

Berlin's Socio-Political Landscape in Transition: Divides, Debates, and the struggle for the Common Good

Summer Semester 2025: 14 April– 18 July 2025

CATEGORY

Sociology and Philosophy

COURSE STRUCTURE

2 contact hours à 45 min per week (summer semester: 14 weeks)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Time

Day: Monday, 10:00-12:00 c.t. (10:15 am – 11:45 am)

Place

Hausvogteiplatz 5-7, Room 0323-26

COURSE LANGUAGE

This course is taught in English, including most readings. For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, language-level B2 is required. Some basic German (A2/B1) is recommended for some of the readings. Translation of texts that are German only will be provided if necessary.

Language requirements (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

English B2

German A2-B1

TARGET GROUP

International exchange students and HU students of all subjects with a strong interest in the course topic. Berlin Perspectives courses are designed for undergraduate students. Master students may participate if their home university agrees. Regular degree-seeking students can select the course within the elective part of their study program (überfachlicher Wahlpflichtbereich üWP).

We welcome students with a variety of interest and backgrounds, including, but not restricted to, political sciences, sociology, global studies, philosophy, political economy and economics. The core of this course will be centered around concepts and topics such as the common good, individualism, public interest, far right political movements and inequalities, for which Berlin will serve as the focal discussion point.

CREDITS = 5 ECTS

The Berlin Perspectives courses are offered by the Career Center as part of the elective program üWP. Registration takes place via Agnes.

All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Berlin is often seen as mostly progressive due to its left-leaning and multicultural image, but the city's socio-political landscape is more nuanced. The Berlin Wall's legacy still shapes socio-economic divides between East and West (fig 1, appendix), influencing political positions. The city center, inside the Ringbahn, leans left/green, while the conservative/right lies outside this transport boundary (fig 2, appendix).

Historical changes include the integration of GDR infrastructure and the revival of Prussian heritage (fig. 3, appendix), alongside the gentrification of some areas. Rising rent prices have sparked debates over housing, with a plebiscite by Deutsche Wohnen und Co Enteignen proposing communal control of real estate (fig 4, appendix). This highlights tensions on the role of the market (fig 4, appendix).

Berlin also reflects global trends like the rise of far-right movements and neoliberalism rooted partly in historical East-West societal divides. These conflicts, however, reveal broader debates on societal value(s) and the common good; this course will explore these debates through subtopics such as gentrification, inequality, and political polarization (e.g. on environmental and housing policy).

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with concepts *and* experiences that can help them draw their own conclusions within a variety of social-state-economics related issues. This course will help students understand and critically reflect on policy development and political debate both in Berlin and their home countries and cities.

Knowledge

- Understand the core characteristics of the *common good* and *public interest* concept
- Understand the concept of *valuation* (the process) and *value* (the outcome e.g. economic, social, environmental, political or public)
- Understand the core differences of the *private/non-private* distinction
- Understand, describe and identify the core characteristics of so-called *far-right movements*

Academic/Transferable Skills

- Communicate and discuss key concepts in the afore mentioned concepts
- Apply and *combine* the afore mentioned concepts

Competencies

- Apply relevant theories and concepts in independent work to analyze new problems and policy proposals”
- Apply theory and concepts that emanate from different scientific disciplines (e.g., sociology, economics, political sciences)

READINGS

Bello, W. (2019) *Counterrevolution: The Global Rise of the Far Right*. Fernwood Publishing, pp. 3-11, 103-115

Bozeman B. (2007) 'Public Interest Theory and its Problems'. In *Public Values and Public Interest*, pp. 83-99.

Chomsky, N. (2015) Can Civilization Survive Really Existing Capitalism? In Chomsky, N. *Masters of Mankind*, pp. 139-146.

Ciepley, D. (2013) 'Beyond Public and Private: Toward a Political Theory of the Corporation', *American Political Science Review*, 107, pp. 139-158.

Deutsche Wohnen und Co. Enteignen Brochure – Vergesellschaftung und Gemeinwirtschaft

Dutt, A. K. and Veneziani R. (2020) 'Socio-Economic Coordination', *Review of Social Economy*, 78, pp. 1-3.

