

Mirko Wegemann (he/him)

Department of Comparative Politics

Scharnhorststraße 100

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Office Hours: Tuesday 14:00-15:00 (by appointment) author2un=0,uniquepart=base,hash=613d0a926cceb268a0ee730d265d401efamily=Abou-

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Summer Term 2025

Party Competition in Western Europe

Seminar Dates

The seminar takes place every week on Wednesday from 10:00 to 12:00 (c.t.). The first session takes place on 09 April 2025 and the final session will be held on 21 July 2025. The seminar is open to graduate students and will take place in English.

Course Overview

This seminar zeros in on the role of political parties for democracies in Western Europe. After a brief recap on their origins and functions in the democratic system, we will proceed in three blocks. In a first block, we will focus on the demand side, discussing recent changes in the advancements in the analysis of voting behaviour. Do voters try to maximize their own utility when voting for a party or do they rather follow their peers or more emotional motives? We will then proceed by analysing political parties as strategic actors. How do parties find their niche in existing party systems, under which conditions do they decide to change their position on a political issue? Finally, in a third block, we will discuss the impact of political institutions, such as the electoral system, on party competition. When do electoral systems increase party system fragmentation, which systems lead to a personalization of political parties?

Credits can only be granted if participants read and engage with the readings before the seminar and pass the seminar requirements.

Learning Outcomes

The course will familiarize you with key concepts of party competition. You will learn what parties are and how they are embedded in different party systems. Following the empirical literature we are reading, you will better understand current demand- and supply-side dynamics in Western party systems. Moreover, you will be able to assess the role of institutions on both voters and the elite. In three practical-oriented sessions, you will get to know different data sources to examine voters, parties and institutions.

We will deal with various aspects of party competition in Western Europe. In the end, your learning outcomes heavily depend on your own interest. The writing of your essay and term paper will further sharpen your theoretical knowledge on the respective topic and your methodological know-how on the research design you propose.

Requirements

The amount of credits granted depends on the programme you are enrolled in. Keep in mind that each ECTS amounts to about 30 hours of working time. The final mark is composed of the following components. A successful seminar participation requires the following tasks to fulfil (estimated hours based on $7 \text{ ECTS} * 30 = 210$)

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| • regular attendance and active participation in discussion | 18 hours |
| • questions on two empirical articles | } 192 hours |
| • essay | |
| • term paper (graded) | |

Attendance and Questions on the Readings

Students should regularly attend the seminar. In case you miss a session, please inform me about your absence. Attendance requires active participation in class which presumes careful reading of the literature. Please be aware that this is a reading-intense class. Most of the sessions are based on mostly two main readings and several complementary readings. The main readings are compulsory for everyone, the complementary readings contain further information that can support you in writing your essay and term paper.

When reading the empirical paper: There are different reading techniques but you should always take notes – either during or directly after reading the text. Focus on the core message of the author. Try to identify the puzzle and the question an author presents, their arguments, and the general methodological approach (for a first read, do not get lost in the details!). Then always ask yourself whether you can follow the argumentation. On which point do you disagree and why? Once you are able to summarize the core idea of a paper within two minutes, you are ready to go. If you have problems in understanding the text, write them down and we'll try to clarify them in class.

For two sessions of your choice (except for week 1, 2, 6, 11 and 15), you are asked to write down three different questions about the readings. You are, in general, free to choose in which sessions you would like to submit your questions, but for a better distributions across sessions, the number of students submitting questions to a seminar session is limited to two. These can be informed by the questions you had on the readings but should not be comprehension questions about the text (these can and should be raised separately in class). For instance, while your written questions should not ask what the main results of the article are, you could ask about the wider implications of a research finding for gender equality or political representation etc. Each question should clearly relate to an article which was assigned for the class.

Essay

Aside from the questions you submit in advance to the class, you are asked to write an essay as part of your *Studienleistung*. You can decide to write your essay in preparation for week 6 or week 11. The topics are given.

The essays should be no longer than three pages (12 font size, 2.5cm margins, 1.5 spacing). You are asked to evaluate the given question and to thoroughly outline an argument which allows you to take sides on the question. Moreover, you need to present descriptive empirical evidence for your argument, either quantitative or qualitative evidence. Additional literature, either those you can find in the complementary readings or via the library, Google Scholar, etc. helps to further substantiate your argument.

There will be two roundtable sessions in which you either act as an expert or commentator. As an expert, you will briefly present the argument you made in your essay. As a commentator, you will read one of the essays in advance and ask questions to the experts.

Research Paper

In case you need a grade, you need to submit a term paper on one of the topics covered (6,000 words \pm 10%, font size 11/12, 1.5 spacing, justified text, margins 2.5cm). Please list the number of words on your title page. The paper is due 30 September.

