

GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

Course: POLS 395: European Politics and Society
Credits: 3 Credits
Instructor: Alex Wilson, PhD



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Course Objectives

This course introduces students to developments in European politics and society since 1945. The focus will be on the structures and actors of democratic politics in Europe, whose complex history is marked by the creation of nation-states and multi-national federations, democratic and authoritarian regimes. Students will be encouraged to think critically and in a comparative way about Europe, making links with their own political system and bringing their own knowledge to enlighten class discussions. European democracies face a complex series of challenges in the modern world. Many countries in Europe have had to manage complex transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic systems, while managing the related transition from inefficient command economies to successful market economies. Society in the Balkans is still recovering from the terrible effects of civil war in the 1990s, which the international community (including the European Union) has done much to help. More consolidated democracies face the challenge of accommodating competing nationalities (e.g. Basque Country, Catalonia, Scotland) within a common state. European states are also struggling with the concentration of political, media and business power, and the effect this has on democratic politics and political institutions. Vote switching, electoral system change and popular referendums are some of the ways in which European citizens are seeking to force change in their elected representatives. European states have pursued extensive processes of integration to strengthen their economic competitiveness and social cohesion, and coordinate their response to global challenges. The unique construction of a European Union is the most significant development in this respect, implying a change in traditional governance arrangements and a challenge to classic visions of democracy and party government.

Course Content

The first half of the course will focus on the key institutions of representative democracy in modern Europe, and will begin with a session on the difference between majoritarian and consensual regimes. The following session will consider the role of executives, led either by Presidents or Prime ministers, whose method of election and relative power varies considerably between European states. Another core institution is the Parliament (legislature), whose degree of control over the executive explains key differences in policy-making outcomes across Europe. Adapting this model of representative democracy to the EU Institutions is proving a necessary but difficult process, and will be discussed in the next session. The final session analyzes government decision-making as a multi-level process, which includes multiple political actors (local and central, public and private). This session will reflect on the adoption of federal solutions in European states divided along linguistic-territorial lines, as well as more pragmatic solutions in European states merely aiming for more streamlined and efficient government.

The second half of the course will begin by comparing political parties in Europe, which are the key societal and governmental actors across European states. The institutional structures of European democracies are heavily conditioned by the nature of social conflicts, leading to different mechanisms for conflict resolution, such as consensual forms of decision-making. Institutional rules such as electoral systems determine how political parties compete with each other, and in some European states the referendum is a device that can check the unconstrained power of party elites. Another session will deal with the challenge of implanting democratic states and functioning market economies in countries hitherto controlled by authoritarian regimes, whether communist (eastern Europe) or fascist (southern Europe). The penultimate session will dwell on the challenge posed by the conflict in the Balkans, and what is required from the European and international community to stabilize the situation and guarantee peaceful development. The concluding session will reflect on the challenges that European states and societies face in a globalized and technologically advanced world, as well as the opportunities that technology and globalization presents for Europeans.

Course Description

Sessions have two parts (lecture and discussion), with a short break between them. The lecture is conducted by the Professor, and students are encouraged to ask questions or raise points at any time. Students will be expected to make a presentation in the first session and another in the second session. Student contribution is vital for the success of this class, so forms a substantial part of the overall grade (see below). There is no paper requirement. Some classes will have specialist guest speakers, invited from universities in Florence. Students are expected to sit both mid-term and end of term exams, which will test the first and second part of the course. These will exams take the form of broad essay questions designed to test the knowledge and critical thinking of students, as well as their ability to understand the various concepts and realities discussed during the class.

Course Grading

Student presentation, discussion, attendance (**40%** of the total grade)

Mid-term exam (**30%** of the total grade)

End of term exam (**30%** of the total grade)

Material

A reading pack with the readings and material for student presentation is available. The textbook is Michael Gallagher, Michael Laver and Peter Mair, *Representative Government in Modern Europe*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006 (4th Edition). Although it is recommended that students buy this textbook, since it constitutes the principal reading for the majority of classes, the book is also available in the library for photocopying.

Course Outline (Provisional)

Session 1: 11 January 2010

Introduction (Course Outline, Expectation of Students, Questions and Answers Session)

Session 2: 18 January 2010

Title: Consensual and Majoritarian Democracies in Europe

Assigned Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapter 1)

Arend Lijphart *Patterns of Democracy*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1999, Chapters 1 and 2

Session 3: 25 January 2010

Title: Presidents and Prime Ministers in Europe

Assigned Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapter 2)

Paul Webb and Thomas Poguntke, *The Presidentialization of Politics. A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Chapter 15.

Session 4: 1 February 2010

Title: Legislative Politics in Europe

Assigned Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapter 3)

Kaare Strom 'Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies', *European Journal of Political Research*, 37 (3), pp. 261-289, 2000.

Session 5: 8 February 2010

Title: The European Union

Assigned Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapter 5)

Simon Hix, *The Political System of the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, Chapter 6

Session 6: 15 February 2010

Title: Multi-level Politics in Europe

Assigned Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapter 6)

Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe 'Unraveling the Central State, but How? Types of Multi-level Governance' *American Political Science Review* 97 (2), pp.233-243, 2003.

Mid-term Exam: 22 February 2010

Session 7: 1 March 2010

Title: Political Parties in Europe

Assigned Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapters 7 and 8)

Peter Mair 'Party System Change' in Katz and Crotty (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics*, London, Sage, 2006

Session 8: 8 March 2010

Title: Political Conflict, Social Divisions, and Consensus Democracy in Europe

Assigned Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapter 9)

Arend Lijphart *Patterns of Democracy*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1999, Chapter 3 (Consensual Democracy)

Session 9: 15 March 2010

Title: Electoral Systems and Referendums in European States

Assigned Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapter 11)

Katz, Richard S. 'Why there are so many (or so few?) electoral reforms' in Gallagher and Mitchell (Eds.) *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005

Session 12: 22 March 2010

Title: European democracies after the collapse of authoritarian regimes

Assigned Reading:

Thomas Carothers 'The End of the Transition Paradigm' *Journal of Democracy* 13 (1) pp. 5-21, 2002.

Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, Chapters 9 and 21

Session 13: 29 March 2010

Title: Europe and the Balkans

Assigned Reading: To be confirmed

Session 14: 12 April 2010

Title: Challenges and opportunities for European politics and society

Reading: Gallagher et al. (Chapter 13)

Robert A. Dahl, "A Democratic Dilemma: System Effectiveness versus Citizen Participation", *Political Science Quarterly*, 109 (1), pp. 23-34, 1994.

Fareed Zakaria 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec., 1997.

End of Term Exam: 19 April 2010