

POSC 3710: European Politics

8/19/2026: Introduction
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Who Am I?

- I am a comparative political scientist
- I study political parties, polarization and elections, mostly in Western Europe
- I also work on how to apply computational and statistical methods to political science.
- Office: 230a Brackett Hall. Office hours Wednesdays 10–12, or by appointment

What Will We Cover?

- Domestic and inter-state politics of European countries
 - *Mostly* western Europe, but some coverage of central and eastern Europe.
- Not a course on the EU as an institution — that is POSC 3750
- Four broad areas: history and ideas; domestic politics; European (dis)integration; contemporary issues
- Alongside political science research: how scholars have tried to explain all of it

How This Class Works

- Two in-class exams — midterm 25%, final 30%
- Simulation portfolio — 25%
 - Party manifesto, coalition memo, two position papers, two in-class debrief memos
- Participation and attendance — 10%
- Reading checks — 10%, unannounced - lowest dropped
- No textbook. Every reading is free on Canvas or open access

The Federal Republic of Clemson

- A semester-long simulation. You are a member of parliament in a fictional European democracy
- You will found a party, write a manifesto, campaign, contest an election, and bargain over a coalition
- Then you govern — or oppose — through a budget, an immigration bill, and a European summit
- And in late November, you'll deal with a political crisis

Let's Go Through the Syllabus

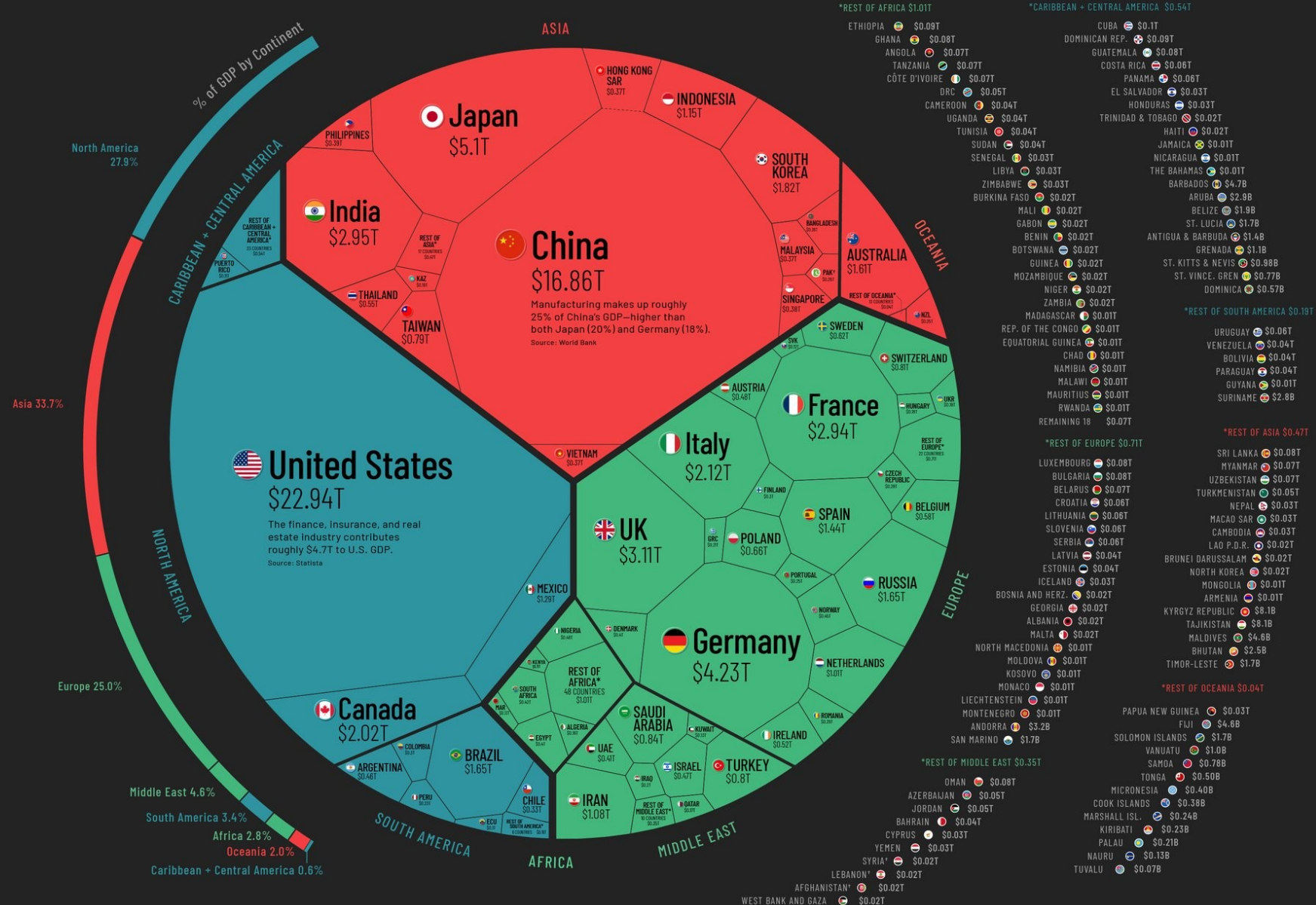
- Questions?

