



# TOOLKIT



# NARRATIVES AND CRITICAL THINKING IN GEOPOLITICS



**HOSTED BY : DU GRAIN A MOUDRE  
PROJECT CO-FUNDED BY ERASMUS+ KA1**



**Co-funded by  
the European Union**



DU GRAIN À MOUDRE

# Context and Background of the Project

"It takes a village to raise a child." This African proverb reminds us that a child's development thrives on diversity—of perspectives, experiences, and practices. But in today's fragmented world, where information floods in from every direction, what is our role as youth workers in nurturing independent, critical thinkers?

How do we guide young people without imposing our own biases? How do we teach critical thinking in an era of relentless media saturation, where algorithms shape perceptions and misinformation spreads faster than truth? The challenges are immense: polarization over questions like migration, climate crisis, and armed conflicts can fuel radicalization, while the sheer volume of information makes discernment harder than ever.

Yet, the ability to analyze, question, and contextualize information is not just a skill—it's a necessity for young people to navigate the world and for society to remain cohesive. That is why this training used a real-world case study (such as the Israël/ Palestien, Venezuela or European migration policies) as a guiding thread, helping youth workers deepen their geopolitical knowledge while honing their critical analysis of media narratives.

Through case studies, serious games, debates and narrative deconstruction, we explored how to articulate complex realities—giving young people the tools to name, understand, and challenge the world they inherited. Because true empowerment began when they could put words to the present.

This project was created in partnership between Du grain à moudre(France), Allilegyi gia Olous/Solidarity for All (Greece), EstYes Youth (Estonia), EVROPSKE CENTRUM MLADÉZE BRECLAV EUROPEAN YOUTH CENTRE BRECLAV Z. (Czech Republic) and Ad Sumus – Associação de Imigrantes de Almada (Portugal).



# Aim & Objectives

This 7-day Erasmus+ training brought together 25 youth workers from France, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, and Estonia. Its goal was to strengthen their skills in critical thinking and geopolitical awareness, using tools like skim reading, debates, educational games, and media analysis.

Participants explored the historical links between past events and their impact on today's global landscape. Through a series of case studies, they deepened their understanding of contemporary geopolitical dynamics and learned to apply an analytical framework that helped unpack the multiple dimensions of a conflict.

They delved into key issues such as misinformation, international conflicts and media bias, using dynamic non-formal education methods—such as structured debates, world café discussions, and immersive simulations. The program blended theoretical insights with hands-on practice, featuring interactive workshops and guided reflection to tailor tools to their specific local realities.

A core focus was sharpening critical thinking skills, crucial for navigating today's complex and often polarized media landscape. They were better equipped to empower young people to analyze, question, and understand the world around them with clarity and confidence.

We wished more specifically to:

- interrogate critical thinking awareness
- acquire knowledge about geopolitics
- develop skills on educational tools
- analyse our practice and our posture
- exchange knowledge of each participant on the different topics of the project

# Educational Approach

The educational approach of the training was based on a combination of non-formal education, experimentation, and self-reflection. This approach aimed to create a learner-centred and participatory environment, in which objectives were defined in a bottom-up manner and adapted to the needs, expectations, and realities of the participants. Flexibility and contextualization were core principles, allowing the programme to evolve in response to the group dynamics and emerging learning needs.

Non-formal education methods encouraged participants to become active agents of their own learning. Throughout the training, they were invited to reflect on what they were learning, how they were learning, and how these insights could be transferred into their professional practice. Evaluation of the learning process and outcomes was primarily carried out through self-assessment, supported by facilitators who guided reflection and helped participants make sense of their experiences.

Participants came from highly diverse backgrounds, with different professional profiles, levels of experience, and degrees of knowledge on the topics addressed. This diversity proved to be a major asset for the training, as it enabled very rich exchanges of perspectives, practices, and interpretations. Each participant was encouraged to take sufficient distance from their own experiences in order to share them openly, listen to others, and build collective understanding. The variety of viewpoints fostered constructive dialogue and mutual learning, and significantly enriched the quality of discussions and group work.

The training was conceived as a learning space grounded in trust, respect, and openness. Participants were invited to adopt a pedagogical mindset throughout the process, remaining attentive to the sensitivities and perspectives of others, especially when addressing complex or emotionally charged geopolitical topics. Particular emphasis was placed on reflecting on professional posture, including examining personal assumptions, biases, and the narratives that shape our understanding of global events.

Active participation was a central expectation. All participants were asked to engage fully in each session, to be punctual, and to contribute to the collective life of the group. As the group lived together during the training period, participants also took part in daily tasks that supported the well-being and smooth functioning of the group, reinforcing a sense of shared responsibility and cooperation.

Methodologically, the training relied on a wide range of participatory tools and techniques drawn from non-formal education, such as fish-bowl discussions, moving debates, skim reading, structured exchanges, and experiential workshops. Participants were encouraged to propose energizers and activities, reinforcing the idea that learning is most effective when it is lived and practiced. While trainers provided theoretical inputs using participatory methods, the core of the programme was built on knowledge sharing and mutual enrichment, with participants bringing in their own experiences and professional realities.

Centred on both individual and collective learning, the planning remained flexible and adaptive, ensuring that the training responded meaningfully to the group's needs. This approach not only strengthened critical thinking and analytical skills, but also reinforced participants' capacity to learn from one another, transforming the diversity of profiles into a powerful driver of reflection, dialogue, and collective intelligence.

## Planning

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
AM	Welcome & icebreakers World map & intercultural games	Energiser Geo timeline & conflicts	Text study (Iran, China, etc.) Collective analysis	Outdoor & cohesion activities	Case studies (Palestine, etc.) Bias discussion	Creative presentations Debates	final evaluation
PM	Method & rules Democracy discussions	Stock market simulation Creative writing	Fishbowl debates Mid-term eval	Art & conflict workshop LG BTQIA+ / EU history	Writing: identity Sharing	Inspiring actions	cleaning

# Vocabulary

## Geopolitics

Geopolitics is a field of study that analyses the relationship between power, space and political processes at local, regional and global levels. It focuses on how geographical factors (such as territory, borders, resources and strategic locations), historical legacies and power relations shape political decisions and international relations.

