Universidad de Navarra

Comparative political systems (RRII+Doble RRII/Der/His)

Teaching guide 2026-27

1. INTRODUCTION

This course aims to familiarise students with the fundamental concepts, analytical methods, and theoretical approaches central to the subfield of comparative politics. The discussions are organised around the essential questions and topics that shape comparative research, while critically examining the strengths and weaknesses of different theories. Given the constraints of a single semester, comprehensive coverage of any single topic or of the subfield as a whole is not possible. This course is therefore conceived as an introduction to comparative politics that encourages students to pursue further study in the field.

The course is structured around four thematic blocks. The first introduces the foundational concepts of political science: the state, national and social identities, and political ideologies. The second examines regime types — democratic and non-democratic — and the institutions that define them. The third focuses on the mechanisms of political representation: parties, party systems, and electoral rules. The fourth addresses the cultural, conflictual, and dynamic dimensions of politics, exploring how institutions change, erode, and break down.

All required readings will be made available in electronic format through ADI. Additional readings may be distributed during the semester.

Degree	IR / IR & Law / IR & History
ECTS	6
Year, Semester	2nd / 5th year, Autumn semester
Typer of course	Required
Instructor	Aurken Sierra, Ph.D. – Associate professor
Language	English
Lecture schedule	Tuesdays 15:30–17:30 / Wednesdays 17:30–19:30
Final exam	9th December 2026 | Aula 11, 8:30 am - 10:30 am

** Sessions originally scheduled for **Tuesday, September 22**, and **Wednesday, September 23**, have been postponed to Friday, October 9, and Friday, October 16, respectively. Both rescheduled sessions will be held in Arquitectura - Aula 4 from 15:30 to 17:30.

2. LEARNING OUTCOMES (Competencies)

Universidad de Navarra

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Define and distinguish the core concepts of comparative politics, including the state, regime, legitimacy, sovereignty, and political institutions.
- Classify political regimes using established typological frameworks (Diamond, Linz, Sartori, Levitsky & Ziblatt).
- Identify and compare different systems of government (parliamentary, presidential, semi-presidential) and their institutional implications.
- Apply Sartori's typology to classify and analyse party systems in different national contexts.
- Evaluate the design and effects of electoral systems on political representation.
- Analyse the role of political culture, identity, and collective action in shaping political outcomes.
- Critically assess current processes of democratic erosion, authoritarian resilience, and regime change using theoretical frameworks from the course.

CORE COMPETENCIES

CC2 - Ensuring that students are able to apply their knowledge to their work or vocation in a professional manner and possess the competencies typically demonstrated through the development and defense of arguments and problem-solving within their field of study.

CC3 - Equipping students with the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to make judgments that include reflection on socially, scientifically, or ethically relevant issues.

CC4 - Enabling students to effectively convey information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialized and non-specialized audiences.

CC5 - Developing the necessary learning skills for further studies with a high degree of autonomy.

GENERAL COMPETENCIES

GC01 - Analyzing, evaluating, and reasoning different international situations based on acquired knowledge.

GC02 - Negotiating, mediating, persuading, and communicating firmly in the field of international relations.

GC04 - Using English correctly with the scientific and academic terminology specific to international relations.

GC05 - Being able to orally express oneself correctly and appropriately on international topics.

GC08 - Skillfully handling new information and communication technologies and applying them to international relations.

SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES

SC02 - Analyzing the nature and characteristics of relationships among international actors, particularly among states.

SC03 - Understanding and comprehending the main elements that define a state's foreign policy.

SC06 - Distinguishing the different competencies and functions of the state, international organizations, and non-state actors in the international system.

SC13 - Familiarity with and analysis of contemporary political theories and ideologies.

SC16 - Analyzing different international conflicts, their causes, development, and effects on countries and the international society.

SC21 - Evaluating possible solutions to international conflicts.

SC23 - Analyzing the political, legal, socio-cultural, economic, and technological environment as a determinant of industrial and business activity in any country in the world.