GLOBAL GDP 2021



Gross domestic product (GDP) serves as a barometer for a country's economic health. It measures the total market value of final goods and services produced in a country during a given year.

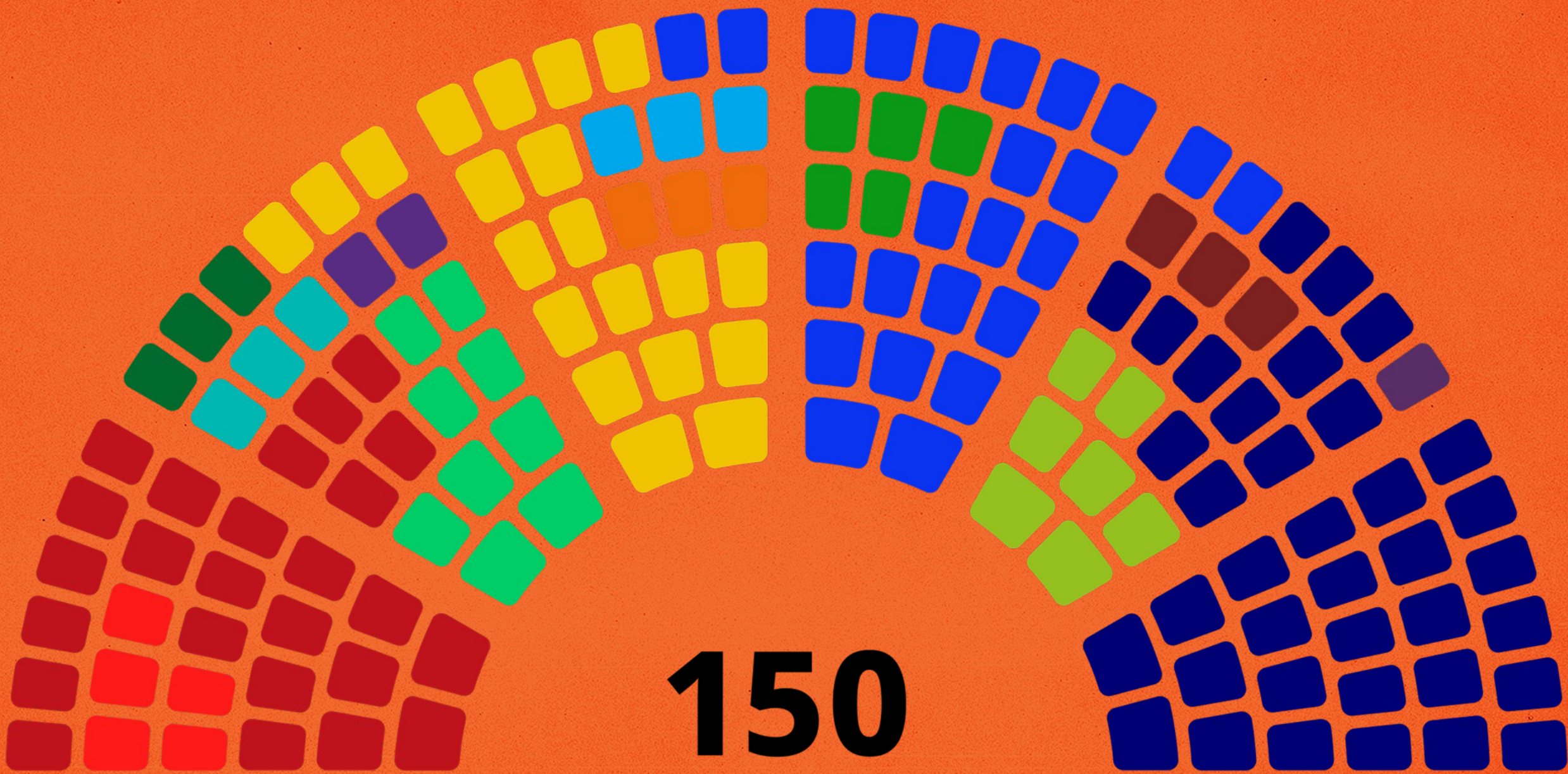
Together, the U.S. and China account for 42% of global GDP. Here is GDP by country according to IMF estimates.