The term paper can be based on your essay. It should follow the basic structure of an academic paper. At the core of your paper should be the research question you would like to study. You should outline its societal and academic relevance. You should then review the existing literature on which base you develop your own theoretical framework formulating testable research hypotheses. Moreover, you need to propose a research design that is comprised of a data and method section. In the data section, you should refer to and describe potential data sources you could use to study your hypotheses. In the method section, you need to elaborate which kind of method you would apply to test the hypotheses. You are not required to present a complete analysis of your question. However, you should present at least some descriptive evidence that allows you to test your hypotheses.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism and ghostwriting are forbidden. Written assignments may be checked for plagiarism using the plagiarism software Turnitin.

Students are required to use referenced work in their assignments with proper documentation and citation. To facilitate the citation workflow and prepare for future assignments in the programme, students are encouraged to use reference software. The University of Münster provides access to Citavi via AcadCloud on a reduced price. Alternatively, students can use the open-source software Zotero. When in doubt about proper citation, please refer to the Leitlinien zum wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten provided by the Department of Political Science.

You need to be transparent about the usage of AI tools at the end of your submitted writings (Which tools did you use? Which prompts did you issue?). AI can be a helpful tool for coding, language editing and information retrieval. Still, please keep in mind that you are expected to submit original work which is based on your *own* ideas. Your creative process can be assisted by AI tools. However, you need to attach a complete list of prompts you used during your research as an appendix to your manuscript. If you fail to be transparent, you'll

fail the class.

Inclusiveness

To promote inclusiveness, this seminar aims to use gender-inclusive language. Participants are invited to share their pronouns with the class.

To allow for a dynamic feedback culture, students are encouraged to regularly submit (anonymous) feedback via Google Forms (link tba) or by sending me a mail.

Readings and Timetable

Week	Date	Topic	Main Readings	Complementary Readings
1	09 April 2025	Introduction		
2	16 April 2025	Concepts	“Party Systems” (2011)	“Political Parties” (2021) <i>Designing Social Inquiry</i> (1994) <i>The Fundamentals of Political Science Research</i> (2018)
3	23 April 2025	Cleavages and Partisan Realignment	“The Social Bases of Political Parties” (2023)	“Brahmin Left Versus Merchant Right? Education, Class, Multiparty Competition, and Redistribution in Western Europe” (2021) <i>Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives</i> (1967)
4	30 April 2025	Polarization	“A New Global Gender Divide Is Emerging” (2024) “Who Dislikes Whom?” (2023) “Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament?” (2019)	“Affect, Not Ideology” (2012) “Affective Polarization in Multiparty Systems” (2021)
5	07 May 2025	Changing Contexts	“Neither Left Behind nor Superstar” (2022) “Economic Risk within the Household and Voting for the Radical Right” (2021)	<i>West European Politics in the Age of Globalization</i> (2008) “Did Austerity Cause Brexit?” (2019)
6	14 May 2025	Roundtable Session		
7	21 May 2025	Issue Competition	“Mainstream Parties and Global Warming” (2024)	“Extreme Weather Events Do Not Increase Political Parties’ Environmental Attention” (2024) “Measuring Policy Positions in Political Space” (2014) “Issue Yield” (2014) “The Fulfillment of Parties’ Election Pledges” (2017)
8	28 May 2025	Parties’ Identity Appeals	“Beyond Policy” (2022) 13 “Why Parties Can Benefit from Promoting Occupational Diversity in Legislatures” (n.d.)	<i>Gendered Targeting</i> (2023)

Introductory Readings

The following readings are not compulsory. However, they can guide you through the process of writing and provide you with a broader perspective on the future of democracy.

On the comparative method:

1. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research, New Edition*. (1994). Princeton University Press
2. *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. (2021). Yale University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1c29t27>
3. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research* (3rd ed.). (2018). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108131704>

On voters:

1. *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*. (2008). Cambridge University Press
2. *Voters under pressure: Group-based cross-pressure and electoral volatility*. (2023). Oxford University Press

• On parties:

1. *Political entrepreneurs: The rise of challenger parties in Europe*. (2020). Princeton University Press
2. *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy*. (2013). Verso

On writing:

1. *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. (2014). CQ Press

• Overview of datasets for Political Science: PolData by Erik Gahner

Week 1: Introduction [09 April 2025]

There is no need to prepare anything from your side. We will talk about the structure of the seminar, expectations and your pre-knowledge on the issue.

Week 2: Concepts [16 April 2025]

In this session, we will discuss the method of comparison in political science and introduce some key concepts in the study of party competition.

