CIEE Berlin, Germany

Course title: European Comparative Political Systems
Course code: (GI) POLI 3002 BRGE
Programs offering course: Global Architecture and Design, Berlin Open Campus Block
Open Campus Track: International Relations and Political Science
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3.00
Contact hours: 45.00
Term: Spring Block II 2021

Course Description

This course examines the political systems of various European nation states. Focus is placed on the main political cleavages in each, such as class, ideology, ethnicity, and religion, and how these divisions have influenced the political playing field. Additional topics include nationalism, citizenship, party structures, corporatism, the welfare state, and electoral politics. A special focus will be recent symptomatic challenges to European democracy. As we compare the features of these different democratic systems in detail and relate them to their historical and cultural context, we will focus on three major challenges common to all of these democracies: the decreasing level of participation, especially regarding voter turnout; the decline of large political parties, which raises the question of who, in future, is going to mediate between the citizens’ interests and those of the state; and the perception that the major decisions in democratic countries are increasingly made outside the purview of democratic institutions.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Compare the significant differences between the political systems of the countries analyzed and explain how these differences translate into a specific landscape of political parties and characteristic patterns of governance.
- Articulate the wider historical and social context that has brought forth different variants of democratic constitutions
- Identify common problems of and challenges to European democracies and discuss these at the level of democratic theory.
- Scrutinize the most important positions in the recurrent debate about the “crisis of democracy.”
- Assess proposals for improvement and think creatively about how to help democracies become more just and more democratic and regain their lost public appeal.
- Practice critical thinking skills, e.g. by developing and applying category schemes to identify the strengths and weaknesses of constitutional democracies in Europe and analyze their similarities and differences.
- Leverage meetings with legislators, activists, and political scientists that are part of the course to hone one’s questioning techniques and other interview skills.

Course Prerequisites

Students should have completed a course in history, politics, or cultural studies.

Methods of Instruction

The course will consist of introductory lectures by the professor, followed by Q&As and class discussions based on these lectures and the assigned readings. Particular attention will be paid to the gap between democratic theory and political practice, and how this gap is both productive and a source of frustration. The learning process will be enhanced by discussion meetings with representatives of different players in the public sphere, among them NGOs, political scientists, and professional politicians.

Assessment and Final Grade

1. Presentation 15%
Course Requirements

Presentation

Individual presentations of not more than 8 minutes are required. Students are expected to provide a critical synopsis on current and historically predominant political issues facing the European Union.

Research Paper

Each student is required to write a research paper of 2500 words in length. Topics may be historical, theoretical, or empirical. Materials prepared in connection with the interviews and debate meetings (see under Class Participation) may be expanded into a research paper. The instructor offers suggestions, advice, and monitoring.

Debate

Students will participate in a debate on contemporary politics topics assigned by the instructor. Each debate will be organised in groups, with opening statements, rebuttals, and closing statements. Students are expected to demonstrate clearly evidence of reading from the course materials, and reading / engagement with current affairs in European and Global politics.

Final Exam

The purpose of the exams is to allow students to demonstrate, and verify for themselves, that they have understood the main arguments / positions discussed in class and demonstrate their ability for creative thinking by evaluating and further developing them. Exams consist of essay questions that refer to the assigned readings as well as to class debates and excursion topics.

Participation

Participation is valued as meaningful contribution in the digital and tangible classroom, utilizing the resources and materials presented to students as part of the course. Meaningful contribution requires students to be prepared in advance of each class session and to have regular attendance. Students must clearly demonstrate they have engaged with the materials as directed, for example, through classroom discussions, online discussion boards, peer-to-peer feedback (after presentations), interaction with guest speakers, and attentiveness on co-curricular and outside-of-classroom activities.

Attendance

Regular class attendance is required throughout the program, and all absences will result in a lower participation grade for any affected CIEE course. Due to the intensive schedules for Open Campus and Short Term programs, absences that constitute more than 10% of the total course will result in a written warning.

Students who transfer from one CIEE class to another during the add/drop period will not be considered absent from the first session(s) of their new class, provided they were marked present for the first session(s) of their original class. Otherwise, the absence(s) from the original class carry over to the new class and count against the grade in that class.

For CIEE classes, excessively tardy (over 15 minutes late) students must be marked absent.

Attendance policies also apply to any required co-curricular class excursion or event, as well as to any required field placement. Students may not miss placement/work hours at an internship or service learning site unless approved in advance by the Academic Director and placement supervisor. All students must complete all of the requisite 100 minimum work hours on site at the internship or service learning placement to be eligible for academic credit.

Students who miss class for personal travel, including unforeseen delays that arise as a result of personal travel, will be marked as absent. No make-up or re-sit opportunity will be provided.