SOURCE: IMF (2021)

*2021 GDP DATA WAS NOT PUBLISHED BY IMF, SO 2020 DATA WAS USED

VISUALCAPITALIST.COM



Europe is Weird (to Americans)

- Governments that fall between elections, and elections nobody scheduled
- Coalitions of parties that campaigned against each other
- Monarchies that are also democracies
- Countries that share a currency but not a budget
- Parties that win the most votes and still end up in opposition



Who Counts as European?

- By ethnicity or 'European heritage'
 - Beyond the normative problems, some indigenous Europeans would not count
- By religion or Christian tradition
 - Ignores longstanding native Jewish and Muslim populations
- By geography
 - Where does Europe end? Turkey, Russia, the Caucasus, Cyprus?
- By institutions — membership of the EU, Council of Europe, Schengen
 - “Europe as an Idea”

A little history

- European States are relatively new
- Europe was a continent of shifting empires, rather than nation-states
- National European Identities are newer still
 - At the turn of the 20th century, many “French” and “Italians” would not have considered themselves such
 - European *States* do not always map on to European *Nations*
- “We have created Italy, now we must create Italians” – Massimo D’Azeglio (1861)

Global deaths in conflicts since the year 1400 – by Max Roser

Each circle represents one conflict. [Data from the *Conflict Catalog* (1400-2000)]