How are geopolitical narratives constructed? Whose interests are prioritised in geopolitical strategies, and whose are marginalised?

## Democracy

Democracy is a political system and a normative ideal in which political authority derives from the people and is exercised either directly or through representative institutions. It is grounded in principles such as popular sovereignty, political participation, rule of law, pluralism and the protection of fundamental rights.

Who is included or excluded from democratic participation? How is power distributed and controlled? Is a real democracy possible?

## Critical Thinking

Critical thinking refers to a reflective and analytical cognitive process that involves questioning assumptions, evaluating evidence, examining power relations and assessing the validity of arguments. It requires awareness of personal, cultural and structural biases, as well as openness to complexity and contradiction.

Which voices are considered legitimate or authoritative? How do ideology, context and power influence what is presented as “truth”?

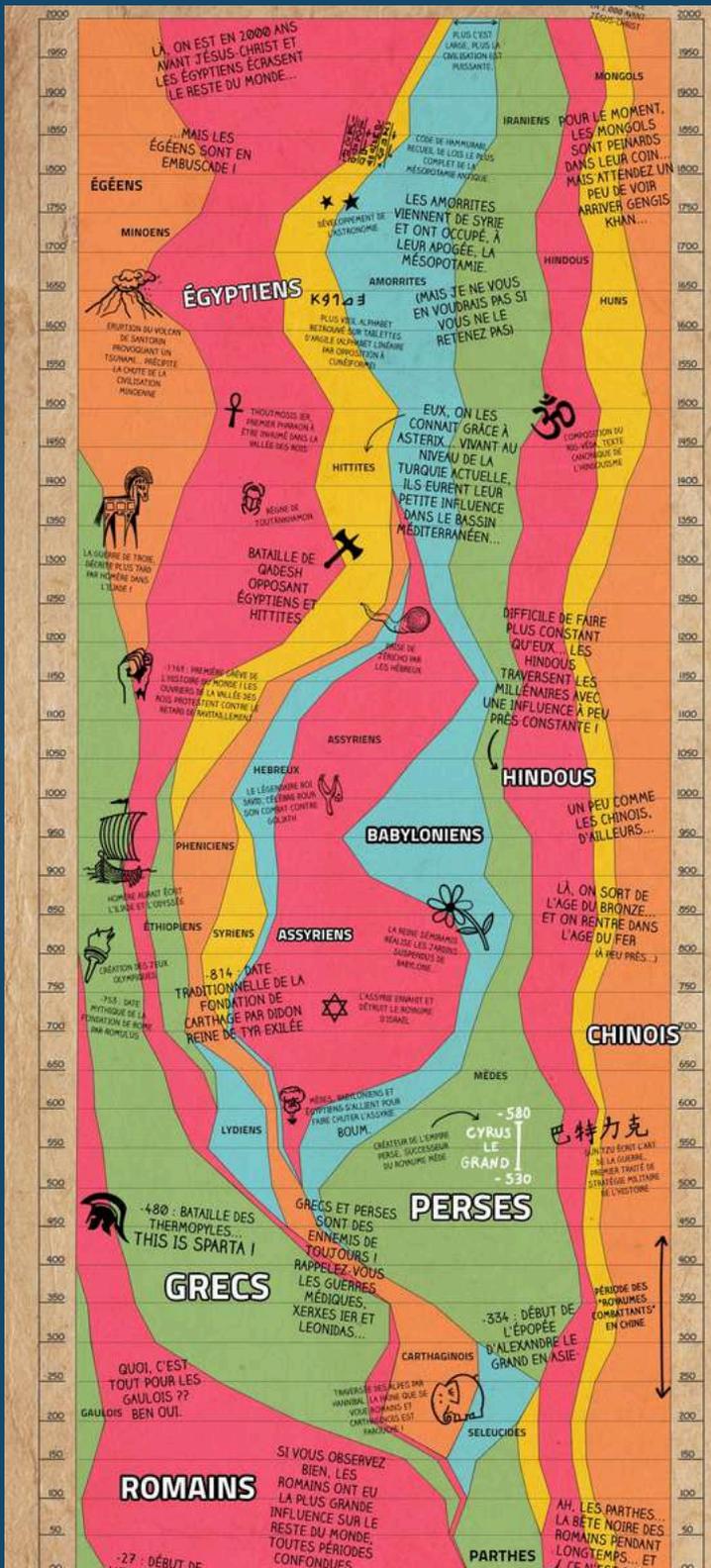
## Domination

Domination describes a social and political relationship in which power is asymmetrically distributed, enabling certain actors (individuals, groups or institutions) to impose their interests, norms or values on others. It may operate through coercion, consent, economic dependency, institutional arrangements or symbolic violence.

How is domination normalised or made invisible? What mechanisms sustain unequal power relations? How can domination be resisted, negotiated or transformed?



# CHRONOLOGICAL GEOPOLITICAL TIMELINE & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS PERIODS



c. 1259 BC – Treaty of Kadesh

This treaty between Egypt and the Hittite Empire is considered the first known diplomatic agreement in history.

0 – Birth of Jesus Christ

The birth of Jesus marks the beginning of Christianity and strongly influenced Western civilization

27 BC – AD 395 – Roman Empire

The Roman Empire unified large parts of Europe and the Mediterranean, shaping law, politics, and culture.

395 – Division of the Roman Empire

The Roman Empire was divided into Western and Eastern parts to improve administration and control.

395–476 – Western Roman Empire

The Western Roman Empire gradually declined and collapsed due to political instability and invasions.

395–1453 – Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine)

The Eastern Roman Empire survived for centuries and preserved Roman traditions until the fall of Constantinople.

1648 – PEACE OF WESTPHALIA: BIRTH OF THE MODERN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

State of the world:

Europe became a state-centered system where sovereign states were the main actors, with early overseas expansion and trade empires.

1066 – Norman Invasion of Great Britain

The Normans conquered England, transforming its political system, language, and culture.

