

New research in European party politics

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Class Room: Bergheimer Str. 58, Room 02.034 Class Hours: Tuesdays, 18:15-19:45

Description

European party systems are undergoing fundamental change. Electoral volatility is rising, mainstream parties – especially social democrats – are losing vote share, and new parties regularly emerge. Meanwhile, voter turnout and party membership continue to decline, adding further unpredictability to government formation and fostering political instability. How can we make sense of these transformations? What are the latest research findings on European party politics?

This seminar explores these questions through two recently published books: Dassonneville (2022) on electoral volatility in Western Europe and Häusermann & Kitschelt (2024) on the decline and electoral strategies of social-democratic parties. Both works offer cutting-edge research and introduce novel conceptual and methodological approaches to studying contemporary European party systems.

The seminar is divided into two thematic blocks, each devoted to one of these major works. We will analyze the books chapter by chapter, discussing their conceptual frameworks, research designs, and empirical findings. In doing so, we will critically evaluate each book's central arguments, with particular attention to methodological choices such as case selection, measurement strategies, and analytical techniques.

While prior familiarity with European party politics and quantitative methods is helpful, no specific background knowledge is required to participate in the seminar.

Course Objectives

This seminar is designed for BA students. The seminar assumes no previous knowledge of the literature. By the end of the seminar, students will achieve several key learning outcomes:

1. Familiarize themselves with the main theoretical approaches in studying European party politics.
2. Become acquainted with the primary methodological approaches used in the study of European party politics.
3. Develop the ability to evaluate research related to the themes discussed in the seminar.

4. Be able to pose a research question relevant to the seminar themes.
5. Learn to argue effectively using the analytical concepts learned throughout the seminar.

Course Requirements

Weekly attendance is mandatory. If you cannot attend, please email me before the respective session. In addition, active participation includes reading the assigned texts, engaging with in-class discussions, asking questions, contributing to debates, and providing constructive peer feedback.

Reading the texts is imperative for the success of the seminar; without having read the readings, the seminar will be very difficult to follow, and over time, the material will become overwhelming.

For 2 credit points	For 2 + 6 credit points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in class • Reading the literature • Doing (group) exercises • In-class presentation (15 mins) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation in class • Reading the literature • Doing (group) exercises • In-class presentation (15 mins) • Term paper (5000 words)

Office Hours

I offer office hours by appointment. Email me if you would like to meet.

We can meet on-site, in room 03.033 (Bergheimer Str. 58, 69115 Heidelberg) or online, using the Zoom link: <https://eu02web.zoom-x.de/my/eborbath>

Online Learning

I provide the course literature via Moodle (<https://moodle.uni-heidelberg.de/>) and also use the platform for general course information. Please contact me with any questions regarding the course literature, technical problems with Moodle, or other organizational issues.

Student presentations and term paper

Presentations

Every student receiving credit points for the seminar must give a presentation in one of the sessions. Each presentation should focus on a key **concept** related to the weekly topic and the broader theme of the seminar (see the list in the weekly schedule below). Students may choose to focus on one or multiple concepts and may prioritize either **theoretical** or **empirical** aspects, or a combination of both, depending on their interest.

The presentation must also go beyond **all required readings for the week**. The students are expected to conduct their own **literature review**, incorporating additional academic sources to contextualize and critically reflect on the chosen concept and its use in political science.

We will allocate presentation slots in the first session.

Presentations should be around 10 minutes long and **no longer than 15 minutes**. **Slides must be submitted by email no later than Monday at 9 AM before your presentation**. All slides will be made available to the class via Moodle.

A strong presentation addresses the most relevant of the following guiding questions:

- **Definition:** How is the concept defined? Are there alternative definitions or debates about it?
- **Disciplinary use:** How is the concept used in political science? What is its intellectual history?
- **Link to the seminar:** How does the concept relate to the seminar's broader themes?
- **Operationalization:** Has the concept been measured empirically? How is it operationalized in research?
- **Data sources:** What data sources are used to measure this concept? Are they publicly available?
- **Causal role:** What are the causes and/or consequences of this concept according to the literature?
- **State of the art:** Is the concept clearly defined and measurable? How is it integrated into empirical research?

Not all questions will apply to every concept. Focus on those most relevant to your chosen topic.

