

Political participation in the age of polarization: Austria, Poland, and Slovenia from a comparative perspective (POPAPOL)

This project advances research on two themes that have emerged from contemporary scientific and public debates on challenges to democracy: political polarization and political participation. Recent years have brought rising levels of polarization among mass publics in many countries. This increase was accompanied by an almost universal decline in electoral turnout, as well as an rise – in several countries – in new, non-institutional forms of participation, such as participation in demonstrations. The planned project addresses both important phenomena and explores their association in a collaboration between research teams from Poland, Austria and Slovenia, and in coordination with other research projects carried out in Southern Europe and Latin America.

The main research question deals with polarization as a predictor of participation, taking into account different aspects of polarization and different forms of participation, as well as differences across countries and among social groups within countries.

We will collect new data via two types of surveys with which we will collect new data in the three project partner countries (Austria, Poland, and Slovenia): (1) a general population two-wave panel survey, and (2) surveys among participants in public demonstrations (protest surveys). In addition, we will conduct an extensive analysis of existing survey data, including age-period-cohort analyses of time-series cross-section datasets.

The project will tackle new research questions that has not yet been systematically examined. Among others, the project will address the question about who becomes motivated to participate in politics by an increasingly polarized political climate, and the possibility that increases in political polarization have positive consequences for democracy. Additionally, the project will provide original, high-quality data to improve the infrastructure for social science research.