1517 – Protestant Reformation

Martin Luther's actions led to a split between Catholics and Protestants in Europe.

### 19th Century – Early 20th Century: COLONISATION

State of the world:

Europe controlled most of the world, with strong inequalities between colonisers and colonised societies.

1788 – Colonization of Australia

Great Britain began settling Australia, using it as a penal colony.

1821 – Greek War of Independence

Greece rebelled against the Ottoman Empire and eventually became an independent state.

1917 – Bolshevik Revolution

The Bolsheviks overthrew the Russian government and established a communist regime.

1918 – Fall of the Prussian and German Empires

Germany's defeat in World War I ended its imperial system.

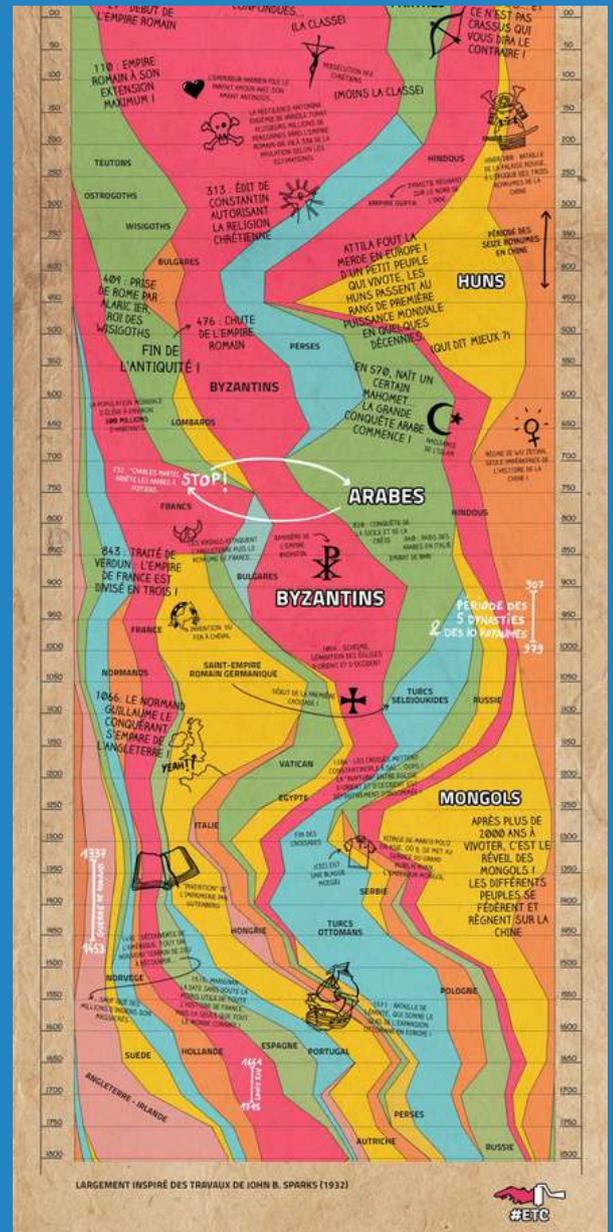
### 1919 – TREATY OF VERSAILLES: INTERWAR PERIOD

State of the world:

Europe was weakened, the United States emerged as an economic power, and colonial empires were contested.

1938 – Munich Agreement

European powers tried to avoid war by allowing Nazi Germany to annex parts of Czechoslovakia.



1942 – Brazil in World War II

Brazil joined the Allies, showing that World War II was a truly global conflict.

### 1945 – YALTA & POTSDAM: BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR

State of the world:

A bipolar world emerged, dominated by the USA and the USSR, while European powers declined.

Dominant IR theories:

Realism and Neorealism (Structural Realism).

1947 – Independence of India

India gained independence from British rule, accelerating global decolonization. A massive migration happens between India and Pakistan.

1948 – Creation of Israel

The State of Israel was established, leading to long-term conflict in the Middle East.

1950–1953 – Korean War

The war divided Korea into two states and symbolized Cold War tensions.

1951 – European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)

European countries cooperated economically to prevent future wars.

### 1945–1970s – DECOLONISATION

State of the world:

Many new states emerged, formal empires ended, but economic dependence often remained.

1975 – Decolonization of Portuguese Africa  
Portugal's African colonies gained independence after the Carnation Revolution.

1975–1979 – Khmer Rouge Regime

The Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia, causing mass violence and genocide.

Late 1980s – Macau Transition

Portugal and China negotiated the return of Macau to Chinese sovereignty.

### 1989–1991 – END OF THE COLD WAR

State of the world:

A temporary unipolar moment dominated by the United States, with intensified globalisation.

1989 – End of Communism in Eastern Europe

Communist regimes collapsed, including during the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia.

### 21st Century – MULTIPOLAR WORLD

State of the world:

A multipolar and fragmented system with multiple centers of power and transnational threats.

2004 – Estonia Joins the European Union

Estonia became part of the EU, reflecting post-Cold War European integration.

### 2000s–Present – EMERGENCE OF NEW POWERS

State of the world:

Relative decline of Western dominance and increased strategic competition.

