

A CRITICAL STUDY OF DEMOCRACIES

The PhD programme in «Democracy in the 21st Century?» is the result of a partnership between the Centre for Social Studies (CES) and the Faculty of Economics at the University of Coimbra (FEUC). Since its establishment in 2007, it has become a space for critical reflection and advanced training focused on the study of the political, social, and institutional transformations shaping contemporary democracies.

With a curriculum that combines theoretical training, methodological depth, and individualised supervision of research projects, the programme welcomes students from diverse academic and professional backgrounds, fostering a learning environment characterised by diversity, scientific rigour, and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Throughout the course of study, PhD candidates have the opportunity to engage in ongoing research projects, participate in academic networks, and benefit from an internationalised academic environment.

The programme awards a doctoral degree in Sociology from the University of Coimbra and, in cases covered by specific cooperation agreements, may lead to a joint degree with partner foreign universities.

FACULTY

The programme boasts a highly qualified faculty, trained at leading universities with extensive experience in research, teaching, and public engagement. Their areas of expertise include Sociology, Political Science, Urban, Territorial and Environmental Planning, International Relations, and Educational Sciences, ensuring a critical and comparative approach to democratic dynamics. Involved in international networks and projects, they collaborate with academic institutions and civil society organisations, creating opportunities for mobility and cooperation.