Term Paper

A term paper should be 5000 words, including references and footnotes. The deadline for this paper is the end of the winter term, **30th September, 2025**. The paper is the final 'product' of the seminar, allowing you to showcase what you have learned throughout the semester. **The term paper should present a clear, central thesis and develop it through a coherent argument supported by evidence**. This is the critical requirement for assessment. **You are strongly encouraged to discuss the topic of your paper with me in advance** to ensure it aligns with one of the three paper types and meets the expectations of the assignment.

There are three typical types of papers: 1) empirical analysis, 2) a research proposal, or 3) a book review. The first type of paper provides an overview of one or more empirical cases, focusing on party politics. For example, this could be a qualitative case study of a specific party/ party system or a quantitative analysis of the electorate/ profile of a party or party system. In this type of paper, students apply the analytical frameworks and theoretical approaches discussed in the seminar to analyze their case(s) and extract a central message or conclusion. Even when focusing on a single case, the paper should consider its classification from a comparative and generalizable perspective.

In a research proposal, the student not only formulates a research question but also makes a theoretical proposition or a set of hypotheses based on a critical review of a relevant strand of literature. In addition to what we have discussed in the seminar, the paper should also refer to further reading. To the extent possible, it should go beyond summarizing existing studies by critically engaging with them and using the debate to frame an original argument or a set of hypotheses. In addition, the paper should formulate an appropriate research design to study the

argument or hypotheses, including a brief discussion of methodology (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), operationalization, and potential data sources.

The third type of paper is a review of one or multiple (2-3) book(s) published in the last 15 years by a major university press on a topic related to the seminar. A book review is expected to summarize the central argument, review the structure in which the argument is presented, and consider the extent to which the empirical evidence supports the main argument. A vital element of a successful review is to situate the book(s) within relevant debates and literature. Does it challenge, support, or extend previous studies? How does its approach differ from or complement other major works in the field? The purpose of this is to assess whether the contribution the book(s) claim to make is indeed new to the literature and to what extent it represents a 'breakthrough' or an incremental step in relevant debates. Reading some existing reviews to familiarize yourself with the genre may be helpful. Three journals that regularly publish book reviews are *Comparative Political Studies*, *Party Politics*, and *Perspectives on Politics*.

Academic Writing and Reading

On writing research papers:

Minkoff, Scott L. 2012. "A Guide to Developing and Writing Research Papers in Political Science," https://kevinlyles.digital.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/minkoff_researchpaper_guide_v4.pdf.

On writing a good abstract:

Gilardi, Fabrizio. 2021. "Good Abstracts: A Template," <https://www.fabriziogilardi.org/resources/papers/good-abstracts.pdf>.

Templates for writing:

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. 2018. *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Fourth edition. New York: W. W. Norton. ISBN: 0-393-63167-2. <https://tinyurl.com/bdec4eex>.

On reading efficiently:

Pacheco-Vega, Raul. 2020. "Reading Strategies," <http://www.raulpacheco.org/resources/reading-strategies>.

Note: Raul Pacheco-Vega's blog is a valuable resource for academic writing in general!

Software Recommendation:

I use Google Scholar and Zotero (both freely available) for literature search. For note-taking, I use Obsidian (also freely available). I recommend that you learn how to use these software tools (or their alternatives), as the investment pays off later during your studies. YouTube has many tutorial videos, and I am also happy to help if you have questions.

Academic Integrity and Mental Health

Plagiarism

Students must comply with the university policy on academic integrity found at <https://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/en/service/detecting-plagiarism>. In addition, please also familiarize yourself with

the Study Guide https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/politikwissenschaften/bachelor_recht_en.html. Not knowing the rules is no excuse for plagiarism!

Use of AI

If you use AI (ChatGPT, Claude, etc.) to write your term paper, you are required to be transparent about it. More specifically, list the prompts or if possible, generate links to share the conversations, in a separate appendix at the end of the term paper. This appendix does not count towards the word count. You are allowed to use AI for coding, data analysis, and programming, but remember to critically evaluate AI-generated content and use it as a supportive tool rather than as a primary author. Please remember always to respect the rules of academic integrity and honesty.

Mental Health

Many students feel overwhelmed by the tasks and responsibilities during their studies, especially if they are new to Germany and Heidelberg. This is normal! If you feel that you are not able to cope alone, please consider approaching the psychosocial counselling service offered free of charge by the student services at <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/en/study/advisory-services/psychosocial-counselling-for-students-pcs>. If you are having difficulties, e.g., with the term paper, please do not hesitate to approach me.