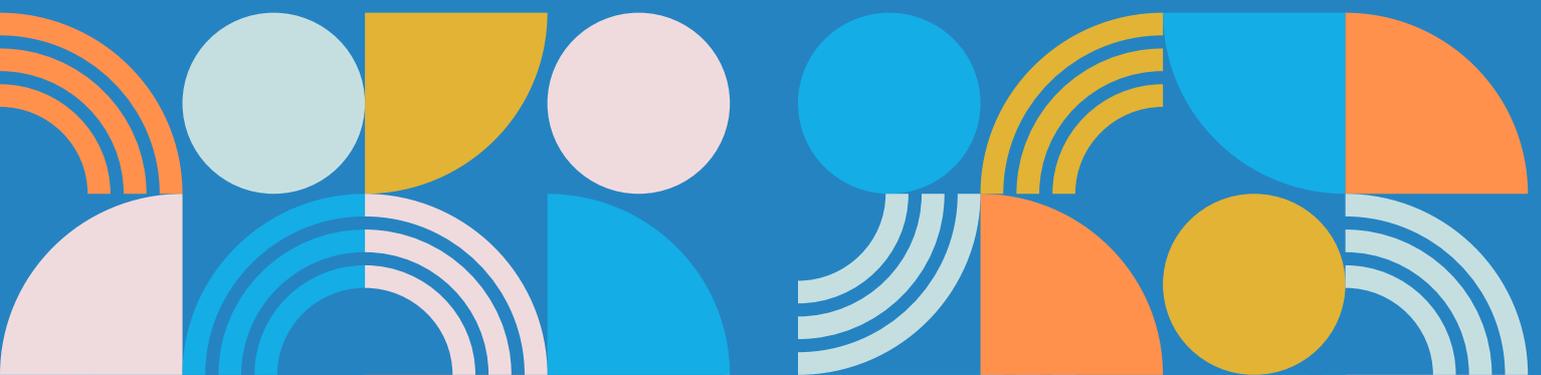


# Taboo on geopolitics

This geopolitical Taboo game is an educational and interactive activity designed to help players explore major international actors, institutions, and concepts in global affairs. Using the exact cards provided, the game includes key organizations such as the United Nations (UN), NATO, the European Union (EU), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the International Criminal Court (ICC), along with major geopolitical themes like war, terrorism, sanctions, soft power, technology, natural resources, and population. Each card contains one main word to guess, accompanied by forbidden keywords that players cannot use, forcing them to explain the concept creatively. For example, players may have to describe BRICS without saying "Brazil" or "Russia," or explain the IAEA without using "nuclear" or "atomic." This makes the game both challenging and fun, while encouraging participants to develop their vocabulary and understanding of international relations and global governance.

The objective of the game is to guess as many cards as possible within a limited time, while avoiding the taboo words, which encourages quick thinking, teamwork, and strategic communication. Because the themes cover diplomacy, trade, security, development, and international cooperation, the game naturally introduces players to the logic of geopolitics and the complexity of world order. Players will learn how global institutions interact with states, how alliances shape international security, and how economic tools like trade agreements or sanctions influence global power relations. The inclusion of broader categories such as "religion," "mafia," "history," and "sporting events" also shows how geopolitics goes beyond military conflict and includes culture, identity, and influence. Overall, this Taboo game is a dynamic way to revise or discover geopolitical concepts while making learning more engaging, competitive, and memorable.

Link to the game: [Geopolitics and Critical Thinking](#)



# Wall Street/ Stock Exchange

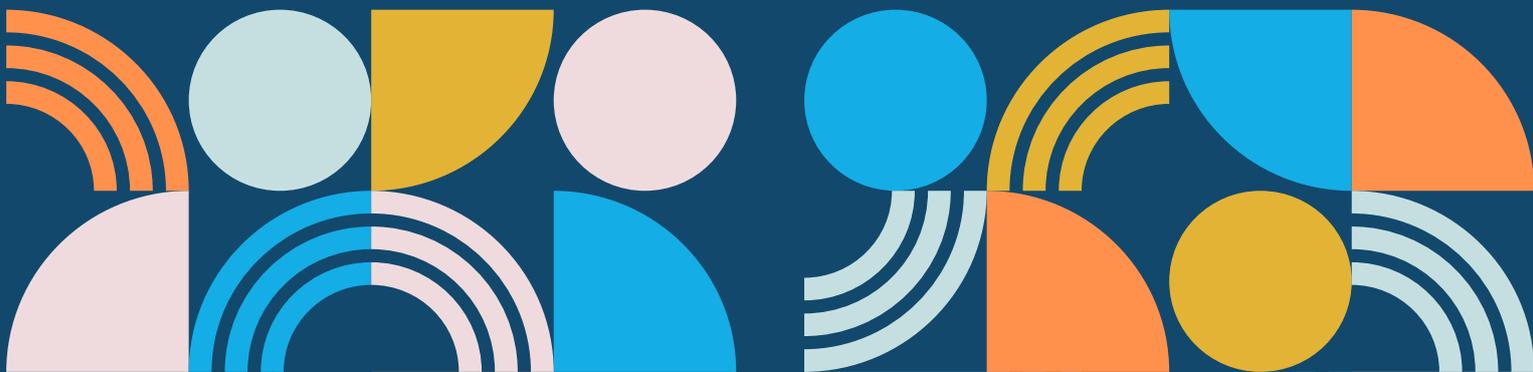
The Wall Street Simulation game is a powerful tool for youth workers and educators in geopolitics, offering a dynamic way to explore the complex interplay between ethics, profit, and power in the global corporate landscape. At its core, the game is structured to mirror the high-stakes environment of multinational corporations, where every choice—whether to exploit cheap labor, ignore environmental regulations, or prioritize shareholder profits—has ripple effects on society, the economy, and global politics.

What makes this game particularly powerful is its ability to expose the systemic issues that underpin global capitalism. Participants quickly realize that unethical choices often yield the highest short-term profits, while ethical decisions can lead to financial losses—at least within the confines of the game's rules. This dynamic sparks critical reflections on how corporate behavior is shaped by incentives, and how systems can be designed to reward exploitation rather than sustainability. \*

One of the greatest strengths of the Wall Street Simulation is its adaptability. Facilitators can customize the dilemmas to reflect current geopolitical issues, such as climate justice, digital colonialism, or labor rights in global supply chains.

For youth workers, the game is an invaluable tool for fostering critical thinking about global systems. It helps young people see beyond the surface of corporate narratives and understand the hidden mechanisms that drive inequality, environmental degradation, and social injustice. By experiencing these dynamics firsthand, participants are better equipped to question the status quo and imagine alternative ways of organizing economies and societies. The game also empowers them to think creatively about solutions, whether through consumer activism, policy advocacy, or community organizing.