3. PROGRAMME

The course is organised into four thematic blocks. Each block builds on the previous one: Block I establishes the conceptual foundations; Block II applies them to the analysis of regimes; Block III examines the institutions of representation; Block IV addresses the dynamic and conflictual dimensions of politics.

Block I — Foundations of Comparative Politic

Topic 0: Introduction

What is comparative politics? The logic of comparison. Why institutions matter. Structure of the course and assessment.

Topic 1: The State

Origins and formation of the modern state. Weber's definition of the state and the monopoly of legitimate violence. Sovereignty and its contemporary challenges. State capacity and state failure. Historical trajectories of state formation.

Topic 2: Nations and Societies

The concept of nation. Nationalism: civic and ethnic variants. National identity and political mobilisation. Ethnic identity and its political consequences. The politics of belonging.

Topic 3: Political Attitudes and Ideologies

What are ideologies? The left–right cleavage and its contemporary relevance. Liberalism, conservatism, socialism, nationalism, populism. The role of religion in politics. Islamism as a case study.

Block II — Regimes

Topic 4: Democratic Regimes — The Basics

Defining democracy: procedural and substantive approaches. Dahl's polyarchy. The institutions of democratic governance. Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential systems compared. The origins and spread of democracy.

Topic 5: Democratic Regimes — Types of Democracy

Majoritarian vs. consensus democracies (Lijphart). The problem of illiberal democracy. Hybrid regimes and the grey zone between democracy and authoritarianism. Electoral authoritarianism. Competitive authoritarian regimes.

Topic 6: Nondemocratic Regimes

Typologies of authoritarian regimes (Linz). Totalitarianism. Military rule, single-party regimes, personalist rule. Mechanisms of authoritarian control and legitimation. Democratic backsliding and erosion: contemporary cases. Transitions from authoritarian rule.

Block III — Representation

Topic 7: Political Parties

Functions and origins of political parties. Party organisation: mass parties, catch-all parties, cartel parties (Katz & Mair). Party families in comparative perspective. The decline of parties? Populist challenges to party democracy.

Topic 8: Electoral Systems

Types of electoral systems: majoritarian, proportional, mixed. Duverger's law. Effects on party systems, representation, and government formation. Constitutional choices for new democracies (Lijphart). The politics of electoral reform.

Block IV — Culture, Violence and Change

Topic 9: The Logic of Belonging

Ethnic politics and political identity. The "ethnocracy trap". Group identity and political mobilisation. Identity politics: definitions and debates. Minority rights and democratic theory.

Topic 10: Political Culture

Defining political culture. Social capital and civic engagement (Putnam). Value change and post-materialism (Inglehart). Trust, legitimacy, and political disaffection. Political culture and democratic stability.

Topic 11: Political Violence

Defining political violence. Civil war: causes and dynamics (Fearon & Laitin). Terrorism: definitions, causes, and typologies (Crenshaw). State failure and the new nature of security. Insurgency and ethnic conflict.

4. SCHEDULE

Week	Content	Block
1	**Topic 0: Introduction / Topic 1: The State (1)**	I
2	**Topic 1: The State (2) / Topic 2: Nations & Societies (1)**	I
3	**Topic 2: Nations & Societies (2) / Topic 3: Ideologies (1)**	I
4	**Topic 3: Ideologies (2) / Block I Review**	I
5	**Topic 4: Democratic Regimes — The Basics (1 & 2)**	II
6	**Topic 5: Types of Democracy (1 & 2)**	II

7	**Topic 5: Types of Democracy (1 & 2)**	II
8	**Topic 6: Nondemocratic Regimes (1 & 2)**	II
9	**Block II Review / Topic 7: Political Parties (1)**	II–III
10	**Topic 7: Political Parties (2) / Topic 8: Electoral Systems (1)**	III
11	**Topic 8: Electoral Systems (2) / Block III Review**	III
12	**Topic 9: Logic of Belonging / Topic 10: Political Culture**	IV
13	**Topic 11: Political Violence (1 & 2)**	IV

5. READINGS

The following table lists required and recommended readings for each topic. Required readings must be completed before the corresponding class session. Recommended readings are for those who wish to deepen their understanding; they are not compulsory but may improve examination performance. All required readings are available through ADI.

