

## COMPARATIVE POLITICS

**Doble grado Administración de Empresas y Relaciones  
Internacionales / Dual Business Administration and  
International Relations BBABIR SEP-2025 CP-NBAIR.3.M.C**

Area Comparative Politics

Number of sessions: 30

Academic year: 25-26

Degree course: THIRD

Number of credits: 6.0

Semester: 1º

Category: BASIC

Language: English

Professor: **GUILLERMO TORAL**

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[Guillermo Toral](#) is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the IE School of Politics, Economics, and Global Affairs, and a Faculty Affiliate at MIT GOV/LAB. He obtained his PhD in Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2020, and an MPhil in Comparative Government at the University of Oxford in 2011. Prior to joining IE, Guillermo worked as Assistant Professor at Vanderbilt University. Before doing his PhD, he spent several years working on human development policy and programs at the World Bank, in Washington DC and across Latin America.

Guillermo works in the fields of comparative politics and political economy, with a regional focus on Latin America and Southern Europe, and a substantive focus on issues of development, governance, and corruption. His research focuses on relationships among state actors (politicians, bureaucrats, and anti-corruption agents) and how they shape public service delivery and human development. In his work, Guillermo uses big administrative datasets, surveys, and extensive qualitative fieldwork to shed light on dynamics of government accountability.

Some of Guillermo's research has been published or is forthcoming in leading journals, including the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics*, and the *Annual Review of Political Science*. He has also published a number of policy reports and book chapters.

### Office Hours

Office hours will be on request. Please contact at:

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## SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

This course allows students to explore and scrutinize some of the key contemporary debates in comparative political science – or comparative politics. Comparative politics involves describing, comparing, and explaining political phenomena around the world. In today's climate of increased political volatility and heightened political risk, a course in comparative politics forms an essential part of the education of any aspiring professional (both in the public and the private sectors) with an international outlook and a keen interest in cross-border affairs. It asks questions such as how do different countries' political systems compare to one another and why are they similar or different? What effect does having a presidential form of government rather than a parliamentary one? Why do some countries have a multiparty political system while others have a two-party system? How do rules for elections differ across countries and what effects do they have on politics and representation? Students will get acquainted with studying human behavior embedded in institutions and what that entails for the larger system of representative democracy.

How do political systems around the world differ? What are the origins of such differences? What consequences do political systems and institutions have for economic, social, and human development? How can we make sense of historical and contemporary patterns of political development? And how can leverage all that knowledge to intervene in the world and make it a better place to live?

This course introduces students to comparative politics, a broad subfield of political science preoccupied with providing answers to these and many other questions related to politics and its impact on human livelihoods.

The semester is organized in 4 substantive blocks:

- First, a block of 5 sessions focuses on the field of comparative politics and the nature, emergence and development of the most important arena of contemporary politics -- the state.
- A second block of 4 sessions is dedicated to political regimes (democracy and authoritarianism, with their respective subtypes) and their survival.
- Next, a block of 4 sessions turns to varieties of political representation (parliamentarism and presidentialism, different types of elections, and electoral systems).
- Fourth, a 12-session block considers major political actors, including parties, voters, subnational authorities, courts, interest groups, social movements, and bureaucrats.

Through a combination of lectures, readings, discussions, workshops, and individual and group research, this course will build students' ability to leverage the concepts, theories, and methods of comparative politics to think systematically through complex political and social problems, and to advance original, evidence-based arguments about them. The skills we build in this class will be useful for those seeking careers in sectors where analyzing complex social problems is valuable, be it in business, government, international organizations, or research.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Knowledge and understanding of a number of key contemporary debates and theories
- Ability to critically evaluate theories and concepts through original, independent and critical thinking
- Practice in the use, interpretation, and presentation of quantitative measures and indicators of concepts in comparative politics
- Ability to digest and use academic readings
- Oral and written communication skills
- Library and information retrieval skills
- Practice of independent research

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

1. Describe the key dimensions of variation in political systems around the world and how major countries in all continents differ along them.
2. Reflect critically about the origins and consequences of differences in political systems, with reference to established theories in political science.
3. Apply key concepts and theories of political science to debates about politics around the world.
4. Demonstrate social scientific literacy, including basic quantitative literacy, and apply it to the study and discussion of politics.
5. Use critical reading, autonomous research, and academic writing skills to build and present cogent and evidence-based arguments about politics.

## TEACHING METHODOLOGY

IE University teaching method is defined by its collaborative, active, and applied nature. Students actively participate in the whole process to build their knowledge and sharpen their skills. The instructor's main role is to lead and guide students to achieve the learning objectives of the course. This is done by engaging in a diverse range of teaching techniques and different types of learning activities.