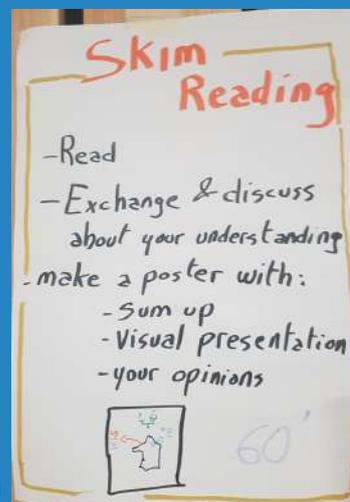
Link to the game description: [Geopolitics and Critical Thinking](#)



# Skim Reading

Small groups were formed to experiment group reading on an article of this analysis: [Geopolitics and Critical Thinking](#) and had to present their understanding of it to the rest of the group.

Arpentage, often described in English as a form of “skim reading,” is a powerful method of popular education that makes reading and knowledge accessible to everyone. By dividing a book or a text into sections and sharing the reading collectively, it removes the idea that books are reserved for experts or highly educated people, helping to desacralize literature and reduce the intimidation many feel toward complex texts. This approach encourages collective discussion, interpretation, and critical thinking, allowing participants to understand and engage with social and political issues that may initially seem difficult or abstract. In this way, arpentage transforms reading into a collaborative and empowering experience, giving people the confidence to explore complicated societal challenges and to connect knowledge with real-life experiences.



## 1. Iran: Resistance as a Strategic Mantra

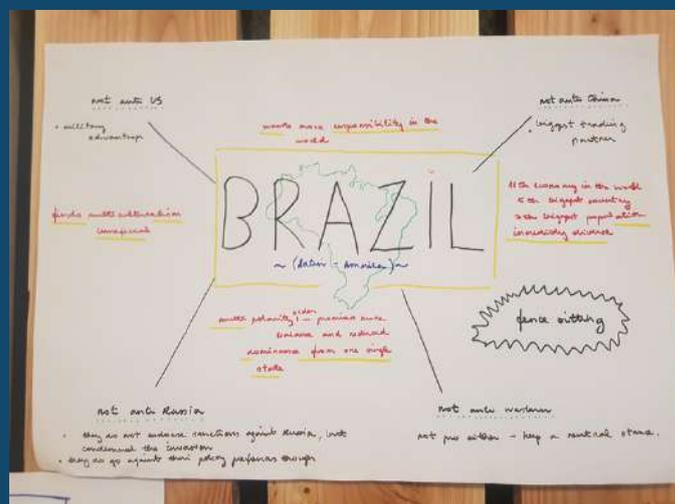
Iran views the liberal international order as a tool of U.S. hegemony and positions itself as a revisionist power, seeking to undermine Western dominance while navigating its own survival. Its foreign policy is rooted in the principle of "resistance," shaped by historical grievances—such as the 1953 coup against Mossadegh, the Iran-Iraq War, and the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018—which reinforced Tehran’s belief that the U.S. will always seek to contain or overthrow it. Iran’s strategy combines defiance (e.g., nuclear posturing, support for regional proxies like Hezbollah) with pragmatic adaptation, such as deepening ties with China and Russia to counter U.S. sanctions. However, these alliances have yielded limited economic benefits, leaving Iran reliant on circumvention of sanctions and regional trade networks. The 2023 Gaza war and the collapse of Iran’s "Forward Defense" strategy in Lebanon/Syria have exposed vulnerabilities, but Tehran remains convinced that long-term trends—such as U.S. decline and multipolarity—favor its resistance agenda.

## 2. China: Balancing U.S. Power, Reshaping Global Influence

China's vision for international order centers on reducing U.S. dominance while elevating its own role through a Westphalian framework—emphasizing sovereignty, non-intervention, and territorial integrity. Under Xi Jinping, China promotes a "community of shared future" to legitimize its rise and counter U.S. alliances, using diplomatic, economic (e.g., Belt and Road Initiative), and military tools. Beijing frames the U.S. as a declining hegemon and leverages global discontent with Western-led institutions to position itself as an alternative provider of public goods (e.g., UN engagement, BRICS expansion). While China avoids formal military alliances, its partnerships with Russia, Iran, and Global South nations aim to fragment U.S. influence. The U.S.–China rivalry accelerates this strategy, with China exploiting Trump's "America First" policies to portray itself as a stabilizer. However, its ambitions face challenges, including economic decoupling risks and skepticism from partners wary of over-dependence.

## 3. Turkey: Opportunistic Autonomy in a Fractured Order

Turkey pursues strategic autonomy to balance its Western ties (NATO membership) with engagements across Eurasia, the Middle East, and Africa. Its foreign policy elite, shaped by both Kemalist secularism and Islamist conservatism, rejects alignment with any single bloc, instead leveraging its geopolitical position to maximize influence. Ankara's approach combines defensive pragmatism (e.g., managing refugee flows, countering Kurdish groups) with opportunistic revisionism (e.g., challenging U.S. sanctions, deepening ties with Russia for energy and arms). Turkey's promotion of "civilizational diversity" and traditional values resonates with illiberal regimes, while its economic vulnerabilities (currency crises, EU accession stagnation) push it toward multi-alignment. The U.S. remains a critical but unreliable partner, and Turkey's balancing act—between NATO, Russia, and China—reflects its ambition to be a regional powerbroker without fully breaking from the West.



#### 4. Brazil: Multipolarity as Opportunity and Challenge

Brazil embraces multipolarity as a means to assert its global role while safeguarding sovereignty, a stance rooted in its historical resistance to U.S. dominance (e.g., Monroe Doctrine, 2013 NSA espionage scandal). As a co-architect of post-WWII institutions, Brazil advocates for reform—not revolution—of the liberal order, pushing for UN Security Council expansion and reduced Western control over global finance (e.g., IMF/World Bank leadership). Its foreign policy blends pragmatic non-alignment (engaging both the U.S. and China) with Global South leadership (e.g., G20 presidency, BRICS mediation). While Lula's government critiques U.S. hypocrisy (e.g., Ukraine war, Gaza), it avoids outright confrontation, prioritizing economic ties with China (top trade partner since 2009) and strategic autonomy. The U.S.–China rivalry complicates this balancing act, as Brazil faces pressure to pick sides on issues like 5G and sanctions, but its elite consensus favors flexible multi-alignment to maximize leverage in a fragmented world.