Schedule and Readings

Block I: Introduction

Session 1, 15.04.2025 - Introducing the seminar

- Introduce the syllabus
- Clarify expectations
- Divide up the presentations

Block II: Dassonneville (2022)

Session 2, 22.04.2025 – Electoral volatility and change in party support

- What is electoral volatility?
- How has the change in electoral volatility been explained in the literature?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *electoral volatility, cleavages, funnel of causality in voting*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *system-level indices derived from election results: e.g., effective number of parties, polarization, turnout*

Required Readings:

Dassonneville, Ruth. 2022a. "Introduction." In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 1–17. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

Dassonneville, Ruth. 2022b. “How change has been explained.” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 21–31. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

———. 2022c. “How socio-demographic factors have fared over time.” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 32–50. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

Session 3, 29.04.2025 – Partisanship and short-term factors influencing the vote

- Are our partisan preferences part of our identity?
- What is the role of short-term factors in influencing electoral behavior?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *party identification, party identification in Europe and in the United States*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *measuring party identification, marginal effects, distinguishing long- and short-term effects in quantitative analysis*

Required:

Dassonneville, Ruth. 2022a. “Have party attachments weakened?” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 51–74. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

———. 2022b. “Increasingly short term?” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 75–95. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

Session 4, 06.05.2025 – Cross-pressured voters

- Who are cross-pressured voters and why are they important?
- How can we measure the extent to which voters are cross-pressured?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *cross-pressured voters, cross-pressured vs. reinforcing (overlapping) cleavages*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *Dos and don'ts of the development of quantitative indices, regression models, probability-to-vote items*

Required:

Dassonneville, Ruth. 2022a. “Sources of instability - Cross-pressures and unconstrained vote choices.” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 99–118. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

———. 2022b. “Cross-pressured voters.” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 119–140. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

Session 5, 13.05.2025 – The dynamic of cross-pressures

- Do voters face more cross-pressures now than in the past?
- What are the short-term consequences of cross-pressures?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *defining generations, generational differences in political attitudes*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *identifying age-period-generation (cohort) effects*

Required:

Dassonneville, Ruth. 2022a. “Increasingly cross-pressured.” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 141–160. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

———. 2022b. “The impact of cross-pressures - Less constraint.” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 161–176. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

Session 6, 20.05.2025 – Linking individual-level analysis to aggregate consequences

- What are the main conclusions we have learned from this book?
- What are the threats and opportunities of combining individual- and aggregate-level analysis?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *aggregate vs. individual-level analysis & the ecological fallacy, context effects in political science*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *advantages and limitations of working with panel data*

Required:

Dassonneville, Ruth. 2022a. “Cross-pressures, late deciding, and volatility.” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 177–198. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

———. 2022b. “Conclusion.” In *Voters Under Pressure: Group-Based Cross-Pressure and Electoral Volatility*, 199–213. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-19-289413-7.

Block III: Häusermann & Kitschelt (2024)

Session 7, 27.05.2025 – Setting the stage for the analysis of social-democracy

- What are the core principles of the social-democratic idea?
- Why have social-democratic parties been in decline?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *social-democratic ideology, history of social-democracy, new social risks, the effect of globalization on domestic political transformations, the politics of knowledge economies*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *measuring occupational change*

Required:

Häusermann, Silja, and Herbert Kitschelt. 2024. "Introduction and Theoretical Framework" - **only until party strategies!!!** In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 1–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Session 8, 03.06.2025 – Strategic options available for social-democrats

- What possible strategies are available for social-democrats?
- What are the implications of following different strategies for the position of social-democratic parties in the political space?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *party strategies, history of the old vs. new-left conflict*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *measuring party positions*

Required:

Häusermann, Silja, and Herbert Kitschelt. 2024. "Introduction and Theoretical Framework" - **only party strategies!!!** In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 43–70. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Session 9, 10.06.2025 – Shifting support for social-democratic parties

- Where are contemporary social-democratic parties the strongest in Europe?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *rural vs. urban differences in political attitudes & behavior, competitors of social-democratic parties*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *strengths and weaknesses of studying vote-switching using cross-sectional surveys, measuring the knowledge economy*

