

**Conference of the Research Section „Comparative Politics“¹
of the German Political Science Association
(Deutsche Vereinigung für Politikwissenschaft, DVPW)**

“Citizen’s trust and societal polarization in times of transformation.

Comparative Perspectives from different world regions”

March, 27th – March 28th 2025, Saarland University

NOW OPEN: CALL FOR PAPERS AND CLOSED PANELS

Deadline September 30, 2024

Application procedure

After having received proposals for panels, we now open the **second phase** of the application procedure with a call for three categories of panels and papers. This application phase **will end on September 30, 2024.**

- **Paper submissions directed to one of the open panels (see below):** Papers can be submitted to one of the panels proposed for the conference (see the list below). Paper submissions should include a title and an abstract of 250 words. Please send the paper proposals to the conference mail address tagung-dvpw-vergleich-2025@uni-saarland.de as well as to the respective panel chairs.
- **Papers unrelated to one of the panels:** Paper proposals can also be directly sent to the conference organization team. We will then create panels that comprise thematically related papers. Please send the paper proposals to the conference mail address tagung-dvpw-vergleich-2025@uni-saarland.de.
- **Closed panel proposals:** We also invite closed panel proposals. These should include a panel abstract, panel chairs as well as a maximum of 4 papers related to the scope of the panel with title and abstracts. Please send the panel proposals to the conference mail address tagung-dvpw-vergleich-2025@uni-saarland.de.

The team of organizers will inform submitters of papers and closed panels by October 11, 2024.

Please visit also the [conference homepage](#) for more information.

¹ Organized by Saarland University & University of Duisburg-Essen at Saarland University, Saarbrücken (Germany), in cooperation with: DVPW Standing Group “Demokratieforschung”, DVPW Standing Group „Diktatur- und Extremismusforschung“, DVPW Standing Group „Europa- und Regionalismusforschung“, DVPW Standing Group „Political Parties“. Local Organizers: Daniela Braun, Kristina Weissenbach and Georg Wenzelburger.

The topic of the conference

The main objective of this conference is to examine from various perspectives one of the most pressing issues of representative democracies: Citizen's (dis-)trust in "their" political system, in institutions and politicians. To contextualize the study of trust and distrust more broadly, we also welcome submissions that examine the linkage between citizens and the state more generally – a linkage that can be expressed in different ways (for example: public opinion/citizens' attitudes; political behavior such as political participation, party membership and affiliation, civic engagement, protest behavior, but also feelings or emotions).

Across different world regions, citizens face times of rapid or long-term transformation related to migration and integration, climate change, technological change, gender inequalities, Europeanization or region-specific challenges, among other issues. These transformations cause uncertainty, frustration, the feeling of not being represented, insecurity or hate on the side of many citizens while others embrace the challenges in an entrepreneurial way. In Democracies around the world we observe the rise of societal polarization, social divides and disconnection between citizens and the state and a new quality of distrust and mistrust in established politicians and political institutions.

These developments raise important questions – theoretically, empirically and practically – about how to regain citizen's trust, to create solidarity and to re(build) linkages between citizens and the state in order to overcome the rise of societal polarization around the world. They become particularly pressing in light of new parties (such as challenger/populist/extreme parties) and players who add to these polarization processes and benefit from it.

The 2025 Conference of the Research Section "Comparative Politics" of the German Political Science Association wants to bring together scholars who examine these developments of citizen's trust, linkage and societal polarization in context of the aforementioned transformations. We encourage panels and papers who examine various facets of these findings in a comparative way and invite regional, European and global perspectives. We especially welcome panel and paper proposals that focus – in addition to the supply side – on the demand side of citizen's trust or even include citizen science approaches into their research designs. Contributions could for instance examine:

- Citizen's attitudes and different forms of behavior and representation as part of citizen's trust in democracies around the world.
- The role of new parties and new players for societal polarization processes and citizen's (dis-)trust in established structures and politicians of democratic political systems.
- The connection between transformational processes in specific policy areas (migration and integration, climate change, technological change, gender inequalities, Europeanization, region-specific challenges) and citizen's (dis-)trust in democracy.
- New forms of participation, membership, affiliation and civic engagement within and beyond established institutions of democracy.
- The role of AI and innovations in these engagement processes.
- New forms of participatory governance strategies.
- The nature and role of public spaces in these processes.
- Emotional and psychological aspects of (dis-) trust and (dis-)linkage.