Attendance policies also apply to any required class excursion, with the exception that some class excursions
cannot accommodate any tardiness, and students risk being marked as absent if they fail to be present at the appointed time.

Absences for classes will lead to the following penalties:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Total Course Hours Missed</th>
<th>Minimum Penalty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 10%</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 – 20%</td>
<td>Participation graded as per class requirements; grade penalty &amp; written warning</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20%</td>
<td>Automatic course failure, and possible expulsion</td>
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N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

**Weekly Schedule**

**Week 1**

Class: 1.0  Introduction: Keeping One’s Bearings in the World of Political Dispute

The course begins with a revision of the dominant political ideologies in Europe from the 19th century to our time, a crucial foundation for understanding the political systems to be investigated in detail.

Reading:

Heywood, Politics, Ch. 2, “Political Ideas and Ideologies”: 27–55, and Ch. 6, “Political Economy and Globalization”: 128–150

**Week 2**

Class: 2.0  Overview: The Transformation of European Politics

The overview of the second week provides general orientation with regard to the variety of constitutions, electoral systems, and political parties in Europe, as well as recent crises and attempts at reform. While concentrating on the contemporary situation of democracies in Europe, some historical aspects will necessarily be included.

Reading:


Magone 2011, Contemporary European Politics, Ch. 3: “The Transformation of European Politics”: 76–105

Class: 3.0  European Unity?

During this class, incorporating a guest speaker, students will examine the crises that have beset the European Union since the global financial crisis in 2008.

Reading:

Dinan 2017, The European Union Crisis, Ch. 1: “A Multi-Dimensional Crisis”: 1-15,

Nugent 2017, The European Union Crisis, Ch. 9, “The Crisis and the EU’s Institutions, Political Actors and Processes”: 167-187

**Presentations Due**
Patterns of Democracy I: Germany

In this class we will examine governmental institutions and policy making within the German polity: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the German parliamentary democracy? What is the relationship between political system and civil society? What are general and specific challenges of the future?

**Reading:**

Heywood, Politics, Ch. 15, “Constitutions, Law and Judges”: 331–344

Hancock et al. 2014, Politics of Europe, Parts 3.3 and 3.4: 239–284, 285–298

Green et al. 2012, The Politics of the New Germany, Ch. 5, "Parties and Voters": 94–114

Patterns of Democracy II: France

Building on our analysis of the German polity, we will study the semi-presidential political system of France, focusing on similar questions and keeping a comparative perspective.

**Reading:**

Drake 2011, Contemporary France, Ch. 1, "Histories and Legacies": 8–36, and Ch. 4, “Government, Policy-making and the Republican State” 93–121

Hancock et al. 2014, Politics of Europe, Part 2.3: 139–165

Chafer & Godin, The End of the French Exception: 17–36

Week 4

Patterns of Democracy III: Denmark

We will study the parliamentary democratic system of Denmark, and again ask 'what are the strengths of the Danish model of governance?' We will investigate the notion of a Nordic model of governance, and to what extent it is appropriate for Denmark.

**Reading:**


Elklit, Jorgen 2005, “Denmark: Simplicity Embedded in Complexity (or is it the Other Way Round)?”

Elklit, Jorgen 1993, “Simpler than its reputation: The electoral system in Denmark since 1920”

Bildt, Carl. “Is There Such Thing as a Nordic Model?”

Youth and Politics in Europe

Site visit and meeting with youth wing of a political party, and discuss the value of the Young Political Leaders Programme within the European Parliament.

**Reading:**


Research Paper Due

Week 5

European Democracies in Crisis: The Case of Hungary

Hungary represents the dramatic case of a rapid transition from a liberal to an illiberal democracy through a “tyranny of the majority”. Our interest will be to analyze the individual steps and phases of this deterioration and examine what conclusions can be drawn from it for the theory and practice of democracy.

**Reading:**
Reforming and Strengthening Democracy: Experiments in Theory and Practice

How relevant and urgent are recurrent warnings about a “crisis of democracy”, the loss of trust in democratic institutions and the inefficiency of their decision-making processes?

**Reading:**


Spinelli & Van Reybrouck 2011

**Week 6**

Class: 10.0 Deliberative Democracy

**Site Visit TBA**

We will look at reform proposals such as those connected with the concept of “deliberative democracy”, and concrete reform experiments such as the G1000 manifesto in Belgium.

**Reading:**


**Course Materials**

**Readings**


**Online Resources**

WZB Rule of Law Center:

The Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University:
http://cdd.stanford.edu/

Eurozine (a netmagazine that publishes outstanding articles from more than 80 associated journals partnered in the network by the same name):
http://www.eurozine.com/

G1000 Platform for democratic innovation:
http://www.g1000.org/en/

European Parliament: Young Political Leaders Programme