Required:

Gingrich, Jane. 2024. "The Changing Geography of the Social Democratic Vote." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 73–101. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Abou-Chadi, Tarik, and Markus Wagner. 2024. "Losing the Middle Ground - The Electoral Decline of Social Democratic Parties since 2000." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 102–119. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Session 10, 17.06.2025 – The profile of social-democratic voters

- How can we characterize the core voters of social-democratic parties?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *the role of occupation in influencing electoral preferences, social class analysis in current research*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *Oesch occupational schema, strengths and weaknesses of studying vote-switching using panel surveys*

Required:

Ares, Macarena, and Mathilde M. Van Ditmars. 2024. "Who Continues to Vote for the Left? Social Class of Origin, Intergenerational Mobility, and Party Choice in Western Europe." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 120–140. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Bischof, Daniel, and Thomas Kurer. 2024. "Lost in Transition - Where Are All the Social Democrats Today?" In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 141–162. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Session 11, 24.06.2025 – The competitive environment of social-democratic parties

- What is the electoral potential of social democratic parties in the different parts of Europe?
- To what extent is the social-democratic electorate differentiated from the electorate of other parties?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *the role of education in influencing electoral preferences*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *approaches in working with voter-flow data*

Required:

Häusermann, Silja. 2024. "Social Democracy in Competition - Voting Propensities, Electoral Potentials and Overlaps." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 163–190. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Kitschelt, Herbert, and Philipp Rehm. 2024. "Voter Switchers and Social Democracy in Contemporary Knowledge Capitalism - How Voter Rationales Signal Strategic Dilemmas of Social Democracy." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 193–215. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Session 12, 01.07.2025 – Determinants of party strategies

- What is the role of trade unions in influencing social-democratic parties?
- What is the popularity of different types of party strategies?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *different types of welfare states, party-movement interactions, old vs. new left party programs*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *indices to measure trade union strength/unionization*

Required:

Häusermann, Silja, Herbert Kitschelt, Nadja Mosimann, and Philipp Rehm. 2024. "Labor Unionization and Social Democratic Parties." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 216–248. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Abou-Chadi, Tarik, Silja Häusermann, Reto Mitteregger, Nadja Mosimann, and Markus Wagner. 2024. "Old Left, New Left, Centrist, or Left National? Determinants of Support for Different Social Democratic Programmatic Strategies." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 249–275. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Session 13, 08.07.2025 – Electoral trade-offs

- How does the success of party strategies differ in the short term vs. the long term?
- What are the electoral trade-offs involved in parties' strategic decisions?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *electoral trade-offs, Nash equilibrium, incentives and payoffs*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *payoff matrix, agent-based modeling*

Required:

Polk, Jonathan, and Johannes Karreth. 2024. "Voter Responses to Social Democratic Ideological Moderation after the Third Way." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 279–313. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Kitschelt, Herbert, and Philipp Rehm. 2024. "Social Democracy and Party Competition Mapping the Electoral Payoffs of Strategic Interaction." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 314–341. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Session 14, 15.07.2025 – Electoral consequences

- What are the electoral consequences of austerity policies for social-democratic parties?
- What role do leaders play in the success of social-democratic parties?

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *austerity policy, structural reforms, spending vs. revenue-based consolidation, personalization*

Keywords related to the empirical approach:

- *measuring fiscal consolidation, studying leadership effects*

Required:

Bremer, Björn. 2024. "The Electoral Consequences of Centrist Policies - Fiscal Consolidations and the Fate of Social Democratic Parties." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 342–365. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Somer-Topcu, Zeynep, and Daniel Weitzel. 2024. "Leadership Turnovers and Their Electoral Consequences A Social Democratic Exceptionalism?" In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 366–392. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.

Session 15, 22.07.2025 – Concluding session

- What have we learned from this seminar?
- Feedback session on the content and organization of the seminar.

Keywords related to the conceptual framework:

- *alternative explanations of the decline of social-democratic parties*

Required:

Häusermann, Silja, and Herbert Kitschelt. 2024. "Conclusion." In *Beyond Social Democracy: The Transformation of the Left in Emerging Knowledge Societies*, edited by Silja Häusermann and Herbert Kitschelt, 393–422. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 978-1-00-949682-7. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009496810>.