#### 5. Russia: Regional Dominance as a Path to Global Ambition

Russia views itself as a great power in a post-Western, multipolar world, with its vision of international order resting on three pillars: regional hegemony over post-Soviet states, undermining U.S. leadership, and exploiting Western divisions. The war in Ukraine is framed as a proxy conflict against U.S. hegemony, not just a territorial dispute, with Moscow positioning itself as the vanguard of anti-Western resistance. Russia uses military force (e.g., Ukraine, Syria), disinformation (e.g., election interference, anti-Western narratives), and regional organizations (e.g., CSTO, EAEU) to project power, though these tools have had mixed success (e.g., CSTO's failure to support Armenia in 2023). Economically, Russia leverages sanctions evasion (via Central Asia, China, and the Middle East) and energy diplomacy to counter Western pressure, but its attempts to provide alternative public goods (e.g., Sputnik V vaccine, financial aid) have largely failed. Moscow's alliance with China is opportunistic but asymmetrical: while both oppose U.S. dominance, Russia's dependence on China for trade and military tech undermines its autonomy. Domestically, Russian elites see the U.S. as a declining hegemon and believe the war in Ukraine accelerates the transition to a multipolar order. However, the text suggests Russia's long-term prospects are uncertain—it risks becoming either a rogue state (like North Korea) or a Chinese vassal, rather than a sustainable independent pole in a post-Western world.

# Case studies

## 1. Rise of Far-Right Coalitions in Europe

Since 2020, Europe has witnessed a steady rise of far-right parties, which have increasingly moved from the fringes to the heart of government coalitions. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party has dominated politics for over a decade, while in Italy, Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy won the 2022 elections, positioning Italy as a key player in Europe's rightward shift. Sweden's Democrats broke the traditional "cordon sanitaire" in 2022, becoming kingmakers in a center-right government. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) won the 2023 legislative elections, eventually forming a coalition with other right-wing parties. By 2024, France's National Rally (RN) became the largest party in the National Assembly, and Germany's AfD made historic gains in regional elections, reflecting growing discontent with mainstream politics.

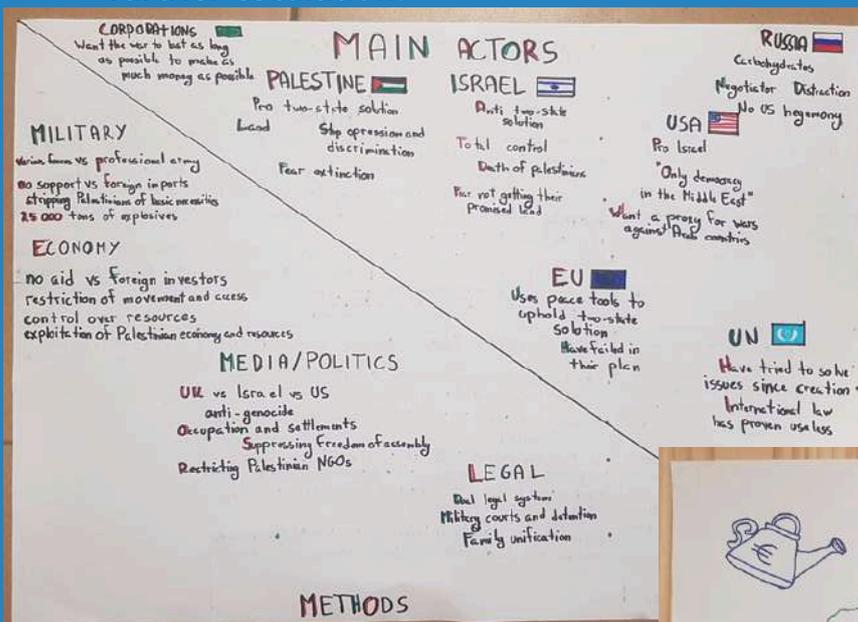
In 2025, Austria's FPÖ won legislative elections but struggled to form a coalition due to its radical stance. Meanwhile, Spain's Vox became a crucial partner for the center-right Popular Party, signaling the normalization of far-right politics. As 2026 approaches, Hungary's Fidesz faces a united opposition ahead of legislative elections, while Italy's Meloni continues to shape EU policies, aligning with conservative and far-right forces to push for stricter migration controls and a more sovereignist Europe.

Europe's far-right rise is reshaping the continent's political landscape, influencing policies on migration, security, and relations with Russia and the U.S. While mainstream parties still dominate EU institutions, the far-right's growing influence threatens to fragment European unity and challenge democratic norms. From a Russian perspective, this shift is seen as an opportunity to weaken EU cohesion and reduce support for Ukraine. Arab and African countries fear stricter migration policies and reduced aid, while the U.S. worries about the erosion of transatlantic unity and the potential for far-right alignment with authoritarian regimes.

## 2. Israel-Palestine Conflict

The Israel-Palestine conflict reached a devastating new phase in October 2023, when Hamas launched a surprise attack on southern Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking over 250 hostages. Israel responded with a massive military offensive in Gaza, leading to over 73,000 Palestinian deaths and a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Throughout 2024 and 2025, ceasefire negotiations repeatedly failed, and violence persisted in both Gaza and the West Bank. International pressure mounted for a two-state solution, but Israel's military campaign continued, drawing global condemnation for its heavy civilian toll. By 2026, the conflict remains unresolved, with Hamas still entrenched in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority struggling to regain control.

The conflict is a geopolitical flashpoint with global repercussions. For Israel and its allies, the war is framed as a fight against terrorism and a struggle for security. Arab and Muslim-majority countries view it as a brutal occupation and a humanitarian catastrophe, with many accusing the West of double standards. Russia and China use the conflict to criticize U.S. influence in the Middle East, while African nations often emphasize the need for a just solution to prevent further regional instability. The U.S. and EU are divided between supporting Israel's right to self-defense and calling for restraint to avoid further escalation.