Main handbooks

- O'Neil, P.H., Fields, K.J. & Share, D. (2022). Essentials of Comparative Politics (6th ed.). Norton. [Primary course text]
- Caramani, D. (ed.) (2020). Comparative Politics (5th ed.). Oxford University Press. [Supplementary reference]

Topic	**Required**	**Recommended**
T0 – Intro	Fukuyama – The Necessity of Politics	O'Neil ch. 1
T1 – State	Weber – Politics as a Vocation Tilly – Coercion, Capital and European States (ch. 1)	Krasner – Sovereignty Herbst – State Building in Africa

T2 – Nations	Hobsbawm – On Nationalism	Howard – The Ethnocracy Trap
T3 – Ideologies	Berman – Islamism, Revolution and Civil Society	Freeden – Ideology: A Very Short Introduction (ch. 1–2)
T4 – Democracy (basics)	Schmitter & Karl – What Democracy Is and Is Not	O'Neil ch. 5
T5 – Democracy (types)	Zakaria – The Rise of Illiberal Democracy Diamond – The Rule of Law v. the Big Man	Larry Diamond – Thinking about Hybrid Regimes Lijphart – Constitutional Choices for New Democracies
T6 – Nondemocratic	Blumberg – The Trap of Liberalized AutocracyBunce & Wolchik – Conclusions	Levitsky & Ziblatt – How Democracies Die (ch. 1) Linz – Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes (intro)
T7 – Parties	Katz & Mair – Changing Models of Party Organization (Party Politics, 1995) Aldrich – Why Parties? (ch. 1)	O'Neil ch. 7
T8 – Electoral	King – Electoral Systems Lijphart – Constitutional Choices for New Democracies	Cox – Making Votes Count (ch. 2)
T9 – Belonging	Howard – The Ethnocracy Trap Hima – An Introduction to Identity Politics	Fearon & Laitin – Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War (intro)
T10 – Culture	Putnam – Making Democracy Work (ch. 6)	Inglehart – Changing Values among Western Publics (West European Politics, 2008)
T11 – Violence	Fearon & Laitin – Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil WarCrenshaw – The Causes of Terrorism	Rotberg – The New Nature of Nation-State Failure

6. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

6.1 Lectures (52 hours)

The instructor will deliver two two-hour lecture sessions per week. Sessions combine conceptual exposition, discussion of assigned readings, and engagement with current political events where relevant. Students are expected to complete the required readings before each session. Lecture slides will be posted on ADI at the end of each topic.

6.2 Country Case Study (individual work)

Each student will be assigned a country from a closed list at the start of the semester. Assignments are made by the instructor and are not negotiable. The assignment requires students to produce an individual analytical report of 900–1,100 words, due on November 14, submitted via ADI.

The report is not a country profile or a political history. Its purpose is to apply the conceptual frameworks studied in this course to analyse the country's current political situation. Students must consult the Freedom House *Freedom in the World* (2026) and V-Dem *Democracy Report* (2026) as primary data sources, and must cite specific scores and indicators — not general descriptions. Each analytical claim must be supported by a named concept from the course, attributed to its author. Generic statements unsupported by theoretical grounding will not receive credit.

The report must follow a fixed four-section structure: (1) regime classification, (2) state structure and system of government, (3) party system analysis using Sartori's typology, and (4) one current institutional challenge. Full instructions, the complete country list, and the assessment rubric are provided in a separate document available on ADI. Students are strongly advised to read the instructions carefully before beginning work.

6.3 Weekly Reading Quizzes

Short multiple-choice quizzes on the required readings will be administered periodically via ADI. These quizzes count toward the participation grade and are designed to encourage consistent engagement with the readings throughout the semester.

6.4 Exams

The course has two graded examinations.

