PSC 2380-001 Spring 2026

European Politics

T/Th 8:30–9:45

https://elearning.villanova.edu/ Synchronous/Online

Instructor: Prof. Ryan Weldzius
Class Zoom link: click here
Office hours: T/Th 10-11AM (sign-up here)
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, we will explore the origins, institutions, successes, and challenges of the post-WWII project of European unification. We will begin by exploring the historical rationale for establishing the European Union, evaluate the institutions created by this union, and consider how these institutions affect the political economy of European integration (past, present, and future). In the second half of the course, we will explore the root causes for the rise of anti-EU (or Eurosceptic) parties across the union and discuss what this means for the future of the European project. Each student will choose a populist Eurosceptic party to follow throughout the term and will write a critical analysis on the determinants of the party's successes (or failures).

Core Topics

1. History of European integration
2. European institutions
3. Rise of populism and Eurosceptic parties

Course goals

1. Sharpen analytical skills
2. Understand the interplay of politics, economics, and institutions in the EU
3. Analyze the rise of populist parties in Europe

LEARNING METHODOLOGY:

This course emphasizes active learning and repeated application of concepts to contemporary European politics. Core theories and institutional features of European integration are introduced in the first half of the semester and then used to analyze the rise of populist and Eurosceptic parties in the second half.

Class sessions combine instructor-led lecture with structured discussion and small-group activities. Short lectures introduce key concepts and frame central analytical questions, while the remainder of class time is devoted to discussion, problem-solving, and the application of theories to real-world cases. Students will work collaboratively to identify political coalitions, evaluate institutional constraints, and assess policy tradeoffs in the European Union.

Assigned readings must be completed prior to class. Slides used during class will be posted **after** each session in order to encourage active engagement and participation during class time. Questions posed in class may draw directly from assigned readings and weekly writing assignments.

Rather than relying on a single research paper, the course uses a combination of weekly analytical writing, two exams, and two structured group presentations. The goal of this format is to help students build confidence in applying theories of European politics through regular, low-stakes practice, while reserving higher-stakes assessments for cumulative evaluations at the end of each half of the semester.

READINGS:

The course readings will be drawn from one textbook on the European Union (available online through Falvey Library), two chapters from a scholarly text on economic austerity (available online at Falvey Library), and several scholarly research articles. All readings (not from the assigned books) will be made available on the course webpage or links will be available on the syllabus.

> Glencross, Andrew. 2014. *Politics of European Integration: Political Union or a House Divided?* Wiley & Sons, Inc. [link]

REQUIREMENTS:

Class attendance and participation (10%)

Participation will be structured around small-group activities rather than individual volunteer contributions. Early in the semester, students will be assigned to groups of 4–5.

During class, the instructor will periodically pose short conceptual or application-based questions related to the readings, prior lectures, or student presentations. A student may be selected at random to respond on behalf of their group. Participation credit reflects consistent preparation, engagement in discussion, and contributions to group work.

Attendance is expected, and students should be prepared to participate actively in every class meeting.

Weekly European Politics Briefs (25%):

Each week, students will complete a short analytical writing assignment (maximum 500 words) based on the *Financial Times* **Europe Express** newsletter. Students are required to

read the newsletter daily (Monday–Friday). You may sign up at https://www.ft.com/europe-express.

Each week, students will select **one** newsletter and connect it to a core theme, concept, or debate from that week's course material. The purpose of these briefs is to develop the ability to use theories of European integration and political economy to analyze ongoing political developments through frequent, low-stakes practice.

Briefs will be evaluated using a simple completion-based system:

- **Check (2 points):** The brief includes all required elements.
- **Check-minus (1 point):** The brief is submitted but is missing multiple elements or is substantially underdeveloped.

To receive a check, a memo must:

1. Identify a relevant theory or concept from the week's readings;
2. Use that theory to explain the policy issue, political conflict, or economic outcome discussed in the article;
3. Propose a policy response or course of action and explain why that response follows from the theory;
4. State one testable prediction or implication that would support or challenge the theoretical explanation.
5. A link to the article used for the memo.

Memos that are not submitted or are submitted late will receive zero points. Points will be summed over the semester and converted into the percentage listed above.

Exams (50%)

You will have two exams (mid-term and final), each consisting of definitions, multiple-choice, short answer, and short essay questions. Each exam will be worth 25% of your final grade. If you miss the mid-term exam for an excused reason, you will take your makeup exam concurrently with your final exam. Each exam is structured to take approximately one hour and 15 minutes.

Group Project: Eurosceptic Party Analysis (15%)

Instead of a traditional research paper, students will complete a semester-long group project focused on a contemporary populist, Eurosceptic political party. Students will be assigned to small groups, with each group responsible for tracking one party throughout the term.

The project consists of **two in-class group presentations**, each serving a distinct analytical purpose.