The Comparative Politics Research Section encourages different theoretical, conceptual and methodological approaches and welcomes the growing body of methods used in the field, in order to improve our understanding of the various facets of citizen's (dis-)trust. It is open to

various sub-disciplines, with different methodological and empirical approaches and with scopes ranging from single case studies to large-N comparative papers.

The conference topic is the result of two international research projects which are part of the Horizon Europe programme: ActEU (led by University of Duisburg-Essen & Saarland University) and PROTEMO (led by Saarland University).

Technical information

- The meeting aims to attract established scholars along with young academics (Ph.D. candidates and postdoctoral researchers) from across the world. It is a central aim of the German Political Science Association to increase the proportion of young scientists and women at its events, who are therefore particularly encouraged to apply.
- Panels are 90 minutes in length and may comprise at maximum four individual papers. Linked panels may also be considered. Both open panel ideas inviting paper submissions and complete panel proposals will be considered.
- The panels can be (in their entirety) in either German or English. The working language of the conference is German and English; a limited number of closed panels in French may also be invited. DVPW *Standing Groups* and *Thematic Networks* or a team of *at minimum two individual scholars* are eligible to submit panel proposals.
- As part of the Conference a Business Meeting of the Section as well as a practitioner's panel in cooperation with NRW School of Governance / Institute for Political Science (UDE) will be organized. We will open some of the panels to a wider audience to make political science research more visible to the general public. A conference website will be available here: be found at <https://www.uni-saarland.de/lehrstuhl/braun/forschung-und-aktivitaeten.html>.
- Until **October, 25, 2024** all participants are asked for mandatory conference registration and payment of the conference fee (between 25 and 30 euros; paid via the DVPW conference platform). The conference program will be published in early November. Hotel pre-reservations in Saarbrücken will be open until mid-December.

List of open panels with short abstracts

(Longer abstracts of the panels can also be found on the [conference website](#)).

Panel Title: Polarized publics and political violence

Panel Chair: Morten Harmening (Leibniz University Hannover)
Dominic Nyhuis (Leibniz University Hannover)

Contact: d.nyhuis@ipw.uni-hannover.de

Abstract: Many societies around the world are becoming increasingly polarized. More and more, political opponents view each other not as legitimate competitors for the levers of the power but as veritable enemies with reprehensible political goals, making them seem threatening to the very fabric of society. Viewed in this light, certain political behaviors may seem increasingly justified which would ordinarily be considered taboo between democratic competitors. One of the most egregious violation of democratic norms is the rise in political violence. With woeful frequency we are confronted with acts of political violence against politicians and public servants at all levels of government.

Panel Title: (Dis)United We Stand: Polarization, Public Trust, Global Security & Defense

Panel Chair: Lukas Grundsfield (Free University Berlin)
Djamila Jabra (Saarland University)

Contact: djamila.jabra@uni-saarland.de

Abstract: In the context of the rise of authoritarian regimes and increasing political polarization in the West, the post-Cold War liberal international order is perceived as being in decline, resulting in increasing uncertainties and challenges with significant implications for the trust within and between states. These developments have resulted in a shift in our conceptualisation of security and defence. This panel is dedicated to exploring the nexus of political polarization, trust, and security strategies and defence policies. Inviting a multidisciplinary analysis that includes comparative case studies, discourse analysis, surveys and theoretical approaches to international relations, the panel's contributions will focus on the intricate interconnections between states, international organisations, and non-state actors. The panel thereby seeks to address the question of how these relationships are affecting – and are affected by – political polarization and trust. It thereby contributes to our understanding of how these relationships could be structured in order to ensure effective and sustainable security policies in the context of mounting global challenges. This examination will investigate the role of domestic and international mistrust, its impact on bi- and multilateral security cooperation, and the potential for enhancing trust through more comprehensive risk assessments and the involvement of all relevant actors.

Panel Title: National and European identity in times of political polarisation in Europe

Panel Chair: Philipp König (Saarland University)

Contact: philipp.koenig@uni-saarland.de

Abstract: At a time of increasing distrust in political systems (especially in the EU), political polarization and growing electoral support for right-wing populist parties, social cohesion in Europe seems to be under threat. A common identity is often proclaimed to strengthen social cohesion within political systems, but it can also lead to nationalism or distrust of members of other groups. At the heart of identity issues are questions of 'who are the true people' and what constitutes them - a discourse often exploited by populist parties, further increasing political polarisation. Especially at the European level, different meanings of national and/or European identity can lead to Euroscepticism or support for the EU. The aim of this panel is to explore under what conditions a common identity can be a bulwark against or a catalysator for the growing polarisation in Europe by investigating the following questions: How do different forms of national and European identity relate to relevant issues such as social cohesion and Euroscepticism? How do they relate to (dis-)trust in political systems (e.g., the EU)? How have national and European identities changed in times of rapid social change (e.g., migration and integration, gender roles and inequalities, Europeanisation)?