Hochschild, A. (2016) *Strangers in Their Own Land. Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, The New Press, pp. 210-230

Mau S. (2024) *Ungleich vereint (Unity Without Equality)*. Suhrkamp, pp. 15-38

Mazzucato, M. (2023). Governing the economics of the common good: from correcting market failures to shaping collective goals. *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, 27(1), pp. 1–24.

Reckwitz, A. (2020) *Society of Singularities*. Polity Press

Westheuser, L. & Lux, T. (2024) Klassenbewusstsein und Wahlentscheidung. In: *FES diskurs*, September 2024

ASSIGNMENT INFO

Workload and assignments

In order to be granted 5 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- actively attend all sessions (a minimum of 75% attendance is required for classroom and online sessions)
- prepare and revise the classroom/online sessions
- hand in the following **assignments**:
 - *Small presentation combining concepts acquired in class and insights gained from the excursions. (up to 20 min)*
 - *End of term paper (approx. 2000 words)*

Failure to fulfil one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of 50% presentation, 50% end of term paper.

YOUR INSTRUCTORS

We are Felipe García and Fabio Braun Carrasco. We both work in a DFG research project at HU's Institute for Asian and African Studies and we're both currently working on our PhDs. Felipe focuses on Economic Sociology by studying value(s) in economic and social sciences and its relationship with political movements, governance, the common good, and the public interest. Fabio works on the ascendance of far-right movements. His research focuses include the far-right, social inequality, critical theory, class, climate change, and decolonial thought.

COURSE SCHEDULE

2 hours à 45 min per week (summer semester: 14 weeks)

Week 1: Kick-off Meeting, 14.04.

Introduction to the course, instructors and students' presentations. List of assignments, Q&A, and discussion of possible topics for the presentations.

Week 2: Public Holiday, 21.04.

Optional Film to be watched at home

Week 3: The Private/Nonprivate distinction, 28.04.

A generalised misunderstanding across social sciences is the understanding and distinction of (i) value vs resources, and (ii) private vs public (or nonprivate). For example, going for a run at a public park uses private (e.g., sneakers and personal time) and public resources (oxygen and green areas). Further, it might create private value (e.g. stress release and health improvement) and possibly public value (e.g. the health improvement might imply using less public health services such as a hospital). The same confusion applies for different units of analysis e.g., policies, corporations, communities, governments and so on.

Ciepley, D. (2013) 'Beyond Public and Private: Toward a Political Theory of the Corporation', *American Political Science Review*, **107**, 139-158.

Week 4: The Common Good and The Public Interest, 05.05.

Both the common good and the public interest are extremely complex topics. This session aims to provide the basics of these topics by reviewing some of the limitations that arise when we aim to tackle collective goals.

Mazzucato, M. (2023). Governing the economics of the common good: from correcting market failures to shaping collective goals. *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, 27(1), 1-24.

Week 5: Gentrification: the case of Berlin - Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen, 12.05.

The housing market in Berlin has been increasingly commodified and different understandings of the common good and public interest compete fiercely in this sphere. This session examines discussions around affordable housing, communal vs. financialized types of economies, and gentrification.

Reckwitz, A. (2020) *Society of Singularities*. Cambridge: Polity Press
(optional) Deutsche Wohnen und Co. Enteignen. (2020) *Brochure Vergesellschaftung und Gemeinwirtschaft*

Week 6: The environmental discussion (inside and outside the ring), 19.05.

This session aims to apply what we have learn so far to the political polarization around environmental issues. It focuses on the shortcomings of individualism when faced by collective challenges.

Chomsky, N. (2015) Can Civilization Survive Really Existing Capitalism? In Chomsky, N. *Masters of Mankind*, pp 139-146

Week 7: East-West + Humboldt Forum Discussion, 26.05.

How are socio-cultures in Germany today still shaped by East-West configurations? This session examines differences (and similarities) in social structure, economic and cultural configurations, and belief systems. We will then apply these observations to the debate surrounding the Humboldt Forum.