- **Presentation 1: Party Positions on European Integration (5%)** In the first

presentation, groups will analyze their party's positions on key elements of European integration covered in the course. These include (but are not limited to): EU institutions, enlargement, cohesion policy, the Single Market, the common currency, and EU regulation. Groups should describe whether the party's stance on each issue is positive, negative, or neutral, and discuss whether and how these positions have changed as the European Union has evolved.

- **Presentation 2: Explaining the Party's Rise (10%)** In the second presentation, groups will explain the rise (or decline) of their party's electoral support. Drawing on theories of European integration and political economy introduced in the course, groups should identify the economic, political, and institutional factors that contributed to the party's success (or failure), including crises, policy changes, and shifts in voter coalitions.

Groups will be expected to incorporate evidence from elections, party platforms, and current events, and to respond to questions from the instructor and classmates. The project emphasizes analytical reasoning and the application of course concepts rather than polished writing.

Eurosceptic Parties:

- Rassemblement National (France)
- Alternative für Deutschland (Germany)
- Lega (Italy)
- Fidesz (Hungary)
- SYRIZA (Greece)

GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

Grade Scale: 94-100, A; 90-93, A-; 88-89, B+; 84-87, B; 80-83, B-; . . . 0-60, F.

Grade Appeals. If you believe you received an incorrect grade on the midterm or final, you may formally appeal it to me. The appeal will consist of a one-page typed explanation that identifies the problem and presents a reasoned argument for the proposed change.

OFFICE HOURS:

I am available for office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 10:00am and 11:00AM via Zoom. Please sign-up for a 15-minute time slot here. If you cannot make these times, please write to me with your availability and we'll find a time that is suitable for us both.

AI POLICY

All written work in this course must reflect the student's own reading, thinking, and writing. The use of generative artificial intelligence tools (including but not limited to ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or similar systems) is **strictly prohibited** unless explicitly noted by the instructor.

Any assignment found to involve the use of generative AI will receive a grade of zero and will be referred for disciplinary action under the College Academic Integrity policy. If you are uncertain whether a tool or use case is permitted, assume that it is not and consult the instructor **before** submitting your work.

LEARNING SUPPORT, ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, AND ABSENCES:

Office of Disabilities (ODS) and Learning Support Services (LSS): It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. All students who need accommodations should go to Clockwork for Students via myNOVA to complete the Online Intake or to send accommodation letters to professors. Go to the LSS website (http://learningsupportservices.villanova.edu) or the ADS website (https://www1.villanova.edu/university/student-life/ods.html) for registration guidelines and instructions. If you have any questions please contact LSS at 610-519-5176 or learning.support.services@villanova.edu, or ADS at 610-519-3209 or ods@villanova.edu.

Academic Integrity: All students are expected to uphold Villanova's Academic Integrity Policy and Code. Any incident of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for disciplinary action. For the College's statement on Academic Integrity, you should consult the Student Guide to Policies and Procedures. You may view the University's Academic Integrity Policy and Code, as well as other useful information related to writing papers, at the Academic Integrity Gateway web site.

Absences for Religious Holidays: Villanova University makes every reasonable effort to allow members of the community to observe their religious holidays, consistent with the University's obligations, responsibilities, and policies. Students who expect to miss a class orassignment due to the observance of a religious holiday should discuss the matter with their professors as soon as possible, normally at least two weeks in advance. Absence from classes or examinations for religious reasons does not relieve students from responsibility for any part of the course work required during the absence. See the Provost's policies on religious holidays.

SCHEDULE:

*The weekly schedule is subject to change.

WEEK 1 - Introduction

Class 1: (01/13) Introduction

Read: the syllabus (see why, here).

Class 2: (01/15) The EU in crisis?

Read: Timothy Garton Ash. 2012. The crisis of Europe: How the Union came together and why it's falling apart. *Foreign Affairs* 91:2-15.

WEEK 2 - Origins of the European Union

Class 3: (01/20) The evolution of the EU, 1945-1973

Read: *Politics of European Integration*: Chapter 2.

Class 4: (01/22) The politics of EU enlargement

Read: Schneider, Christina J. 2009. *Conflict, negotiation and European Union enlargement*. Cambridge University Press: Ch. 1 (pp. 1–8 only), Ch. 2 (p. 12–32).

WEEK 3 - EU Institutions

Class 5: (01/27) Institutional development of the EU, 1973-2020

Read: *Politics of European Integration*: Chapter 3.

Class 6: (01/29) EU institutions and their functioning

Read: *Politics of European Integration*: Chapter 4.

WEEK 4 - EU Institutions & the Policy Process

Class 7: (02/03) The European Council

Watch the documentary *A History of the European Council* at home (link)

Class 8: (02/05) The Brussels Effect

Read:

1. Bradford, Anu. 2020. *The Brussels effect: How the European Union rules the world*. Oxford University Press: pp. 7–24.
2. Bradford, Anu, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Tommaso Pavone. 2025. Europe Could

Lose What Makes It Great: U.S. Pressure and Domestic Rancor Threaten the EU's Regulatory Superpower. *Foreign Affairs*.

