



COURSE SYLLABUS

Course: **POLITICAL SYSTEM AND POLITICS IN SPAIN**

COURSE DATA

Degree	Diploma in Humanities and Global Challenges
Academic Year	2025-26
Credits	6
Course type	Elective
Departament	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Language of instruction	English
Name and email of instructor	Daniel Pérez Fernández dpfernandez@comillas.edu

SHORT DESCRIPTION

This course aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of Spain's institutional features and most salient political dynamics. We will start with an examination of the Spanish transition to democracy (1975-1982), delving into the formation of the nation's current constitutional framework. Next, we will analyze Spain's parliamentary monarchy by focusing on the quirks and most distinctive traits of its form of state and government.

Following on, students will be given insight into the party system and the leading political parties competing for power in Spain. We will also investigate the processes of government formation, the interplay between the executive and legislative branches, and the functions and powers of the judicial branch. The course concludes by addressing the role of trade unions, business organizations, civil society associations and media groups in Spanish politics.

CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

TOPIC 1: THE SPANISH CONSTITUTIONAL REGIME

- Antecedents: The Francoist dictatorship (1936-1975).
- The politics of Constitution-making (1975-1978).
- The Constitution of 1978.

TOPIC 2: SPAIN'S FORM OF STATE AND FORM OF GOVERNMENT

- Understanding the role of the monarchy in Spain's parliamentary monarchy.
- A highly decentralized unitary system: the 'state of autonomies'.
- The evolution of (bicameral) parliamentary politics in Spain.

TOPIC 3: POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARTY SYSTEM

- Central features of the Spanish party system.
- Old and new political parties.
- Regionalist and nationalist political parties.

TOPIC 4: THE FORMATION (AND REMOVAL) OF GOVERNMENT

- Composition and powers of the executive branch.
- Majority and minority governments in Spain.
- The removal of government: losing elections and votes of no confidence.

TOPIC 5: THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

- Structure and functions of the judiciary.
- The rule of law in Spain.
- Emergent phenomena: The judicialization of politics and the politicization of justice.

TOPIC 6: CIVIL SOCIETY ASSOCIATIONS AND INTEREST GROUPS

- Trade unions, business organizations, and other civil society associations.
- Lobbying in Spain.
- Pluralism and social conflict.

TOPIC 7: THE MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN SPAIN

- A taxonomy of major communication groups.
 - The mediatization of Spanish politics.
 - Disinformation, fake news, and other information disorders.
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METHODOLOGY

This course is structured into two segments: lectures, where the professor will provide a comprehensive overview of the subject's theoretical underpinnings, and practical sessions, where the theoretical concepts discussed in the lectures will be applied to the analysis of specific cases within the context of Spanish politics.

- The professor will upload to Moodle summary slides of the topics covered in the lectures, along with both compulsory and optional readings. To facilitate student's preparation for the practical sessions, the professor will also upload a document to Moodle at least one week in advance before the session takes place. This document will provide students with a brief guide on how each session will be conducted, and on the materials that students should have reviewed before the beginning of each practical session.
 - In all practical sessions, a group of students will be responsible for delivering a concise presentation on a topic related to each of the course's thematic units. These groups will be formed during the first week of the course. Presentations are expected to last approximately 15 minutes each. All enrolled students are required to participate in one presentation.
 - Students should prepare for the course's final exam by studying each topic's summary slides and all compulsory readings.
 - Attendance to practical sessions is mandatory and, together with participation in lectures and practices, will represent 20% of the final grade.
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ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

Assessment type	Assessment criteria	Percentage
FINAL EXAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Content mastery and conceptual accuracy.▪ Analytical capacity and argumentative skills.▪ Structure, coherence, and expository clarity.	50%
GROUP PRESENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Content mastery and conceptual accuracy.▪ Structure, coherence, and expository clarity.▪ Presentation skills and teamwork.▪ Conciseness and adherence to the 15-minute time limit.	30%
ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Arriving in class with assigned readings or materials reviewed.▪ Active engagement in discussions and asking relevant questions.▪ Consistent presence in class and timely arrival at all sessions.	20%

IMPORTANT

- Committing any serious academic misconduct, such as plagiarism of previously published material, or copying in the exam or any other graded activity, will imply not being able to pass the course in the ordinary assessment period.
- The use of AI to create complete works or relevant parts, without citing the source or the tool or without being expressly allowed in the description of the work, will be considered plagiarism and regulated according to the General Regulations of the University.
- At the beginning of the term the professor will announce the office hours for the course. Tutorials are an essential part of the development of the course, and students may attend tutorials during the course within those office times, but it is recommended that they are arranged in advance with the professor.
- Any non-face-to-face learning activity that requires the submission of an assignment/document, etc. will be submitted by the student through Moodle, always in PDF format.