Panel title: Paths of Representation: Political Careers in Europe and Politician's Connection to Citizens

Panel Chair: Elena Frech (University Bamberg)

Contact: elena.frech@uni-bamberg.de

Abstract: This panel explores the relationship between political careers in the European Union (EU) and citizens, building upon previous research on political careers in the EU (Daniel 2015, Salvati 2016, Scarrow 1997) while addressing recent questions about how these careers impact representation (Bailer et al. 2022, Dodeigne et al. 2025, Dodeigne et al. 2024). By using a variety of methods and data, the papers of this panel seek to understand how the experiences (and identities) of politicians influence who they represent and how. Additionally, it will also explore how politicians' connections to citizens, including their representative approaches, shape their careers within the EU. This discussion is particularly timely given the EU's substantive legislative power that is contrasted by rising concerns about democratic deficits in the EU and citizen dissatisfaction. The panel invites contributions that deepen our understanding of the interplay between political careers and citizen representation in the evolving EU landscape.

Panel title: What are the current major challenges of (European) representative democracy and how can we resolve these issues?

Panel Chair: Daniela Braun (University Saarland)
Kristina Weissenbach (University of Duisburg-Essen)

Contact: d.braun@uni-saarland.de

Abstract: Representative democracy in Europe is currently said to be under pressure: paradigmatic indicators are low turnout in elections together with a more diverse set of protest activities and decreasing levels of political trust in the representative institutions of the state. However, previous research mixes up different attitudinal and behavioural components when analysing representative democracy under pressure, so the empirical findings on this broad phenomenon are still inconclusive. The conceptual as well as empirical linkage between political attitudes and engagement is still underdeveloped. Citizens may display low levels of trust in their representative institutions, distrust their politicians or feel not well represented by them. But is this related to the way they engage with politics?

Panel title: New Methods in Political Polarisation

Panel Chair: Alexander Hartland (Saarland University)

Contact: alexander.hartland@uni-saarland.de

Abstract: Polarisation is an important and complex issue of increasing relevance for the study of politics. As new cleavages and contestations emerge at both the elite and mass levels, capturing polarisation accurately and systematically is more valuable than ever. While the online environment and related technologies may provoke this conflict, it is increasingly clear that they can also contribute to our understanding of the issue of polarisation and add nuance to its measurement. At the same time, researchers find it useful to innovate in the collection, sources, and analysis of large online datasets, combining new and traditional sources of text, image and audio content to compensate for loss of access to some platforms and content. The methods of analysis themselves also continue to develop, with Large Language Models making analysis of large quantities of online political content an increasing possibility, though validation and sustainability remain relevant concerns. This panel will explore the use of these sources and methods, with a focus on how they can enhance our understanding of polarisation. We welcome submissions that use new methods and also apply them to empirical cases, from migration to climate change and Western democracies to other regions and forms of government.

Panel title: Drivers of trust in public institutions: A global perspective

Panel Chair: Veronica Hera (OECD Trust Survey team)

Contact: veronica.hera@oecd.org

Abstract: Trust in public institutions is essential for the effective functioning and legitimacy of democratic systems. Tracking the levels of trust in public institutions can offer valuable insights to public administrations about citizens' experiences with and assessments of policy and service delivery. When there is a high level of trust in public institutions, governments can achieve significant outcomes, such as reducing transaction costs, ensuring compliance with public policies, and encouraging public investments in forward-looking reforms and programmes. Based on recent report findings of the OECD Trust Survey, we would like to propose an open panel looking at differences in trust drivers across different regions of the world. Taking a comparative perspective to the study of trust would enable us to delve deeper into the results and better understand how regional differences shape the factors behind institutional trust and satisfaction with services, while also explaining the differences in citizens' perceptions of day-to-day interactions with government in contrast to long-term complex decision-making processes. Having a broader overview of these relationships can enable us to recognise patterns and understand what lies behind citizens' perceptions in different clusters of countries. This would enable a better interpretation of data, as well as the development of tailored strategies for each country. A similar approach to the above could be taken for country comparisons based on their administrative or electoral systems, to capture the influence of these system-level characteristics on the importance of trust drivers.