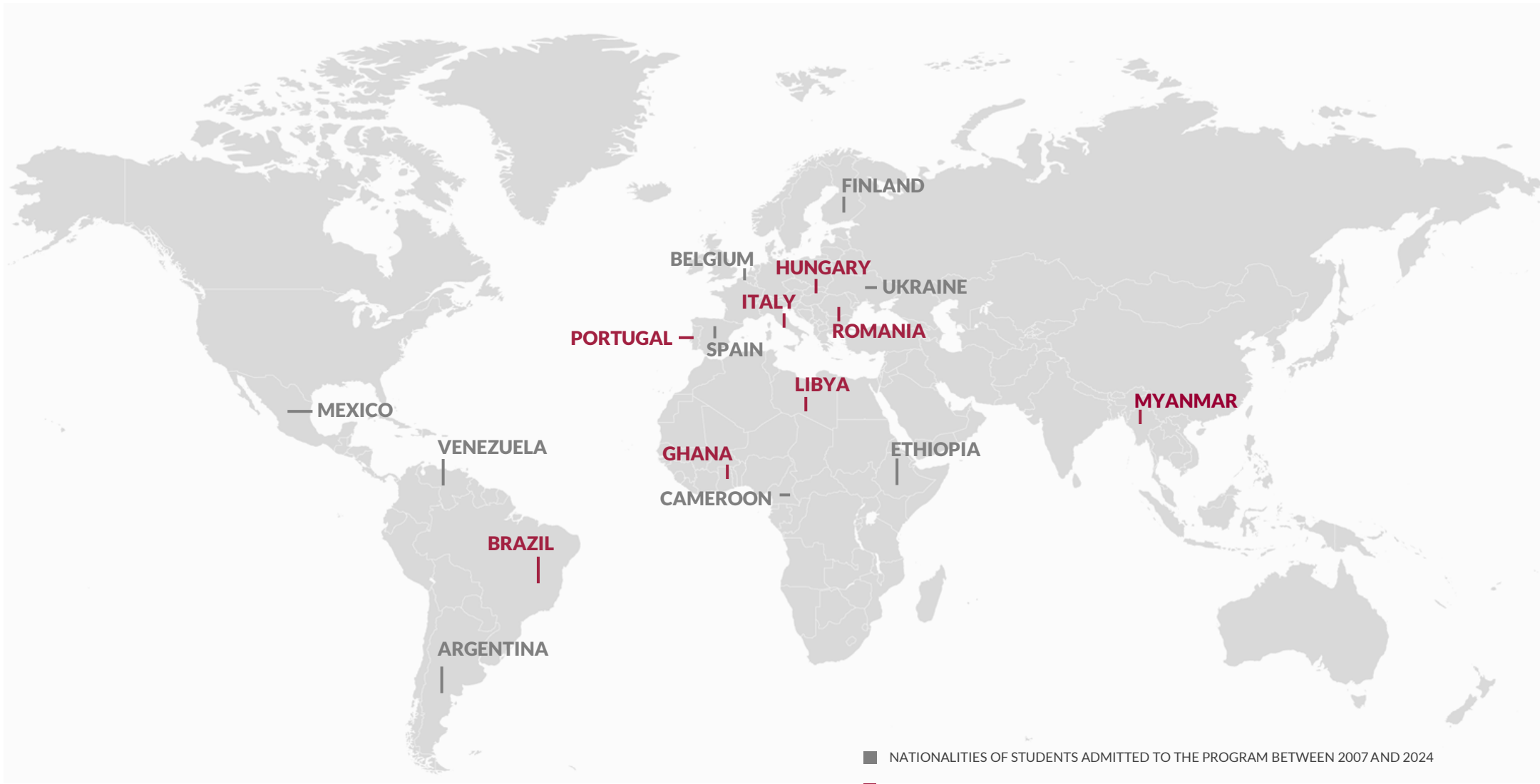
A PLURAL COMMUNITY

The programme welcomes students from diverse backgrounds in the social sciences and humanities, as well as other fields with an interest in critical reflection on democracy. The combination of (early-career) researchers and professionals with experience in sectors such as public administration, education, journalism, social movements, or international cooperation fosters a dynamic and interdisciplinary environment. The community is international and multicultural, promoting critical debate and the development of transnational research networks.

RESEARCH AND CAREER PATHS

The research carried out by PhD candidates reflects the thematic and geographical diversity that defines the programme. Ongoing projects and completed theses address key challenges facing contemporary democracies, bridging different scales—from local to transnational—and multiple regions—from Latin America to European contexts, from Africa to the Middle East and Asia.

Graduates have gone on to pursue careers at leading universities and research centres (such as USP, UNB, PUC-PR, CES, ICS, CRIA, ISCTE, Sciences Po, Università di Padova, Politecnico di Milano, Université de Genève, University of Southampton, University of Alberta, among others), as well as in scientific management projects, the private sector (consulting, communications), and public institutions.



■ NATIONALITIES OF STUDENTS ADMITTED TO THE PROGRAM BETWEEN 2007 AND 2024
■ NATIONALITIES OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE PROGRAM IN 2025

SCHOLARSHIPS & FUNDING

FCT SCHOLARSHIPS

The CES (Centre for Social Studies) serves as the academic host institution for students in the programme and provides support at every stage of applications for national and international funding. Of particular note are the doctoral scholarships awarded by the [Foundation for Science and Technology \(FCT\)](#), granted annually through competitive calls. Between 2016 and 2024, 22 students from the programme applied for these scholarships, with 18 being successful—most on their first or second attempt (see Figures A and B).