Main readings

1. Party Systems. (2011). In R. Goodin (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhpb/9780199604456.013.0030>

Complementary readings

1. Political Parties. (2021). *Foundations of European Politics* (pp. 132–154). Oxford University Press. Retrieved March 12, 2025, from <https://www.oxfordpoliticstrove.com/display/10.1093/hepl/9780198831303.001.0001/hepl-9780198831303-chapter-8>
2. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research, New Edition*. (1994). Princeton University Press
3. *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research* (3rd ed.). (2018). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108131704>

Week 3: Cleavages and Partisan Realignment [23 April 2025]

In a first session on the demand-side of party competition, we will discover the social basis of voting behavior and discuss how these have changed in recent times. The second part of the session will be a lab on data sources that grasp attitudinal trends on the voter-level.

Main readings

1. The Social Bases of Political Parties: A New Measure and Survey. (2023). *British Journal of Political Science*, 53(1), 249–260. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123421000740>

- **Complementary readings**

1. Brahmin Left Versus Merchant Right? Education, Class, Multiparty Competition, and Redistribution in Western Europe. (2021). *The British Journal of Sociology*, 72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12834>
2. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. (1967). Free Press

- **Data:**

1. ESS11 - integrated file, edition 2.0. (2024). https://doi.org/10.21338/ESS11E02_0
2. CSES Module 6 First Advance Release CSES Module 6 First Advance Release. (2024). <https://doi.org/10.7804/CSES.MODULE6.2024-12-17>
3. European Parliament Election Study 2024, Voter Study European Parliament Election Study 2024, Voter Study. (2024). <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14409>

Week 4: Polarization [30 April 2025]

Few concepts in political science have received as much attention as *polarization*. We will distinguish different types of polarization, before assessing existing explanations for the growing political polarization within Western societies.

- **Compulsory readings**

1. A new global gender divide is emerging. (2024). *Financial Times*. Retrieved March 7, 2025, from <https://www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998>
2. Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament? (2019). *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(4), 888–904. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12449>

- **Complementary readings**

1. Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization. (2012). *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(3), 405–431. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038>
2. Affective polarization in multiparty systems. (2021). *Electoral Studies*, 69, 102199. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102199>
3. Who Dislikes Whom? Affective Polarization between Pairs of Parties in Western Democracies. (2023). *British Journal of Political Science*, 53(3), 997–1015. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000394>

Week 5: Changing Contexts [07 May 2025]

Voters are embedded in a changing socio-economic environment. Globalization and technologization are among the most consequential societal transformations in the post-War era. How do voters respond to these new challenges?

- **Main reading**

1. Neither Left Behind nor Superstar: Ordinary Winners of Digitalization at the Ballot Box. (2022). *The Journal of Politics*, 84(1), 418–436. <https://doi.org/10.1086/714920>
2. Economic Risk within the Household and Voting for the Radical Right. (2021). *World Politics*, 73(3), 482–511. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887121000046>

- **Complementary readings**

1. *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*. (2008). Cambridge University Press
2. Did Austerity Cause Brexit? (2019). *American Economic Review*, 109(11), 3849–3886. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20181164>

Week 6: Roundtable Format [14 May 2025]

Essay: Many models in party research are based on the assumption of rational citizens voting for their self-interest. However, some scholars raise doubt that rationality determines political behavior (*Democracy for Realists* 2017). What do you think – do voters follow their own self-interests? If yes, how can we evaluate rational voting? If not, which other motivations appear important? What are the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches to voting?

Week 7: Issue Competition [21 May 2025]

In this session, we will switch the perspective to the supply-side. We discuss parties' policy agendas and how the public and exogenous events affect their attention to specific issues. Moreover, the second part of the session takes inventory of different data sources we can use to trace the programmatic stances of political parties.

• Main reading

1. Mainstream parties and global warming: What determines parties' engagement in climate protection? (2024). *European Journal of Political Research*, 63(1), 303–325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12602>
2. Extreme weather events do not increase political parties' environmental attention. (2024). *Nature Climate Change*, 14(7), 696–699. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-024-02024-z>

• Complementary readings

1. Measuring Policy Positions in Political Space. (2014). *Annual Review of Political Science*, 17(Volume 17, 2014), 207–223. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-061413-041905>
2. Issue Yield: A Model of Party Strategy in Multidimensional Space. (2014). *American Political Science Review*, 108(4), 870–885. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000379>
3. The Fulfillment of Parties' Election Pledges: A Comparative Study on the Impact of Power Sharing. (2017). *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(3), 527–542. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12313>

• Data

1. Manifesto Project Dataset. (2024). <https://doi.org/10.25522/MANIFESTO.MPD.S.2024A>
2. Various country-specific datasets on parties, legislatures, courts etc. by the Comparative Agendas Project The ParlSpeech V2 data set: Full-text corpora of 6.3 million parliamentary speeches in the key legislative chambers of nine representative democracies. (2020). <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/L4OAKN>

Week 8: Parties' Identity Appeals [28 May 2025]

In this week, we deal with another aspect of party competition: parties' appeals to social groups. We will discover which groups parties appeal to and how they establish a group-party linkage.

