 23.59h. The outline should be a maximum 1,000 words (excluding references). Consult the instructions for the final paper, so that you know what the final paper should look like.

For the outline, you can be very brief and use bullet points here and there, just to show the general idea you have, with some ideas for the argumentation. For example, instead of spelling out the whole theoretical argumentation, you can briefly mention the sources they will use, and why, to make certain points. The goal of handing in the outline is to receive oral and written feedback on the overall idea from the lecturer, before starting to write the final assignment. The outline should include a maximum of 1,000 words (excl. references).

Class 7. Wrap-up + presentations

In this session, we bring together and synthesize the key insights from the past six weeks of readings. We will also reflect on how the literature's findings speak to broader questions about the polarization in

contemporary democracies. The second half of the group briefly present their paper outline. Toward the end of class, there will be space to address any questions regarding the final paper.

Readings:

- Lelkes, Y. (2016). Mass polarization: Manifestations and measurements. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(S1), 392-410.
 - *Note:* the goal is to understand the different definitions of polarization, you don't have to understand the technical discussion of measurement.
- Hegewald, S., & Schraff, D. (2025). Is the Urban-Rural Divide Affectively Polarised? Comparative Evidence from Nine European Countries. *Comparative Political Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140251369317>
- 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>
- 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.

No preparatory memo

Class 8. Working on the paper

Students work on their paper and one-by-one receive personal feedback on the outline they handed in previously. There is also time to ask further questions about the final paper or on the content of the course. Attendance is compulsory, except if students have travelled home for the winter break. In that case, please notify the instructor well beforehand.

No preparatory memo

Final Paper: Research Proposal

The final paper asks you to design a research proposal on a topic related to the geographic dimensions of politics. The goal is not to carry out the research itself, but to show that you can take insights from the course literature and translate them into a focused, feasible, and meaningful research project. You will formulate a clear research question, situate it within existing debates, develop theoretical expectations, and think through possible data and methods. In doing so, the paper should demonstrate both scientific motivation (how your project builds on and contributes to the academic literature) and societal relevance (why the question matters beyond academia). The total length of the paper is 3,500 words (+/- 10%), excluding references. See below for detailed instructions by paragraph, and a grading scheme.

1. Introduction

Your **introduction** sets up the topic and motivates your project. Keep it clear, focused, and engaging.

- **Start with the broader puzzle**
Introduce the general theme of geographic political divides and why it matters today.
- **Narrow it down**
Clarify whether you focus on a specific country, region, voter group, outcome variable, or a specific type of explanation.
- **State your research question**
Make it specific, researchable, and politically/societally relevant.

Criteria for a Good Research Question:

- **Clarity** – Frame your topic as a clear, focused question rather than a broad statement. This helps in narrowing down the research scope.
 - **Analytical** – Aim for questions that require analysis, such as exploring causes, reasons, and motives, rather than merely descriptive inquiries.
 - **Significant** – Ensure your question addresses an important issue in the field, contributing to existing knowledge and offering insights into relevant topics.
 - **Feasible** – Consider the scope of your research question to ensure it is manageable within the constraints of a potential master thesis, including time and resource limitations. In doing so, keep in mind what kind of data you would need to answer the question, and include potential data sources when available.
-
- **Explain the scientific motivation**
What does your project add to the literature? Are you testing a theory, applying it to a new context or outcome variable, or using new data? Etc. How does that add to our existing knowledge, and why are these potential new insights important?
 - **Describe the societal relevance**
Describe how your research question connects to real-world issues. Why does it matter beyond academia? What practical implications or societal challenges does it relate to? How could your findings inform public debates or policy? Relate this to some of the readings on policy implications.
 - **Outline the structure of the research proposal**
Briefly explain what the next paragraphs will cover.

*Length: about 500–1000 words **

2. Theory and Hypotheses

This section sets up your theoretical framework and leads to your testable hypotheses.

- **Define central concepts**
- **Engage with relevant literature**
What have others found and/or argued? Don't just summarize the literature, but show how existing work motivates your question, frames your theoretical expectations, or provides competing explanations. Make clear where your project fits in
- **Build your argument**
How does your independent variable affect your dependent variable? What is the mechanism?
- **Formulate testable hypotheses**
Your hypotheses should follow logically from your argument and be directional.
- **(Optional, but recommended) Add a conceptual diagram**
Visualize key relationships

*Length: 1500-2000 words depending on complexity. **

3. Data and Method

Briefly explain how you could answer your research question with either quantitative or qualitative data.