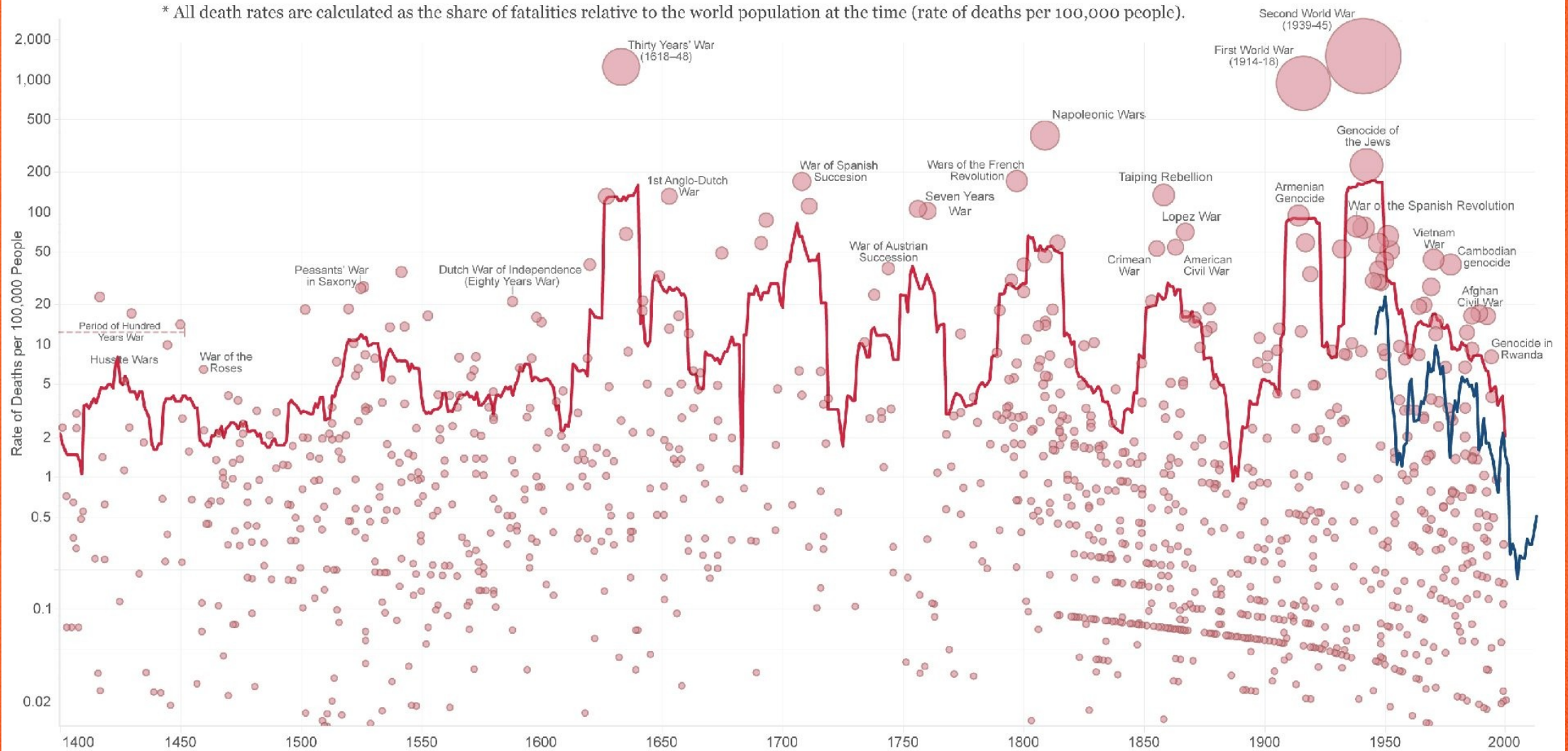
The **size** represents the absolute number of fatalities (military + civilian fatalities)

The **position** on the y-axis represents the fatality rate* (military + civilian fatalities)

 **Military + civilian death rate* for 1400-2000** [Data from *Conflict Catalog*] – 15 year moving-average

 **Military death rate* for 1946-2013** [Data from the PRIO Institute]

* All death rates are calculated as the share of fatalities relative to the world population at the time (rate of deaths per 100,000 people).



Data sources: Battle Deaths Dataset v.3.0. published by the PRIO Institute and Conflict Catalog by Peter Brecke for data on battle deaths. And world population data from HYDE and UN.

This is a data visualisation from OurWorldinData.org. There you find more visualisations on this topic.

Licensed under CC-BY-NC-SA by the author Max Roser.

Europe Today is Kind of a Miracle

- Highly prosperous — extraordinary growth after 1945
 - Though with real regional variation; post-communist countries remain poorer
- Peaceful — no war between EU member states since 1945
 - Though war returned to the continent in 2022, and has not left
- Democratic — dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece within living memory
 - Though democratic quality is now contested in several member states

“Joining Europe”: Place, Idea, or Argument?

- Slovenia, Poland, Ukraine can “join Europe”
 - But nobody joins a continent
- Judt: “Europe today is not so much a place as an idea”
 - peace, prosperity, human rights, open borders
 - A “hyper-real Europe, more European than the continent itself”
 - the old civilization’s virtues “shorn of its darker qualities”
- So who built this idea, when, and what for?

What Actually Made “Europe”?

- Judt: not idealists, not destiny — an “accident”
- Every founder was solving a national problem
 - France: contain Germany, keep the coal.
 - Germany: “This is our breakthrough.”
 - Benelux: markets.
 - Britain: stayed out until after decolonization + declining global position
- And reacting to
 - Increasing strong Soviet Union just to the east
 - Concerns about overreliance on American power
- Unrepeatable luck: shared defeat, the Cold War, catch-up growth, Marshall dollars, a divided continent
- The idea came later — Europe’s “foundation myth”

Four Stylized Models of Europe

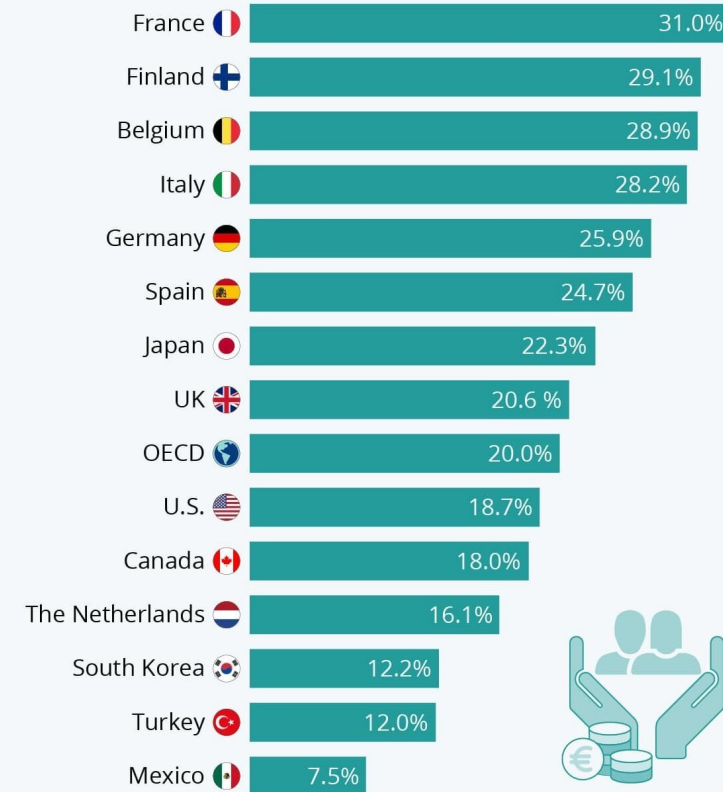
- Europe as a shining example of social democracy
- Europe as a cautionary tale for the left
- The European Union as a model of supranational cooperation
- The European Union as a declining power

Social Democracy

- Generous welfare states, built after 1945
- Lower inequality and poverty
- Low-cost healthcare and education
- Stronger unions, wider bargaining

Where Social Spending is Highest and Lowest

Social spending as a share of GDP in selected countries (2019*)



* Or latest available
Source: OECD

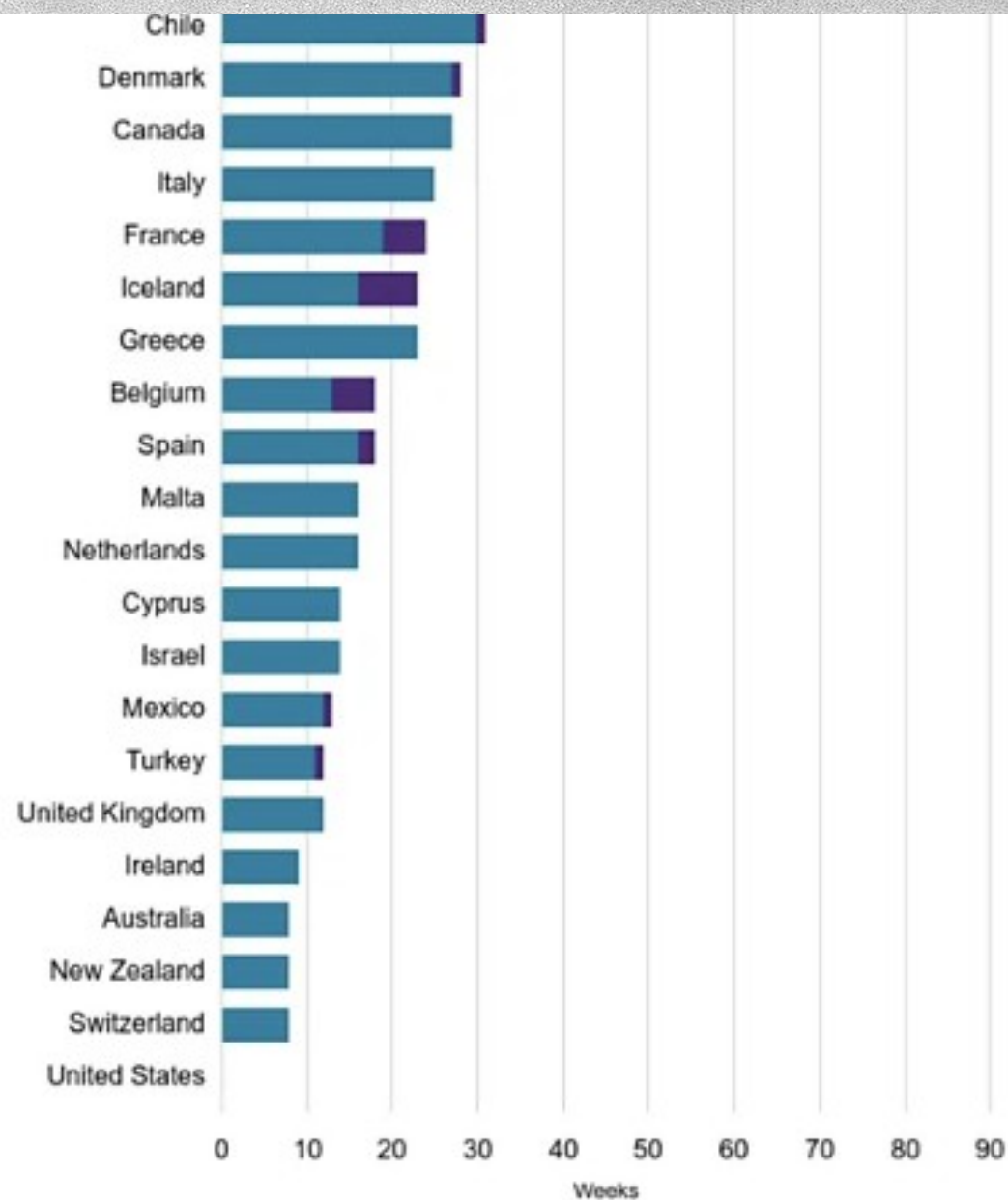
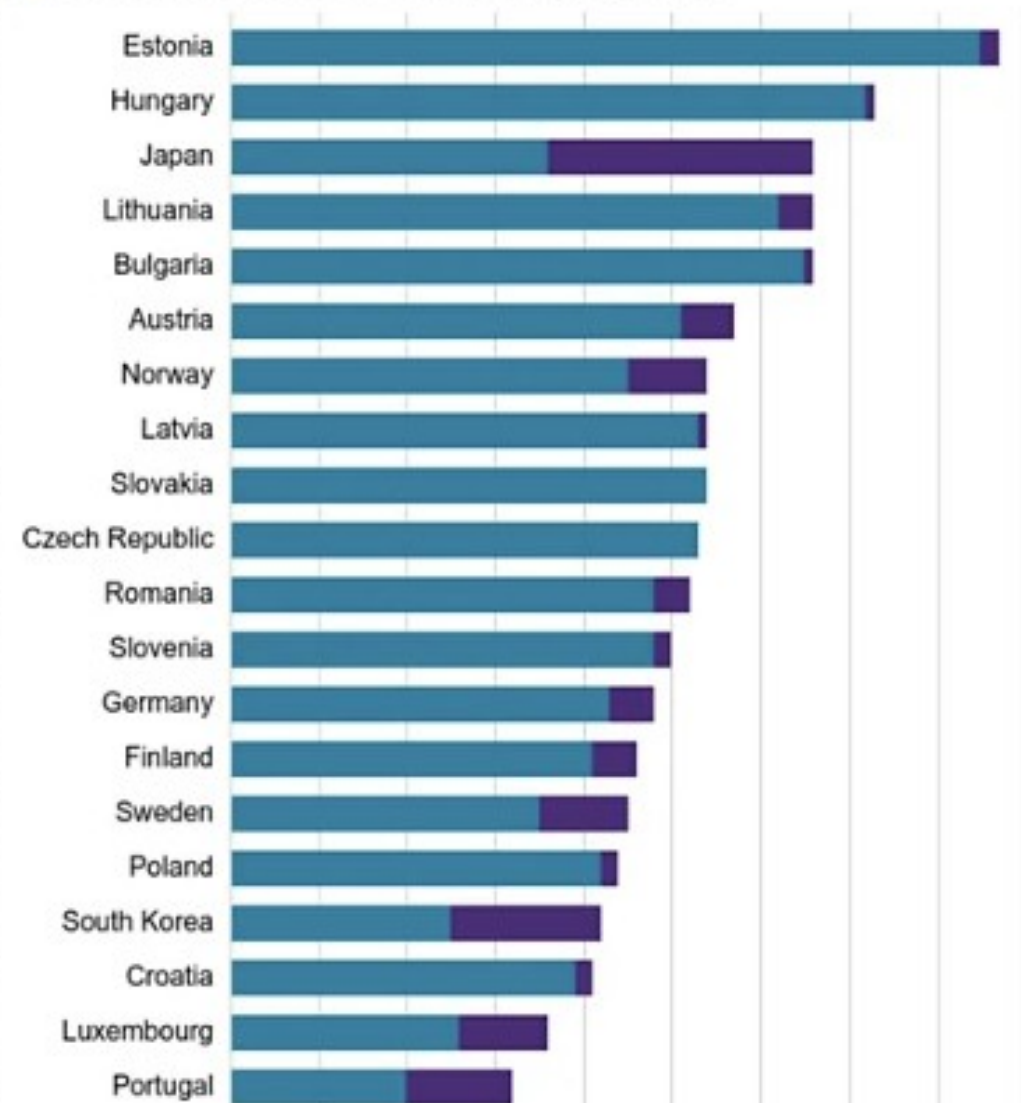


