UAB
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Political Parties

Code: 101072
ECTS Credits: 6

2025/2026

Degree	Type	Year
Political Science and Public Management	OT	3
Political Science and Public Management	OT	4
Contemporary History, Politics and Economics	OT	3
Contemporary History, Politics and Economics	OT	4

Contact

Name: Ernesto Manuel Pascual Bueno

Email: ernestomanuel.pascual@uab.cat

Teaching groups languages

You can view this information at the end of this document.

Prerequisites

Our Contract

By enrolling in this course, you and I enter into a mutual agreement. I commit to working with dedication to be well-prepared, enthusiastic, fair, and respectful toward each student and their opinions. I will be accessible and will do my best to return corrected materials within a maximum of two weeks.

For your part, by enrolling in this course, you agree to:

1. Attend all classes regularly.

2. Participate actively by asking questions and engaging in debates.

3. Read the assigned materials and submit written assignments on time.

To guarantee our mutual commitment, it is essential that you read the course guide and submit it signed on the first day of class. You will receive one additional point for attendance if you can show that you have read the guide before enrolling or before the first session.

Formal Prerequisites

It is advisable to have completed the courses Political Behavior (second year) and Electoral Analysis (third year).

Recommendations

It is recommended that students regularly follow political current events through various media (written and audiovisual) in order to participate more meaningfully in classroom debates and discussions.

To make the most of this course, students are encouraged to have basic computer skills (word processing, creating presentations, web browsing, and research), as well as familiarity with the UAB Virtual Campus.

An intermediate level of English is required to understand research papers, news, and specialized bibliography in the language.

Remarks

The use of electronic devices is not allowed during class, neither for communication nor for note-taking.Laptops, tablets, and mobile phones are not permitted in the classroom. All devices must be deposited in a designated area at the beginning of class and may be collected at the end of the session.

Objectives and Contextualisation

This course introduces students to the analytical and empirical study of political parties-key institutions in the functioning of contemporary democracies. The course goes beyond the merely descriptive or typological approach and adopts an explanatory and causal framework to understand how parties are organized internally, how they compete with one another, how they relate to the state and society, and how they respond to political change.

The course begins with the theoretical foundations of party functioning, drawing on the main analytical assumptions of modern political organization theories. It then incorporates institutional, sociological, and ideological dimensions that reflect the real complexity of contemporary political parties. The approach is primarily empirical and comparative, allowing students to understand and analyze specific cases in various national contexts, including Spain.

The course objectives are:

• To provide students with basic analytical tools for studying internal organization, behavior, and strategies of political parties.

• To analyze internal party structures and mechanisms of participation and internal representation.

• To study ideological and organizational competition among parties.

• To understand the institutional and legal relationships between political parties and the state.

• To recognize the diversity of existing party types and current trends in organizational and ideological transformation.

• To examine the historical origins and contemporary evolution of political parties.

Competences

> Political Science and Public Management
- Analysing the behaviour of the political actors, both individually and collectively (parties, interest groups, social movements, etc.).
- Analysing the electoral processes, including campaigns, parties' electoral strategies, political scenarios and analysis and interpretation of electoral results.
- Arguing from different theoretical perspectives.
- Demonstrating good writing skills in different contexts.
- Demonstrating the comprehension of citizen behaviour and democratic values, particularly in internal or international concrete cases.
- Explaining political, individual and collective attitudes and behaviours, as well as the education process and expression of political preferences.
- Identifying and distinguishing the functioning of the electoral processes.

- Identifying main actors of the political system, inspecting their interactions and assessing their behaviour in their environment and in the political system from a theoretical and practical perspective.
- Identifying sources of data and conducting bibliographic and documentary searches.
- Interpreting and applying English texts in an academic way.
- Managing the available time in order to accomplish the established objectives and fulfil the intended task.
- Managing the different theoretical contributions about actors and actor's networks, as well as the characteristics of collective action.
- Realising effective oral presentations that are suited to the audience.
- Showing a good capacity for transmitting information, distinguishing key messages for their different recipients.
- Synthesizing and critically analysing information.
- Using the main information and documentation techniques (ICT) as an essential tool for the analysis.
- Working autonomously.
- Working by using quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques in order to apply them to research processes.
- Working in teams and networking, particularly in interdisciplinary conditions.