- What is your **unit of analysis**? (e.g., individuals, municipalities, regions, parties)
- What is your research **sample, case or comparison**?
- What are your **key variables**? How could they be measured? How does that relate to your main concepts?
- What dataset could you use? (Or would you have to gather new data?) Why does it fit your research question?
 - If you propose to use an existing dataset, have a look at the codebook or the dataset itself to ensure feasibility of your proposal (this does not mean you have to analyze the data)
- (Briefly) What (statistical) methods could you apply to analyze the data and test your hypotheses?
In case of qualitative data, how would you analyze your data to answer your research question?

*Length: 500-1000 words **

* These are suggested ranges; your overall paper should be ~3,500 words (+/-10%).

Assessment weighting:

- Introduction: 25%
- Theory and hypotheses: 30%
- Data and method: 30%
- Style, clarity, and coherence: 15%

Make sure to also add a signed AI statement as an Appendix to your research proposal. See the AI in the appendix of the course manual.

Research Proposal Grading Scheme

Section	Insufficient	Sufficient	Good	Excellent
Introduction (25%)	Topic and motivation are unclear or too broad. Research question is missing, vague, or purely descriptive. No link to literature or real-world relevance.	Topic is introduced but lacks focus. Research question is somewhat clear but imprecise or weakly motivated. Scientific or societal relevance is mentioned but not well integrated.	Clear and focused introduction. Research question is well-formulated, relevant, and feasible. Scientific motivation and societal relevance are addressed but could be more strongly connected.	Engaging, sharply focused introduction. Research question is precise, researchable, and highly relevant. Demonstrates strong understanding of academic debates and compelling societal motivation. Clear structure preview.
Theory and Hypotheses (30%)	Theoretical discussion is missing or superficial. Key concepts are undefined. No link between theory, literature, and hypotheses.	Some relevant literature discussed, but engagement is limited or overly descriptive. Hypotheses are underdeveloped or not clearly derived from theory.	Solid theoretical foundation. Engages with relevant literature and shows awareness of competing explanations. Hypotheses follow logically from argument but could be more precise or theoretically grounded.	Excellent command of theory and literature. Integrates sources to build a clear and original argument. Hypotheses are precise, directional, and well-justified by the theoretical framework.
Data and Method (30%)	No clear plan for empirical testing. Unit of analysis, data, or variables not specified or inappropriate.	Some effort to outline data and methods, but feasibility, fit, or clarity are lacking. Concepts and measures only loosely connected.	Coherent and realistic plan for data and methods. Data sources, variables, and methods are appropriate and feasible. Some links between theory and operationalization could be stronger.	Excellent methodological reasoning. Data choices and methods clearly fit the research question and hypotheses. Demonstrates strong understanding of feasibility and validity. Links between concepts, variables, and measurement are well explained.
Style, Clarity, and Coherence (15%)	Writing is unclear, disorganized, and contains errors. Logical flow is missing. References incomplete or inconsistent.	Writing is understandable but sometimes unclear or repetitive. Structure is uneven. Some referencing or formatting issues.	Writing is clear and coherent, without language or formatting errors. Logical flow between sections. Proper referencing.	Writing is elegant, concise, and engaging. Excellent organization and transitions. References and formatting fully consistent. Professional academic style throughout.

APPENDIX: Rules regarding Fraud and Plagiarism

The provisions of the Regulations Governing Fraud and Plagiarism for UvA Students apply in full. Access this regulation at <http://www.student.uva.nl/preventfraud-plagiarism>. All unsupervised assessments are submitted to a Turnitin Plagiarism check.

Specific rules for AI-use

1. All written work handed in for assessment should be authored in its entirety by the student. In other words, no text can be included that is written by artificial intelligence (AI) or someone else, unless this is in the form of a quote.
2. It is permitted to have someone else assist with copy_ editing of the text after writing a first draft. This draft must be retained and kept available for future inspection. The editing assistance may come from a natural person or from AI. Any copy-edited text should be reread and if necessary, re-edited by the submitting student. The student alone is responsible for the quality of the work.
3. Any search for empirical material or academic literature may also be assisted by natural persons as well as tools such as search engines, AI or other tools. The student should be aware that the information gathered in such a manner may contain biases, omissions, may not be up to date or contain other inaccuracies. Regardless of where information was found, information used in assignments must always be referenced with sources that have been carefully studied by the student.
4. Each unsupervised assignment must contain a formal declaration of authorship and a detailed account of any assistance rendered towards the drafting of the final product. If AI was used, all prompts used must be listed. To this end, the form below should be used.

All the writing in this assignment is mine	Yes/No
I have refrained from the use of AI	Yes/No
I have used AI to copy-edit my text	Yes/No
I have used AI with the following prompts	My prompts:

Name, signature, and date: