

Conflicts, Group Identities, Inequalities and their Consequences on Contemporary Party Systems

Contemporary societies and politics are undergoing profound transformations driven by globalization, economic restructuring, demographic shifts, and cultural changes. These developments have revitalized existing social conflicts and generated new ones, challenging traditional political cleavages and reshaping patterns of political behavior. This panel aims to bring together contributions that explore the salience and politicization of social conflicts, the role of group identities in structuring political preferences, and the implications of inequalities and intersectionality for political participation, voting behavior, and party systems.

Building on classical cleavage theory (Bartolini & Mair, 1990; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), recent scholarship has questioned the persistence of traditional class- and religion-based cleavages while investigating the emergence of new social divides (Borbáth et al., 2023; Bornschier & Kriesi, 2012; Crulli & Emanuele, 2025; Hooghe & Marks, 2025). Disputes over economic inequality, identity politics, generational divides, and environmental sustainability are increasingly politicized by both established and emerging political actors, who selectively mobilize different grievances to shape electoral competition. However, these conflicts do not always align neatly into structured cleavages; rather, they often overlap in complex ways, creating a fragmented social and political landscape.

In this context, the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1989) has highlighted how multiple axes of disadvantage—based on class, ethnicity, gender, and other social markers—interact to shape political engagement and voting behavior. While intersectionality has been extensively studied in sociology and feminist theory, its quantitative application in political science remains underdeveloped (McCall, 2005; Evans & Lépinard, 2019). Yet, emerging research suggests that intersecting inequalities can influence political preferences in ways that single-dimensional categorizations fail to capture (Frasure-Yokley, 2018).

Moreover, the fragmentation of social identities and interests creates a growing number of group-based cross-pressures (Dassonneville, 2023), as individuals may simultaneously belong to multiple, sometimes contradictory, social categories. These cross-cutting pressures complicate political alignments, contributing to electoral volatility and weakening traditional party loyalties. Understanding how voters and parties navigate these overlapping social conflicts is crucial for analyzing contemporary patterns of political participation, ideological positioning, and party competition.

Against this backdrop, this panel welcomes contributions from different methodological and theoretical perspectives that address, among others, the following topics:

- The evolution, weakening, or persistence of traditional cleavages (e.g., class, religion, territory);

- The salience and politicization of emerging social conflicts (e.g., over globalization, immigration, climate change, generational tensions, or gender and sexuality);
- The role of identity-based divisions and their implications for political behavior and party competition;
- The application of intersectionality in political science, including its impact on political participation, ideological positioning, and voting behavior;
- The interplay between structural inequalities and political agency, considering both the demand- and supply-sides of electoral politics;
- The effects of group-based cross-pressures on political fragmentation, electoral volatility, and partisan realignments.

The panel encourages submissions employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method approaches, as well as comparative studies across different socio-political contexts. By engaging with these issues, the panel aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex and evolving nature of political conflict in contemporary democracies.

CONTACTS:

Mirko Crulli: mcrulli@luiss.it

Vincenzo Emanuele: vemanuele@luiss.it