Mau S. (2024) *Ungleich vereint (Unity Without Equality)*. Suhrkamp, pp. 15-38

Week 8: Far right-wing movements in Germany I, 02.06.

We are reading the current ascendance of the far right against social indicators of class. Is there a direct connection that can be established between certain class positions and support for far-right politics?

Westheuser, L. & Lux, T. (2024) Klassenbewusstsein und Wahlentscheidung. In: *FES diskurs, September 2024*

Week 9: Public Holiday, 09.06.

Special Assignment

Week 10: Berlin-Marzahn: Far right political success, 16.06.

Visit former DDR neighbourhoods that today are located at the lower end of the socio-economic distribution within the city and where AfD support is strong. Discuss reasons for far-right political strength.

Hochschild, A. (2016) *Strangers in Their Own Land. Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, The New Press, pp. 210-230

Week 11: Far right-wing movements in a Global Comparison, 23.06.

In this session we look at the global dimension of far-right movements: Are there overarching themes within different far-right movements around the world? Is the emergence and success of the far-right conditioned by specific social factors?

This session will also contain the first **student presentations**.

Bello, W. (2019) *Counterrevolution: The Global Rise of the Far Right*. Fernwood Publishing, pp. 3-11, 103-115

Week 12: Presentations, 30.06.

Student presentations

Week 13: Socio-Economic Coordination, 07.07.

Economic coordination is based on private interest and the assumption that the agent is maximizing it in the form of utility. Is that acceptable when dealing with complex problems such as sharp inequalities or environmental crisis? What role does the far-right play on these issues?

Bozeman B. (2007) 'Public Interest Theory and its Problems'. In *Public Values and Public Interest*, pp 83-99

Dutt, A. K. and Veneziani R. (2020) 'Socio-Economic Coordination', *Review of Social Economy*, **78**, 1-3

Week 14: Presentations, 14.07.

Student presentations

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Registration on Moodle (HU's e-learning platform)

in case of online sessions

- Fully functional device (laptop, tablet, PC)
- Stable internet connection
- Software: Zoom (video/audio)
- *Recommended* hardware: external headset for better sound quality

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions: be on time, have *at least* the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment: pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions in this international classroom.

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies. Plagiarism in even a small assignment will result in failing the entire course.

Attendance policy: Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the lecturer.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 19th November, 2024.

Appendix

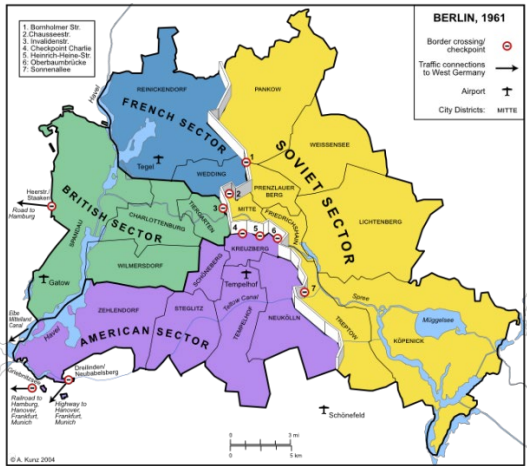


Figure 1: East-West Berlin

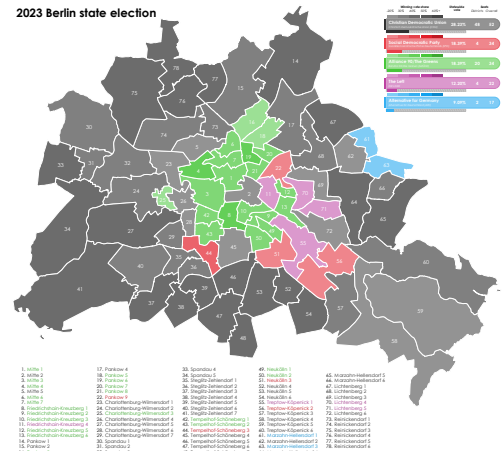


Figure 2: 2023 Berlin State Election



Figure 3: site of the Humboldt Forum under construction



Figure 4: Plebiscite campaign posters