Figure A. Programme students who applied for FCT scholarships, 2016-2024

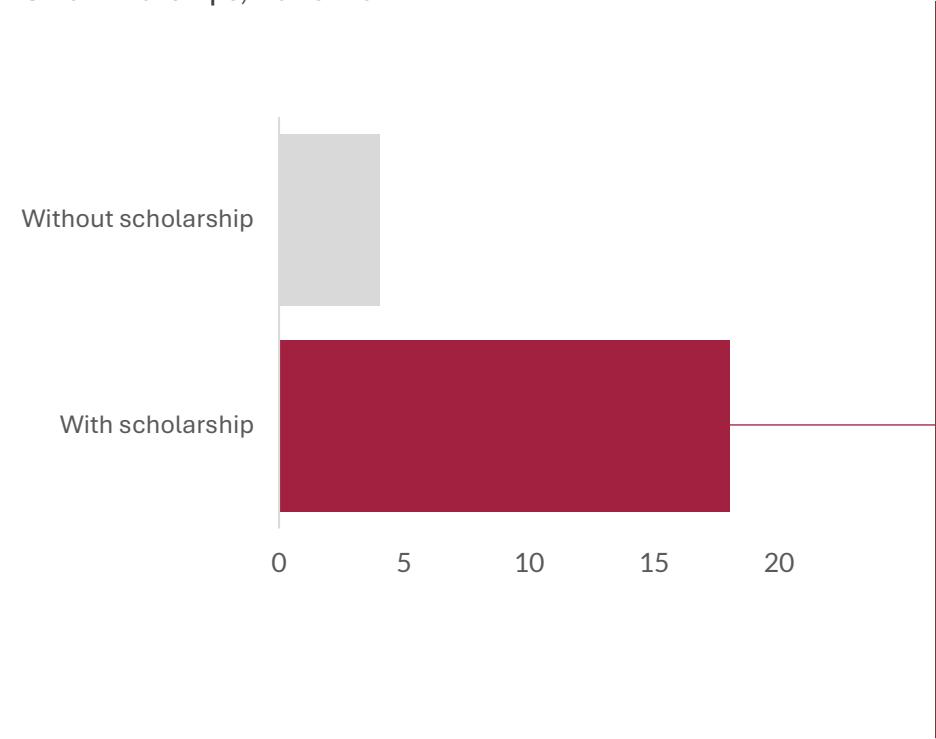
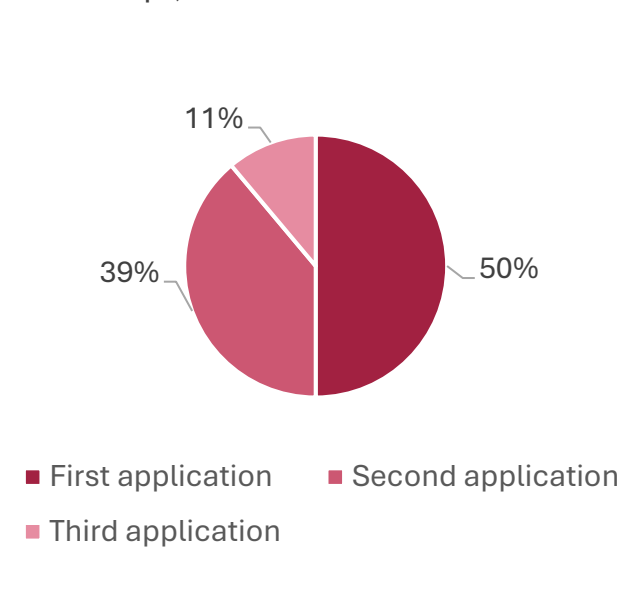


Figure B. Programme students awarded FCT scholarships, 2016-2024.



OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Beyond FCT funding, PhD candidates may apply for scholarships offered by institutions such as the [Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation](#), the [Luso-American Development Foundation \(FLAD\)](#), [Camões – Institute for Cooperation and Language](#), as well as the student services of African Countries with Portuguese as an Official Language (PALOP) embassies. The University of Coimbra also regularly advertises opportunities for international mobility funding. Additionally, the programme has its own fund to support student participation in conferences, workshops, and summer schools, while the CES hosts multiple funded research projects with opportunities for early-career researchers.

STUDY PLAN AND PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The programme is structured over eight semesters (240 ECTS).

First semester

Theories and Democratic Institutions (10 ECTS)

Ecological Crisis and Democracy (10 ECTS)

‘Race’ and Racism in Democratic Societies (10 ECTS)

Second semester

Social Movements and Democracy (10 ECTS)

Public Policies and Civic Participation (10 ECTS)

Global Governance and Democracy (10 ECTS)

Third semester

Research Methods (10 ECTS)

Thesis Project (20 ECTS)

Thesis (150 ECTS)

TEACHING SCHEDULE AND WORKING LANGUAGES

Classes are held on Fridays (morning and afternoon, 10:00–17:00) and Saturdays (10:00–13:00). The programme languages are English and Portuguese. Proficiency in Portuguese is not a requirement for admission. Applicants who are not fluent in the language may enquire about the availability of [language courses](#) offered by the University of Coimbra

ACADEMIC CALENDAR 2025/26

The first semester runs from September to January, and the second semester from February to July. The academic calendar for the 2025/26 academic year is available [here](#).

TUITION FEES

The annual tuition fee is €2,000.

APPLICATIONS 2025/26

APPLICATION PERIODS

- 2 June – 15 July 2025
- 1 September – 12 September 2025

WHO CAN APPLY

- Holders of a master's degree or legally equivalent qualification.
- Holders of a bachelor's degree in Sociology, Political Science, or other Social Sciences and Humanities, provided they present an exceptionally relevant academic or scientific background. This must be formally recognised by the Scientific Council as demonstrating the candidate's ability to undertake this cycle of studies.*

* This recognition serves only for admission to the doctoral programme and does not confer equivalence to a master's degree or official recognition of such a degree.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Applications must be submitted exclusively through the InforEstud@nte online platform.*

* A non-refundable application fee of €50 is required, which applies in all cases - including invalidated applications or instances where the applicant is not placed on the programme.

FURTHER INFORMATION



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