- To be able to take the final exam, students must not have missed more than one third of the classes without justification. If this requirement is not met, the student may lose the right to be assessed both in the ordinary and extraordinary assessment period (art. 93-1 of the General Regulations). Failure to attend to the first hour of a two-hour lecture, means having missed the whole session in terms of attendance, regardless of whether or not the student is present in the classroom during the second hour.

STUDENT WORKLOAD (in hours)

CONTACT HOURS	OUTSIDE CLASSROOM	OVERALL
60	90	150

READING LIST / RELEVANT REFERENCES

Balfour, S. (2005). *The politics of contemporary Spain*. London: Routledge.

Biezen, I. & Hopkin, J. (2005). "The presidentialization of Spanish democracy: sources of prime ministerial power in post-Franco Spain". T. Poguntke & P. Webb (Eds.): *The presidentialization of politics*, pp. 107-126. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bosco, A. (2015). "Midlife Crisis? Spanish Democracy at 40". *Juncture*, 22:1, pp. 65-73.

Desfor Edles, L. (1995) "Rethinking Democratic Transition: A Culturalist Critique and the Spanish Case". *Theory and Society*, 24:3, pp. 355-384

Díaz, E. (1998) "Ideologies in the Making of the Spanish Transition". *West European Politics*, 21:4, pp. 26-39

Field, B. (2021). "Spain: Single-Party Majority and Minority Governments". T. Bergman, H. Bäck & J. Hellström (Eds.): *Coalition Governance in Western Spain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gunther, R. (2011). "The Spanish Model Revisited". G. Alonso & D. Muro (Eds.): *The Politics and Memory of Democratic Transition*, pp. 17-40. London: Routledge.

Gunther, R., Montero, J.R. & Botella, J. (2004). *Democracy in modern Spain*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hamlin, R. & Sala, G. (2018). "The Judicialization of Politics Disentangled". *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

Hutter, S., Kriesi, H. & Vidal, G. (2018). "Old versus new politics: The political spaces in Southern Europe in times of crises". *Party Politics*, 24(1), pp. 10-22.

Llorca-Abad, G., López-García, G. & Cano-Orón, L. (2021). "Spanish Politicians Dealing with Fake News in the April 2019 General Election". G. López-García, D. Palau-Sampio, B. Palomo, E. Campos-Domínguez & P. Masip (Eds.): *Politics of Disinformation*. New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell.

Maravall, J.M. (2009). "The Rule of Law as a Political Weapon". J.M. Maravall & Przeworski, A. (Eds.): *Democracy and the Rule of Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Muro, D. & Lago, I. (2020). *The Oxford Handbook of Spanish Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Paniagua Soto, J.L. (1997). "Spain: A Fledgling Parliament, 1977-1997". *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 50-53.

Rama, J., Cordero, G. & Zagorski, P. (2021). "Three is a Crowd? Podemos, Ciudadanos and Vox: The End of Bipartisanship in Spain". *Frontiers in Political Science*, Vol. 3, pp. 1-16.

Rodríguez-Teruel, J. (2016). "But Still Enthusiastic: The Unchanged Europeaness of the Spanish Parliamentary Elite During the Eurozone Crisis". *Historical Social Research*, 41:4, pp. 214-238.

Rodríguez-Teruel, J., Barberà, O., Barrio, A. & Casal Bértoa, F. (2018). "From stability to change? The evolution of the party system in Spain". M. Lisi (Ed.): *Party System Change, the European Crisis and the State of Democracy*, pp. 248-270. London: Routledge.

Rowe, K. T., Lago, I. & and Lago, S. (2015). "The partisan consequences of turnout revisited". *Comparative European Politics*, 13(4), pp. 514-534.

Ruiz-Lorenzo, V. (2022). "From Deviant Microbehavior to Political Corruption in Spain". *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, No. 177, pp. 127-142.

Vidal, G. (2018). "Challenging business as usual? The rise of new parties in Spain in times of crisis". *West European Politics*, 41(2), pp. 261-286.