### **3. European Migratory Policies**

Europe's migratory policies have undergone significant changes since 2020, driven by political shifts and external pressures. The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, set to be fully implemented by June 2026, aims to streamline asylum procedures, increase deportations, and establish "return hubs" outside the EU. Countries like Italy and Greece, facing disproportionate migrant arrivals, have pushed for stricter border controls and greater solidarity from other member states. Meanwhile, far-right parties across Europe have capitalized on anti-immigration sentiment, advocating for harsher policies and partnerships with third countries to curb migration flows. In 2025, the EU launched its first Annual Migration Management Cycle, identifying Italy, Spain, Greece, and Cyprus as countries under significant migratory pressure. The bloc has also intensified "migration diplomacy," negotiating deals with North African and Middle Eastern countries to stem migrant flows in exchange for financial aid. However, these policies have drawn criticism from human rights organizations, which argue that they prioritize border security over humanitarian concerns.

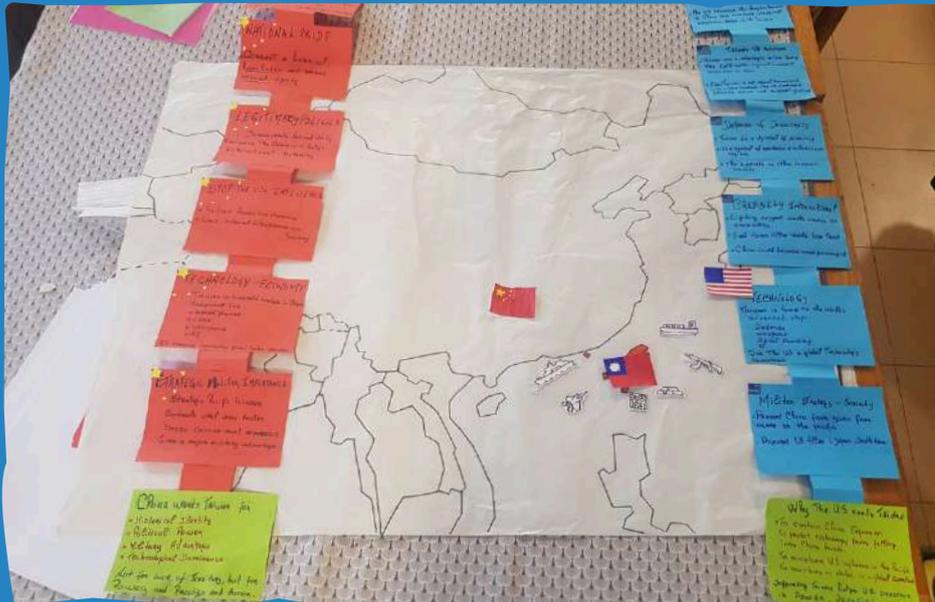
Migration remains one of Europe's most divisive issues, shaping domestic politics and EU cohesion. Southern European countries bear the brunt of arrivals and demand greater burden-sharing, while Eastern and Central European nations resist mandatory relocation quotas. From an African perspective, EU policies are seen as overly restrictive and hypocritical, given Europe's historical and economic ties to the continent. Russia and China exploit these divisions to undermine EU unity, while the U.S. watches closely, balancing its own migration challenges with transatlantic cooperation.

### **4. Taiwan Strait Tensions**

Tensions in the Taiwan Strait have escalated since 2020, as China ramps up military drills and political pressure to assert its claim over the island. In 2023, China conducted large-scale exercises simulating a blockade of Taiwan, following high-profile visits by U.S. officials. These drills intensified in 2024 and 2025, with China testing Taiwan's defenses and signaling its readiness to use force if necessary. Taiwan, under President Lai Ching-te, has responded by increasing defense spending and seeking closer ties with the U.S. and Japan. Meanwhile, the U.S. maintains its policy of "strategic ambiguity," balancing support for Taiwan with efforts to avoid direct conflict with China.

By 2026, the risk of a Chinese blockade or even an invasion remains a key concern, with global implications for semiconductor supply chains and U.S.-China relations. Taiwan's local elections in November 2026 and presidential elections in 2028 will be critical in shaping the island's future trajectory.

Taiwan is a potential flashpoint for a U.S.-China conflict, with global economic and security ramifications. For China, reunification with Taiwan is a core national goal, tied to its vision of "national rejuvenation." The U.S. and its allies view Taiwan as a democratic bulwark against Chinese expansionism, while Southeast Asian nations fear being caught in the crossfire. Russia supports China's stance, seeing it as a way to challenge U.S. dominance, while European countries are divided between economic ties with China and strategic alignment with the U.S.



## 5. Venezuela's Political and Economic Crisis

Venezuela's crisis has deepened since 2020, marked by economic collapse, political repression, and mass emigration. Under Nicolás Maduro, the country faced hyperinflation, U.S. sanctions, and a humanitarian catastrophe, with over 7 million Venezuelans fleeing since 2013. In January 2026, the U.S. launched a military operation to capture Maduro, installing an interim government led by Delcy Rodríguez. While this shift has raised hopes for economic recovery, Venezuela remains fragile, with deep-rooted corruption, crumbling infrastructure, and ongoing political instability.

The U.S. has framed its intervention as a fight against drug trafficking and authoritarianism, but critics argue it reflects broader geopolitical ambitions. Russia and China, long-time allies of Maduro, have condemned the U.S. actions, while Latin American countries are divided between supporting a democratic transition and fearing further destabilization.

Venezuela's crisis is a microcosm of broader geopolitical struggles, with implications for regional stability and global energy markets. For Latin America, the situation highlights the risks of U.S. interventionism and the need for homegrown solutions. Russia and China see Venezuela as a strategic partner in their challenge to U.S. influence, while African and Middle Eastern countries watch closely, given their own experiences with foreign intervention and resource politics.

