

Political discontent and its geographies:

Who, why, where, when, and so what?

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Abstract

Political discontent has become a defining feature of contemporary democracies, visible in declining trust in government, lower electoral participation, and the growing success of anti-establishment and populist parties. While influential accounts attribute these trends primarily to economic drivers, this paper argues that economic factors alone cannot explain the scale, timing, and spatial concentration of discontent. Instead, it advances a geographically grounded framework structured around five questions: who expresses discontent, why it has intensified, where it clusters, when it becomes politically consequential, and with what implications. Summarising the growing body of research on the geography of political discontent, the paper makes four main claims: (1) economic factors alone are insufficient to explain the rise of discontent; (2) perceptions are as important as factual reality to explaining political discontent; (3) geography and place play a role, not only as a background; (4) socialisation and social interactions are a key mechanism through which places shape individual political outlooks and behaviours.

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