statista

Time off for kids

Across 41 wealthy countries in the EU and OECD, the amount of paid leave for mothers and fathers varies substantially.

- Weeks of leave available to mothers, full-pay equivalent
- Weeks of leave reserved for fathers, full-pay equivalent



Source: OECD, EU

But...

- Aging populations make social spending hard to sustain
 - Unless birth rates or immigration rise, something has to give
- Economic and technological change have strained the postwar bargain
- Reform is politically punishing — France has now suspended a pension reform twice
- We will spend a full session on why these systems have proved so hard to cut

A Cautionary Tale for the Left

- Center-left parties have lost their historic working-class base
- Voters without degrees dissatisfied on economics and culture alike
- Backlash against globalization and immigration
- In 2026: the AfD polls first in Germany, the RN is France's largest party
- Labour replaced Starmer with Andy Burnham in July after heavy local losses



The EU as a Global Power

- Started with six members, now 27 — and enlargement is live again
 - Accession talks with Ukraine and Moldova advanced in 2026; Montenegro is furthest along
- The world's largest single market, and a regulatory superpower
 - The 'Brussels effect' — EU rules become global rules
- Rearming: the ReArm Europe package committed up to €800bn in 2025

The EU as a Declining Power

- Brexit removed the second-largest European economy — ten years on, the costs are measurable
- A widening economic gap with the United States, and now with China on key technologies
 - The 2024 Draghi report called it an 'existential challenge'
- Euroskeptic and radical-right parties in government or near it in several member states
- Dependent on an American security guarantee that no longer feels guaranteed

None of These Models is Right or Wrong

- Europe is more generous in welfare spending, but the systems are under real strain
- The populist right has reshaped politics — without winning everywhere
 - Hungary's Fidesz lost power in April 2026 after sixteen years.
- The EU is both a regulatory superpower and an economy growing more slowly than its rivals
- Your job this semester is to adjudicate between these models/ideas and figure out what you think