Contemporary History, Politics and Economics
- Contrast the main contemporary political theories.
- Explain and summarise knowledge acquired in English language at an advanced level.
- Identify the main actors, structure and functioning of political systems in the internal and international sphere from a theoretical or applied perspective.
- Manage and apply data to solve problems.
- Students must be capable of communicating information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialised and non-specialised audiences.
- Students must develop the necessary learning skills to undertake further training with a high degree of autonomy.
- Work cooperatively in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams implementing new projects.

Learning Outcomes

1. Analysing the behaviour of the political actors, both individually and collectively (parties, interest groups, social movements, etc.).
2. Analysing the electoral processes, including campaigns, parties' electoral strategies, political scenarios and analysis and interpretation of electoral results.
3. Apply quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques in research processes.
4. Arguing from different theoretical perspectives.
5. Assessing the contribution of movements like feminism, environmentalism or various identity movements.
6. Demonstrate the capacity to continue working in the future autonomously gaining a deeper understanding of the knowledge acquired or embarking on new areas of knowledge.
7. Demonstrating good writing skills in different contexts.
8. Designing data collection techniques, coordinating the information processing and meticulously applying hypothesis verification methods.
9. Explaining political, individual and collective attitudes and behaviours, as well as the education process and expression of political preferences.
10. Identify the main actors in the political system, examine their interactions and evaluate their behaviour in their environment and in the political system from a theoretical and applied perspective.
11. Identifying and distinguishing the functioning of the electoral processes.
12. Identifying main actors of the political system, inspecting their interactions and assessing their behaviour in their environment and in the political system from a theoretical and practical perspective.
13. Identifying sources of data and conducting bibliographic and documentary searches.
14. Identifying the main and secondary ideas and expressing them with linguistic correctness.
15. Identifying the social, economic and political structures of the contemporary world.
16. Interpreting and applying English texts in an academic way.
17. Managing the available time in order to accomplish the established objectives and fulfil the intended task.

18. Managing the different theoretical contributions about actors and actor's networks, as well as the characteristics of collective action.
19. Present works in formats tailored to the needs and personal styles, both individual and small group.
20. Producing and preparing presentations of reports and intervention proposals.
21. Realising effective oral presentations that are suited to the audience.
22. Showing a good capacity for transmitting information, distinguishing key messages for their different recipients.
23. Synthesizing and critically analysing information.
24. Use different theoretical contributions on actors and networks of actors as well as the characteristics of collective action.
25. Using the main information and documentation techniques (ICT) as an essential tool for the analysis.
26. Working autonomously.
27. Working by using quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques in order to apply them to research processes.
28. Working in teams and networking, particularly in interdisciplinary conditions.

Content

I. History and Foundations of Political Parties

1. What is a political party? Definition, functions, and differences from other political actors

2. History and evolution of parties: from elite parties to modern organizations

3. Classification of political parties: typologies by ideology, organizational structure, and electoral strategy

4. Parties in democratic theory

5. Functions of political parties: traditional and contemporary

II. Organization and Internal Structure

1. The party's formal structure: aims, objectives, and organizational levels

2. The party as a bureaucracy

3. Membership and participation: members, sympathizers, and activists

4. Party leadership: selection of leaders and candidates

5. Internal democracy: factions, currents, and deliberative processes

III. Ideology and Competition

1. Ideological families and party groupings

2. Ideological competition and the structuring of political space

IV. Party and State

1. Phases of the relationship: from hostility to legal recognition

2. Political Parties Law

3. Party financing: models, transparency, and oversight

V. Institutional Dynamics: Opposition and Government

1. The party in electoral competition

2. The party in opposition

3. The party in government and coalition formation

Course Description

This course presents political parties as central institutions of contemporary democracies, integrating historical, institutional, organizational, and ideological approaches from an analytical, causal, and comparative perspective.

The first block addresses the theoretical and conceptual foundations of political parties. It begins by defining what a political party is, specifying its classical and modern functions, and distinguishing it clearly from other political actors (such as interest groups and social movements). Then, it provides a historical overview of party evolution, analyzing how social and historical changes have given rise to different types of parties-from elite parties to today's cartel parties. This section concludes by examining the normative role of parties in modern democratic theories.