- **Midterm exam** (**liberatory**, **Topics 1–2**): date **TBA**, held once Topic 1 (The State) and Topic 2 (Nations and Societies) have been completed. It consists of 40 multiple-choice questions in the double-statement format, to be completed in 30 minutes. Students must answer at least 20 questions correctly to pass. This exam is graded on a pass/fail basis only; no numerical grade is awarded. Students who pass earn the full 10% assigned to this component and are exempted from being examined on Topics 1 and 2 in Part 1 of the final exam. Students who do not pass earn 0% for this component and remain examinable on the full programme, including Topics 1 and 2, in the final exam.
- **The final exam** takes place on **December 9, 2026**, and counts for **60% of the final grade (70% for students who did not pass the midterm exam)**. Part 1 is a multiple-choice filter test of 40 questions in the double-statement format, to be completed in 30 minutes, covering *either the full programme or Topics 3–11* depending on whether the student passed the midterm exam. Students must answer at least 20 questions correctly to have Part 2 corrected. Part 2 consists of short and medium-length conceptual questions worth a total of 10 points and is only corrected if Part 1 has been passed. **Failing the final exam (Part 1 or, where corrected, Part 2) implies failing the course, regardless of whether the student passed the midterm exam.**

6.5 Personal study (93 hours)

Universidad de Navarra

Students are expected to devote approximately 93 hours to personal study: completing the required readings (approximately 50 hours), revising lecture notes and preparing for examinations (approximately 38 hours), and working on the country case study (approximately 5 hours).

Activity	Hours
Lectures	52
Country Case Study (individual preparation)	5
Personal study and exam preparation	88
Exams	5
TOTAL (6 ECTS)	**150**

7. ASSESSMENT

7.1 Ordinary call

The final grade is the instructor's overall assessment of the student's achievement of the course objectives. Passing the multiple-choice section of the final exam is a necessary condition for passing the course.

Component	Weight
Class participation and weekly reading quizzes	15%
Country Case Study	15%
Midterm exam	10%
Final exam – Part 1 (filter) + Part 2	60%

Midterm exam (10%): date **TBA**, held once Topics 1 and 2 have been completed. The exam consists of 40 questions to be completed in 30 minutes and covers Topics 1 and 2. It is graded on a pass/fail basis only (minimum 20/40 correct answers to pass); no numerical grade is given. Students who pass earn the full 10% of the final grade assigned to this component and are exempted from being examined on Topics 1 and 2 in Part 1 of the final exam. Students who do not pass earn 0% for this component and remain examinable on the full programme in the final exam.

Final exam (60%, or 70% for students who did not pass the midterm exam): takes place on 9th December 2026, and consists of two parts. Part 1 is a multiple-choice filter test of 40 questions in the double-statement format, to be completed in 30 minutes, covering the full programme for students who did not pass the midterm, or Topics 3–11 for students who did. Students must answer at least 20 questions correctly to have Part 2 corrected; a failing grade in Part 1 means a failing grade for the exam regardless of Part 2 performance. Part 2 consists of short and medium-length conceptual questions worth a total of 10 points and is only corrected if Part 1 has been passed. **Failing the final exam implies failing the course, regardless of whether the student passed the midterm exam**.

Participation and quizzes

The participation grade is based on two components: active engagement during lecture sessions (quality of contributions to discussion, responsiveness to questions on the readings), and completion of weekly reading quizzes on ADI. Regular attendance is a prerequisite for a meaningful participation grade.

Criteria to pass the course

- Students with a final grade of 5.0 or above will pass the course.
- Students with a final grade below 5.0 will receive a Suspenso.
- Students who do not sit the final exam will receive a No Presentado.
- Passing Part 1 of the final exam is a necessary condition for passing the course.

Failing the final exam (Part 1 or, where corrected, Part 2) implies failing the course, regardless of whether the student passed the midterm exam.

7.2 Resit (June)

The resit examination accounts for 100% of the final grade. It follows the same double-statement multiple-choice format used in the diagnostic test and the final exam. It consists of two parts:

- Part 1: 40 double-statement multiple-choice questions covering the full programme. Students must answer at least 20 questions correctly to have Part 2 corrected.
- Part 2: short and medium-length conceptual questions worth a total of 10 points, only corrected if Part 1 is passed.

Repeating students are subject to the same requirements as first-year students. The diagnostic test grade from the ordinary call is not carried over to the resit.

