

# **From Warsaw ice-breakers to research teams**

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The course began with a three-day workshop in Warsaw. Between lectures, group discussions and interactive exercises we worked through key concepts: youth political participation, the gender gap, anti-establishment attitudes, economic grievances and far-right party strategies. We talked about real campaign materials, media content and party programmes and asked how they talk about gender, cultures, migration and “traditional values”.

After getting to know each other over joint sessions, coffee breaks and evening walks through the city, we formed stable mixed Polish-German working groups and designed our own research projects for the semester. Each group left Warsaw with a clearly defined research question, a first idea of data and methods, and the strong feeling that we were not just attending a course, we were starting a real comparative research project together.

## **Online meetings throughout the semester**

After Warsaw, our collaboration moved online. Every week we met on Zoom to deepen the theoretical background and push our team projects forward. Very quickly the course stopped feeling like a “regular” one. We read cutting-edge articles, explored datasets from the European Election Study, and used our online meetings to test hypotheses, clean data and argue about which variables really mattered.

## **Second workshop: presenting results in Frankfurt (Oder) & Słubice**

By December, we met again in Frankfurt (Oder), Słubice and then in Berlin to present what our groups had produced. The idea of the final workshop was to piece together an overall answer to why young voters choose the far right by bringing all team projects into one conversation. Each research group gave a full presentation, defended its findings in discussion and linked them back to the overarching question about youth support for the far right. It became clear how much impressive work had been done in each team – always with supportive guidance from the lecturers.

Each group chose a different perspective on youth support for the far right in Poland and Germany. For example, we had two teams on economics: one analysed regional factors in depth, looking at how regional inequalities, labour markets and centre–periphery divides shape support for far-right parties among young people. The second economics team explored the role of economic insecurity and perceived unfairness in driving young voters towards far-right options. The group that focused on gender examined the gender gap and, crucially, how far-right parties use and frame gender in their programmes, campaigns and online content. The team showed how these parties mobilise traditional gender roles, talk about “protecting women” and “family values”, and how young women and men respond very differently to these messages. Another team worked on under-representation and anti-establishment attitudes, investigating feelings of being ignored by mainstream politics and how this fuels anti-establishment protest votes.

What made the results so impressive was not just the theory, but the empirical depth: every team combined quantitative data with qualitative insights from campaign materials, party programmes and media content. We constantly compared Polish and German patterns, discovering both surprising similarities and sharp differences.

The workshop was not only about presentations, though. We also explored the twin city on a guided tour, crossed the bridge between Poland and Germany and ended the workshop with a walking tour along the East-Side Gallery, featuring a section of the Berlin Wall.

## **Main takeaways**

Like a puzzle, we tried to put all the pieces from our group presentations together. In the end, we not only gained a much deeper understanding of the issues we studied, but – even more importantly – many of us felt genuinely inspired to continue working on these topics in our future studies and research.

Some of the take-aways were:

- seeing how much young people's political choices are shaped by concrete everyday experiences: from jobs and housing to feeling heard or ignored, as well as by the strategies that parties in Germany and Poland use to address these concerns;
- realising how strongly gender is present in far-right communication, even when it is not named directly;
- getting hands-on experience with real data, methods and teamwork across two universities and two countries;
- and discovering that we actually enjoy doing research and that our own findings can contribute to ongoing debates about democracy.

## **Personal impressions**

When we first met in October in a seminar room at the University of Warsaw, I didn't expect that this joint Polish-German course would change the way I look at politics and parties' strategies so much. Very quickly it stopped being "just a class": it became a space where Polish and German students worked together, argued, laughed and slowly turned into a real team. The best part for me was this human connection, learning about each other's everyday lives, comparing how politics feels from Warsaw and from Germany, and realising how many experiences we actually share.

Our professors played a huge role in this. They not only gave us readings and deadlines; they also treated us like young researchers. We always felt that our questions and ideas were taken seriously, that we were encouraged to try, make mistakes and go deeper. Their support and constant feedback made it much easier to work with real data and to present our own results at the final workshop.

What I personally take away from this course is, first of all, a much clearer understanding of how far-right parties actually work: how they communicate, how they use gender, and how they react to economic and social frustrations. At the same time, I learnt a lot about research itself working with datasets and turning results into a coherent story.

It would be amazing to have a continuation of this project to follow up on our findings and track how youth support for the far right changes over time. For me, this course was a perfect example of how international cooperation between universities can work in practice, and I would be very happy to be part of similar initiatives again.