# Understanding and Exploring Cognitive Biases

Cognitive biases are systematic patterns that cause us to deviate from rational or logical thinking, shaping how we perceive the world, remember information, and make decisions. These biases are not flaws in our character but natural shortcuts our brains use to process the overwhelming amount of information we encounter daily. While they can help us navigate complex situations quickly, they can also lead to errors in judgment, misunderstandings, and even reinforce stereotypes or misinformation. The key to mitigating their impact lies not in eliminating them—an impossible task—but in recognizing their presence and actively working to counteract their effects.

## Common Cognitive Biases

### Perception and Attention Biases

- Pareidolia: Seeing familiar patterns, such as faces or shapes, in random or ambiguous stimuli.
- Blind-Spot Bias: The tendency to recognize biases in others while failing to see them in ourselves, making self-reflection particularly challenging.
- Stereotyping/Representativeness Bias: Judging individuals or groups based on limited or superficial information, often ignoring the broader context or individual differences.
- Framing Effect: Reacting differently to the same information depending on how it is presented, such as perceiving "saving 200 lives" as more positive than "losing 400 lives," even though the outcome is identical.
- Salience Bias: Focusing on the most noticeable or emotionally striking information while overlooking less obvious but equally important details.

### Memory and Information Processing Biases

- Confirmation Bias: Favoring information that aligns with our pre-existing beliefs while dismissing or ignoring contradictory evidence.
- Illusion of Correlation: Perceiving a connection between unrelated events or actions, leading to superstitious thinking or incorrect assumptions.
- Hindsight Bias: The tendency to believe, after an event has occurred, that we could have predicted it all along.
- Information Bias: Seeking more information than necessary, even when it doesn't affect our actions or decisions, often under the illusion that more data equals better judgment.
- Ostrich Effect: Avoiding or ignoring information that challenges our comfort, beliefs, or worldview, which can prevent us from confronting uncomfortable truths.

## **Decision-Making and Judgment Biases**

- **Anchoring Effect:** Relying too heavily on the first piece of information we encounter (the "anchor") when making decisions, even if it's irrelevant or misleading.
- **Availability Heuristic:** Overestimating the importance of information that is readily available, such as recent news events or vivid examples, while underestimating less accessible but equally relevant data.
- **Dunning-Kruger Effect:** Overestimating our own abilities or knowledge, particularly in areas where we are incompetent, while those who are truly skilled may underestimate their expertise.
- **Overconfidence:** Having excessive confidence in our judgments or answers, which can lead to riskier decisions and a reluctance to seek alternative perspectives.
- **Bandwagon Effect:** Adopting beliefs or behaviors simply because many others do, regardless of the evidence or logic behind them.
- **Authority Bias (Halo Effect):** Privileging opinions or information from individuals who are attractive, charismatic, or authoritative, even if they lack expertise on the subject.
- **Loss Aversion:** Preferring to avoid losses rather than acquiring equivalent gains, which can lead to overly conservative or irrational choices.
- **Status Quo Bias:** Resisting change and preferring things to stay the same, often due to fear of the unknown or a desire for stability.
- **Outcome Bias:** Judging the quality of a decision based solely on its outcome, rather than the process or reasoning that led to it, which can distort our evaluation of past actions.

## **Social and Group Biases**

- **Groupthink (Asch Effect):** Conforming to the opinions or behaviors of a group to avoid conflict or maintain harmony, even if the group's consensus is flawed or incorrect.
- **Projection Bias:** Assuming that others think, feel, or believe the same way we do, which can lead to misunderstandings in communication and relationships.
- **In-Group Favoritism:** Favoring people who belong to the same social, cultural, or professional groups as ourselves, often at the expense of outsiders.
- **Humour Effect:** Remembering information better when it is presented in a humorous way, regardless of its accuracy or relevance, which can be both a helpful and misleading tool in education and communication.

## Exploring Your Own Biases

Exploring your own biases is an ongoing process that requires self-awareness, openness, and critical reflection. Our background, education, and personal experiences shape how we interpret information and interact with others. Taking time to reflect—through journaling or conscious questioning of your reactions—can help identify recurring patterns in your thinking. Asking simple questions such as Why do I think this? What perspectives might be missing? is a powerful starting point.

Engaging with diverse perspectives is equally important. Consulting a variety of media sources, including voices from different regions and cultural contexts, helps develop a more nuanced understanding of complex issues. Comparing how the same topic is framed by different outlets reveals underlying assumptions and narratives.

Critical thinking tools—such as debating the opposite viewpoint, fact-checking information, or using structured analysis methods—can further reduce the influence of unchecked assumptions. Seeking feedback from peers and participating in training on unconscious bias can also highlight blind spots.

Rather than trying to eliminate bias entirely, the goal is to recognize and manage it. By cultivating curiosity, intellectual humility, and openness to discomfort, individuals can make more informed, balanced decisions. For educators and facilitators, this awareness is especially important in creating inclusive learning spaces that encourage dialogue, multiple perspectives, and critical engagement.

## The Challenge of Bias in Geopolitical Education: Acknowledging Limits, Embracing Transparency

Geopolitical education is never fully neutral. Trainers inevitably bring their own cultural backgrounds, political views, and educational influences into the classroom. In many European contexts, for example, international relations are often taught through predominantly Western perspectives, while the experiences and viewpoints of countries in Africa, Latin America, or Southeast Asia receive less attention. This imbalance reflects broader inequalities in global media and academic production, where certain narratives dominate and others remain marginal.

Rather than claiming objectivity, responsible trainers should acknowledge these limitations openly. Recognizing that all knowledge is shaped by context encourages learners to question dominant narratives and engage more critically with the material. Transparency about one's own perspective strengthens, rather than weakens, the learning process.

A practical way to address bias is to diversify sources and viewpoints. Including materials from different geopolitical contexts exposes participants to contrasting interpretations of the same events. However, even diversified selections may still overlook underrepresented regions, reminding us that no approach is fully comprehensive.

Ultimately, the goal is not to eliminate bias but to make it visible and manageable. By embracing humility, encouraging multiple perspectives, and fostering critical thinking, trainers can equip learners to navigate complex global issues with greater awareness and nuance.