WEEK 5 - Economic integration

Class 9: (02/10) The Single Market

Read: *Politics of European Integration*: Chapter 5.

Class 10: (02/12) EU Cohesion Policy

Read: Arbolino, Roberta and Paolo Di Caro. 2025. Geopolitical risks and the effectiveness of the EU cohesion policy. VoxEU.

WEEK 6 - Monetary integration

Class 11: (02/17) Politics of monetary integration

Read: Frieden, Jeffry A. 2002. Real sources of European currency policy: Sectoral interests and European monetary integration. *International Organization*: 831–860.

Class 12: (02/19) Presentations

WEEK 7 - Mid-term Exam

Class 13: (02/24) Mid-term review session

Re-read: Timothy Garton Ash. 2012. The crisis of Europe: How the Union came together and why it's falling apart. *Foreign Affairs* 91:2-15.

Class 14: (02/26) **Mid-term Exam (25% of final grade)**

Definitions, multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions

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WEEK 8 - Spring Break

No class meeting (*03/03*)
No class meeting (*03/05*)

WEEK 9 - Introduction to (European) populism

Class 15: (*03/10*) Surge in European Populism

Read: Mudde, Cas. 2016. Europe's populist surge: A long time in the making. *Foreign Affairs* 95(6): 25-30.

Class 16: (*03/12*) Causes of Populism

Read: Berman, Sheri. 2021. The Causes of Populism in the West. *Annual Review of Political Science* 24: 71-88.

WEEK 10 - Populism causes: cultural backlash or economic grievance?

Class 17: (*03/17*) Cultural backlash

Read: Inglehart, Ronald F. and Pippa Norris. Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash. *RWP16-026*.

Class 18: (*03/19*) Economic grievance and Brexit

Read: Colantone, Italo, and Piero Stanig. 2018. Global competition and Brexit. *American Political Science Review* 112(2): 201-218.

WEEK 11 - Failing forward and the impact of populism

Class 19: (*03/24*) Failing forward

Read: Jones, Erik, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Sophie Meunier. 2021. Failing forward? Crises and patterns of European integration. *Journal of European Public Policy*: 1-18.

Class 20: (*03/26*) Party system change

Read: Vachudova, Milada Anna. 2021. Populism, democracy, and party system change in Europe. *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (1): 471-498.

WEEK 12 - Populism causes: global financial crisis and monetary union?

Class 21: (*03/31*) Economic integration and the GFC

Read: Peritz, Lauren, Ryan Weldzius, Ronald Rogowski, and Thomas Flaherty. 2021. Enduring the Great Recession: Economic integration in the European Union. *The Review of International Organizations*: 1-29.

Class 22: (*04/02*) **No class meeting - Easter Break**

WEEK 13 - Populism causes: global financial crisis and austerity?

Class 23: (*04/07*) Austerity: the hangover after the party

Read:

1. Blyth, Mark. 2013. The Austerity Delusion: Why a Bad Idea Won Over the West. *Foreign Affairs* 92 (3): 41-56.
2. Newman, Abraham. 2012. Austerity and the End of the European Model: How Neoliberals Captured the Continent. *Foreign Affairs*.

Class 24: (*04/09*) Austerity and political polarization

Read: Hübscher, E., Sattler, T. and Wagner, M., 2023. Does austerity cause polarization? *British Journal of Political Science* 53(4): pp.1170-1188.

WEEK 14 - Populism causes: immigration?

Class 25: (*04/14*) European attitudes on immigration

Read: Hainmueller, J. and Hiscox, M.J., 2007. Educated preferences: Explaining attitudes toward immigration in Europe. *International Organization* 61(2): pp.399-442.

Class 26: (*04/16*) Migration and distributive politics

Read: Angin, Merih, Albana Shehaj, and Adrian J. Shin. 2021. Inside job: Migration and distributive politics in the European Union. *Economics & Politics* 33: 264-288.

WEEK 15 - Presentations

Class 27: (*04/21*) Presentations

Class 28: (*04/23*) Presentations

WEEK 16 - The Future of Europe

Class 29: (*04/28*) What's next?

Read:

1. Jones, Erik and Matthias Matthijs. 2025. The Biggest Threat to Europe: It's Not Trump—It's the EU's Weak Defense Policy and Stagnant Single Market. *Foreign Affairs*.
2. Matthijs, Matthias and Nathalie Tocci. 2026. How Europe Lost: Can the Continent Escape Its Trump Trap? *Foreign Affairs* 105(1): 154-165.

Class 30: (*04/30*) Course summary and review for final exam

FINALS WEEK

Final Exam (*05/09*) 10:45-1:15PM