- **Main reading**

1. Beyond Policy: The Use of Social Group Appeals in Party Communication. (2022). *Political Communication*, 39(3), 293–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2021.1998264>
2. Why parties can benefit from promoting occupational diversity in legislatures: Experimental evidence from three countries. (n.d.). *American Journal of Political Science*, n/a(n/a). <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12951>

- **Complementary readings**

1. Gendered targeting: Do parties tailor their campaign ads to women? (2023). <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/5vs9b>

Week 9: Entrepreneurs and Mainstream Parties [04 June 2025]

Party systems are not static. Almost 60 years after the concept of ‘frozen party systems’ was formulated in cleavage theory (*Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* 1967), we deal with highly volatile party systems. In this week, we will discuss the emergence of new parties and the reaction of established mainstream parties.

• Main reading

1. *Political entrepreneurs: The rise of challenger parties in Europe*. (2020). Princeton University Press – *Chapters 1 & 2*
2. The Causal Effect of Radical Right Success on Mainstream Parties’ Policy Positions: A Regression Discontinuity Approach. (2020). *British Journal of Political Science*, 50(3), 829–847. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000029>

• Complementary readings

1. The Rise and Fall of Social Democracy, 1918–2017. (2020). *American Political Science Review*, 114(3), 928–939. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000234>
2. How the Refugee Crisis and Radical Right Parties Shape Party Competition on Immigration. (2022). *Political Science Research and Methods*, 10, 524–544. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2021.64>
3. When Does Accommodation Work? Electoral Effects of Mainstream Left Position Taking on Immigration. (2022). *British Journal of Political Science*, 52(2), 949–957. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000563>
4. Competition between unequals: The role of mainstream party strategy in niche party success. (2005). *American Political Science Review*, 99(03), 347–359. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055405051701>

Week 10: No Session (Whitsun Holidays) [11 June 2025]

There is no session scheduled in this week.

Week 11: Roundtable Format [18 June 2025]

Essay: In recent years, there has been a steady decline in the vote share of mainstream parties. At the same time, the far-right has gained increasingly at the ballot box. How should mainstream parties react? Should they accommodate the far-right by absorbing their political demands and/or cooperating with them? Or should they distance themselves from the far-right? What do you think? Which advantages and disadvantages do you see with both strategies?

Week 12: No Session (EPSA Conference) [25 June 2025]

There is no session scheduled in this week.

Week 13: Electoral Systems and Party Competition [02 July 2025]

Party competition cannot be fully explained by the behavior of voters, the demand side, and parties, the supply side. Instead, institutions shape the agency and leeway of parties in party systems. This session deals with a crucial institution, the electoral regime, and assesses how it shapes party and voter behavior. The second part of the session will give an overview of potential data sources that bring institutions in our models.

- **Main reading**

1. Electoral Reform and Strategic Coordination. (2021). *British Journal of Political Science*, 51(4), 1782–1791. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123419000747>

- **Complementary readings**

1. The Effect of More Choice on Voter Turnout Causal Evidence from Germany. (2024). *German Politics*, 33(4), 713–739. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2024.2326457>

- **Data**

1. Dataset of Electoral Volatility in the European Parliament elections since 1979 (2024 update). (2024). <https://doi.org/10.7802/2739>

Week 14: Legislatures [09 July 2025]

In our final substantive session, we will deal with legislatures, a crucial institution of parliamentary democracies. We will discuss research on the evolution of legislative institutions and their effect on the political supply side.

- **Main reading**

1. Institutional Foundations of Legislative Speech. (2012). *American Journal of Political Science*, 56(3), 520–537. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00565.x>
2. Do party system parameters explain differences in legislative organization? Fragmentation, polarization, and the density of regulation in European parliaments, 1945–2009. (2022). *Party Politics*, 28(4), 597–610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688211002490>

- **Complementary readings**

1. Committee strength in parliamentary democracies: A new index. (2021). *European Journal of Political Research*, 60(4), 1018–1031. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12426>

Week 15: Your Projects and Wrap-Up [16 July 2025]

This session serves the purpose to summarize what we did during the term, and discuss your open questions.