The course will take a scientific approach to studying comparative politics and emphasize important concepts, theories, empirical questions and research findings. To this end, sessions will combine the explanation of theoretical concepts with practical activities such as doing exercises and class activities where appropriate. Doing the required readings (listed in this syllabus) before class is key to fruitful in-person sessions and to succeeding in the class more generally. Additional, recommended readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Learning Activity	Weighting	Estimated time a student should dedicate to prepare for and participate in
Lectures	26.7 %	40.0 hours
Discussions	6.7 %	10.0 hours
Exercises in class, Asynchronous sessions, Field Work	20.0 %	30.0 hours
Group work	13.3 %	20.0 hours
Individual studying	33.3 %	50.0 hours
TOTAL	100.0 %	150.0 hours

## **AI POLICY**

Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools may be used in this course for brainstorming and generating an outline, with appropriate acknowledgement. GenAI may not be used for taking quizzes or exams, or for generating any text submitted as own's writing. If a student is found to have used AI-generated content inappropriately, it will be considered academic misconduct, and the student might fail the respective assignment or the course. Students in doubt about the use of GenAI tools in this course can get in touch with the instructor to discuss.

## **PROGRAM**

### **SESSION 1 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Introduction to the course's objectives, requirements, rationale, and participants**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics - introduction (See Bibliography)*

### **SESSIONS 2 - 3 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**The approach and methods of comparative politics**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics - chapter 2 ("Approaches in comparative politics") (See Bibliography)*

*Book Chapters: Foundations of Comparative Politics - chapter 2 ("What is science?") (See Bibliography)*

### **SESSIONS 4 - 5 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**The nature, formation, and development of states**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics (chapter 4 - "The nation state") (See Bibliography)*

*Book Chapters: Foundations of Comparative Politics (chapter 4 - "The origins of the modern state") (See Bibliography)*

### **SESSIONS 6 - 7 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Regimes: Authoritarianism, types, and survival**

*Book Chapters: Foundations of Comparative Politics (chapter 8 - "Varieties of dictatorship") (See Bibliography)*

### **SESSIONS 8 - 9 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Regimes: Democracy, democratization, and survival**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics (chapter 5 - "Democracies") (See Bibliography)*

*Book Chapters: Foundations of Comparative Politics (chapter 7 - "Democratic transitions") (See Bibliography)*

### **SESSIONS 10 - 11 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Representation: Parliamentarism and presidentialism**

*Book Chapters: Foundations of Comparative Politics (chapter 10 - "Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies") (See Bibliography)*

## **SESSIONS 12 - 13 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Representation: Elections and electoral systems**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics (chapter 10 - "Elections and referendums") (See Bibliography)*

*Book Chapters: Foundations of Comparative Politics (chapter 11 - "Elections and electoral systems") (See Bibliography)*

## **SESSION 14 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Review session for the mid-term exam**

## **SESSION 15 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Mid-term exam**

## **SESSIONS 16 - 17 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Actors: Political parties and party systems**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics (chapters 12 and 13 - "Political parties" and "Party systems")*

*(See Bibliography)*

## **SESSIONS 18 - 19 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Actors: Voters and political behavior**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics (chapter 18 - "Political participation") (See Bibliography)*

## **SESSIONS 20 - 21 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Actors: Subnational authorities**

*Book Chapters: Foundations of Comparative Politics (chapter 13 - "Institutional veto players") (See Bibliography)*

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics (chapter 11 - "Multilevel governance") (See Bibliography)*

## **SESSIONS 22 - 23 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Actors: Courts**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics (chapter 9 - "Constitutions, rights, and judicial power") (See Bibliography)*

## **SESSIONS 24 - 25 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Actors: Interest groups and social movements**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Politics (chapters 14 and 16 - "Interest groups" and "Social movements") (See Bibliography)*

## **SESSIONS 26 - 27 (LIVE IN-PERSON)**

**Actors: Bureaucrats**

*Book Chapters: Comparative Government and Politics (chapter 10 - "Bureaucracies") (CED)*

## SESSIONS 28 - 29 (LIVE IN-PERSON)

Review session for the final exam

## SESSION 30 (LIVE IN-PERSON)

Final exam

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

Participation should be a maximum of 10%. This can be exceeded when it is based on individual works such as quizzes, response papers, etc.

criteria	percentage	Learning Objectives	Comments
Final exam	40 %		Closed book, in-person exam covering all sessions and readings (sessions 1-30)
Mid-term exam	20 %		Closed book, in-person exam covering sessions and readings up to session 14
Quizzes	10 %		Closed book, unannounced, in-person quizzes on the assigned readings
Research design	20 %		Creative assignment in groups
Exercises	10 %		Open book, in-group exercises

## RE-SIT / RE-TAKE POLICY

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### Compulsory

- Caramani, Daniele. (2020). *Comparative Politics*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0198820607 (Digital)
- Clark, William Roberts; Golder, Matt; and Golder, Sona Nadenicheck. (2019). *Foundations of Comparative Politics*. CQ Press. ISBN 1544326866 (Digital)

## BEHAVIOR RULES

Please, check the University's Code of Conduct [here](#). The Program Director may provide further indications.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Please, check the University's Attendance Policy [here](#). The Program Director may provide further indications.

## **ETHICAL POLICY**

Please, check the University's Ethics Code [here](#). The Program Director may provide further indications.