7.3 Exam review

Students may review their examinations in an individual meeting with the instructor, to be scheduled after grades have been published.

8. CONCEPTUAL OBJECTIVES OF THE SUBJECT:

8.1 Lectures

Lectures provide the conceptual scaffolding for each topic. They cover the key terms, arguments, and frameworks from the readings, but they do not substitute for the readings themselves. The most productive use of lectures is to come having read the assigned texts, so that the session can deepen and contextualise what you have already encountered on the page.

8.2 Reading strategy

When approaching a reading, resist the impulse to read word by word. Instead: skim the introduction and conclusion to identify the author's central argument; scan section headings and first sentences of paragraphs to understand how the argument is structured; then read closely only those passages that develop or support the argument. If a set of readings is taking you more than three hours, you are reading too slowly. Leave time after reading to ask yourself:

- What is the author's main argument?
- What evidence does the author use?
- Is the argument convincing? What are its weaknesses?
- How does this reading connect with others from the course?

8.3 Participation

Active participation is expected and evaluated. This means coming to class having read the assigned material, contributing to discussions, and engaging critically with the concepts and arguments presented. Transforming a lecture into a genuine intellectual exchange requires the collective effort of every student in the room.

The quality of participation is assessed as follows:

- **High:** Comments show substantive engagement with the reading, add to the discussion, and are grounded in specific textual or empirical evidence.
- **Satisfactory:** Comments show engagement and willingness to connect lecture material to readings, even if tentatively.
- **Low:** Comments show presence but no evidence of having engaged with the readings.

8.4 Electronic devices

All course materials are distributed electronically through ADI. The use of laptops or tablets is not permitted. Phones must be set to silent. Students requiring electronic devices for medical or accessibility reasons should inform the instructor at the start of the semester.

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES

Main handbooks

- O'Neil, P.H., Fields, K.J. & Share, D. (2022). Essentials of Comparative Politics (6th ed.). New York: W.W. Norton. Find it at the Library (Ed. 2021)
- Caramani, D. (ed.) (2020). Comparative Politics (5th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Find it at the Library

Other recommended texts

- Levitsky, S. & Ziblatt, D. (2018). How Democracies Die. New York: Crown.
- Linz, J.J. (2000). Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Lijphart, A. (2012). Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries (2nd ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sartori, G. (1976). Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tilly, C. (1992). Coercion, Capital and European States. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Putnam, R. (1993). Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Required articles and book chapters (available on ADI)

- Berman, S. – Islamism, Revolution and Civil Society
- Blumberg – The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy
- Bunce, V. & Wolchik, S. – Conclusions
- Crenshaw, M. – The Causes of Terrorism
- Diamond, L. – The Rule of Law vs. the Big Man
- Diamond, L. – Thinking about Hybrid Regimes
- Fearon, J. & Laitin, D. – Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War
- Fukuyama, F. – The Necessity of Politics
- Herbst, J. – The Challenge of State Building in Africa
- Hima – An Introduction to Identity Politics
- Hobsbawm, E. – On Nationalism
- Howard, M. – The Ethnocracy Trap

- Inglehart, R. – Changing Values among Western Publics (West European Politics, 2008)
- Katz, R. & Mair, P. – Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy (Party Politics, 1995)
- King, G. – Electoral Systems
- Krasner, S. – Sovereignty
- Lijphart, A. – Constitutional Choices for New Democracies
- Putnam, R. – Making Democracy Work, ch. 6
- Rotberg, R. – The New Nature of Nation-State Failure
- Schmitter, P. & Karl, T.L. – What Democracy Is and Is Not
- Tilly, C. – Coercion, Capital and European States, ch. 1
- Weber, M. – Politics as a Vocation
- Zakaria, F. – The Rise of Illiberal Democracy

OFFICE HOURS

Aurken Sierra, Ph. D.

- Office 0621
- Sánchez Bella building, Ground floor, left corridor.
- Office hours: Wednesdays 12pm - 2 pm / Thursdays 9:00 am - 11:00 am. Schedule an appointment.