Panel title: Polarization about protection? Governments' reactions to insecurity: Patterns, causes and consequences

Panel Chair: Georg Wenzelburger (Saarland University)

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Abstract: As trust in the state to deliver on its promise of security has become brittle in many Western Democracies in these times of polycrisis (Aassve et al., 2024), governments have been struggling with how to respond to the increased feelings of insecurity of their citizens. Protective policies – policies that are communicated by political actors as providing safety and security to citizens – have therefore moved centre stage in political competition, with right-wing populist parties scoring all-time high results with their promises of protection linked to the questions of migration and law and order as well as, depending on the countries, the protection of purchasing power of the “ordinary citizens” (Biard et al., 2019; Bonansinga, 2022). Moreover, the question of who is protected or not may raise new issues of “unequal security” (Starke et al., 2024) and oppose groups in society.

Panel Title: Forms of polarization and polarization processes in developed countries

Panel Chair: Moritz Rehm (Saarland University)

Contact: moritz.rehm@uni-saarland.de

Abstract: Both media and popular social science accounts argue for extreme and further increasing attitude polarization within developed countries. However, are such impressions of extreme attitude polarization actually indicative of population-wide polarization trends, or are they country- or issue-specific impressions that are not always grounded in reality? Are, thus, the trends of increasing societal polarization as described by much of popular discourse, political analysis, and social science theories indeed empirically observable? To answer this question, it is important to not take popular accounts of polarization at face value, but to test claims of strong polarization empirically. It is therefore necessary to measure whether polarization indeed occurs and where it occurs, namely in which countries, times, issue areas and between which groups. It may also be necessary to improve the empirical conceptualization of polarization. And it may be important to highlight the role political actors and other intermediaries, such as social media, play in the process of polarization as well as in its perception.

We invite contributions on the topic of attitude polarization and polarization trends in developed countries. Contributions can be conceptual, inferential, or descriptive, but should be empirically informed, or contribute to empirical research. Topics can be political processes, such as voting behavior, attitudes towards political institutions and/or authority, general trends in social attitudes, changes in specific or overall polarization trends, and drivers of polarization.

Panel title: Meaning and understanding of democracy - The demand side in empirical research of democracy

Panel Chair: Norma Osterberg-Kaufmann, Christoph Mohamad-Klotzbach

Contact: demokratieforschung@dvpw.de

Abstract. The different meanings and understandings of democracy provide considerable explanatory power for understanding why democracy faces challenges in today's world. People have different views of democracy. Some people see democracy as a means of protecting their human dignity by guaranteeing their fundamental rights and freedoms. Conversely, others see democracy as a vehicle for economic progress, improved living standards, and the promotion of effective governance. The divergence of these understandings creates different starting points for individuals to assess democratic practices and form their opinions about democracy. Meanings and understandings of democracy have been an important factor in determining how citizens respond to authoritarian or populist practices in contemporary politics, and these understandings have served as a yardstick by which people judge their existing political regimes, evaluate possible alternatives, and shape their expectations of a "good" regime, as well as the extent and nature of political engagement.

Panel title: Dynamic interrelations between political trust and political parties

Panel Chair: Benjamin Höhne (TU-Chemnitz)

 Kristina Weissenbach (University of Duisburg-Essen)

Contact: benjamin.hoehne@phil.tu-chemnitz.de

Abstract: Political trust and political parties are traditional core objects of political culture research. Political trust is regarded as a form of expression of generalized and lasting support for a system by a country's citizens. It is usually granted to political parties to a much lesser extent than to constitutional institutions that are more distant from politics, such as a constitutional court. As intermediary organizations, parties ideally bring the combined interests of the population into the state's decision-making processes, they act as linkage between citizens and the state. They also play an important role in the outcome by being responsive to the people.

This panel encourages different theoretical, conceptual, and methodological approaches and welcomes the growing body of methods used in party research, in order to improve our understanding of the various facets of citizen's (dis-)trust in political parties and the interrelations between political trust and political parties. We also would like to invite proposals based on citizen science approaches, which take up experimental, applied learning, and foresight perspectives. The panel is open to paper proposals with scopes ranging from single case studies to large-N comparative papers. The panel aims to attract established scholars, postdoctoral researchers, and young academics (Ph.D. candidates) from across the world. It is a central aim of the German Political Science Association to increase the proportion of young scientists and women at its events, who are therefore particularly encouraged to apply.