The second block focuses on the internal and organizational structure of political parties. It starts by analyzing their formal organization, stated goals, hierarchies, and internal bureaucracy. It then examines political participation through membership and activism, as well as the internal selection processes for leaders and candidates. The block concludes by analyzing internal democratic mechanisms, factions, and currents, with emphasis on their role in party cohesion and organizational stability.

The third block explores the ideological dimension of political parties and their competition for voters. It first studies the main ideological families that shape party systems in contemporary democracies. Then, it analyzes how these ideologies are expressed and evolve in partisan competition, shaping the political space and influencing parties' strategic and organizational behavior.

The fourth block examines the institutional relationship between political parties and the state. It provides a historical review of this relationship, highlighting the process by which initial distrust gave way to legal institutionalization through party laws. It also discusses party financing, exploring comparative models and current challenges related to transparency, accountability, and democratic control of resources.

Finally, the fifth block focuses on parties in their everyday institutional roles, particularly during elections, in opposition, and in government. It studies the strategies parties adopt during campaigns, how they behave and organize in opposition, and the dynamics of coalition formation and government stability-highlighting the political logic and consequences of coalition politics.

In short, this course equips students with analytical and empirical tools to understand political parties as core actors in contemporary democratic systems, combining political theory, institutional analysis, and comparative case studies.

Activities and Methodology

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Type: Directed			
Acquisition and development of basic knowledge guided by the professor	60	2.4	1, 12, 11, 27
Type: Supervised			

Use of acquired concepts	7	0.28	4, 11, 23, 28	
Type: Autonomous				
Study and presentation of results	75	3	7, 17, 13, 16, 26, 25	

The course employs a variety of learning and assessment tools to ensure that students develop a deep analytical understanding of political parties as central institutions in democratic systems. Continuous assessment will include critical reviews of selected readings, practical assignments based on the analysis of real party statutes and organizations, and case studies from both national and international contexts. In addition, sessions will include debate and critical discussion, where students apply theoretical tools to current issues related to political parties.

This methodological approach is designed not only to provide students with a solid understanding of course content, but also to develop their applied analytical skills. Specifically, students will complete individual assignments, supervised coursework, and attend lectures.

Annotation: Within the schedule set by the centre or degree programme, 15 minutes of one class will be reserved for students to evaluate their lecturers and their courses or modules through questionnaires.

Assessment

Continous Assessment Activities

Title	Weighting	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Attendance and participation	10%	1	0.04	1, 4, 12, 13, 11, 27, 25
Continuous evaluation exercises	40%	2	0.08	1, 4, 7, 17, 12, 13, 11, 16, 23, 27, 26, 28, 25
essays	20%	3.5	0.14	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 20, 18, 9, 21, 24, 17, 12, 10, 13, 11, 15, 14, 16, 22, 19, 23, 27, 26, 28, 25
Final Exam	30%	1.5	0.06	1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 18, 9, 24, 17, 12, 10, 11, 15, 14, 22, 23, 27, 26

Course evaluation consists of the following components:

1. Attendance and participation. In addition to mandatory attendance, students who are able to relate theoretical frameworks and concepts to current political and social issues will be especially valued.

2. Five practical exercises based on the theoretical content.

3. A term paper on a topic selected jointly by the student and the instructor.

4. A final exam consisting of four short-answer questions (1.5 points each) and one essay question (4 points).

Additional Notes on the Evaluation System

• The exam date will be set by the faculty. No individual exams will be offered. ERASMUS students who book travel before the official exam date and miss the exam will be marked as "not presented."

• Passing the final exam with a minimum grade is required to pass the course.

• All submissions must be made through the Virtual Campus in the designated space. Submissions outside of that space or after the deadline will be marked as "not presented."

• Once students have completed more than 30% of the assessed coursework, they may no longer withdraw from the course.

• All oral and written assignments must be completed in Catalan or Spanish. Submissions in other languages will not be accepted.

• Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty: according to academic regulations, any irregularity (e.g., reusing previous coursework, using uncredited sources, websites, or books) that results in a significant grade alteration will be scored as 0. Multiple irregularities in the same course will result in a final grade of 0.

• The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools is not allowed at any stage of the coursework. Any assignment that includes content generated by AI will be considered academically dishonest and may result in partial or full penalties, or more severe disciplinary measures in serious cases.

Resits

To be eligible for resits, students must have completed at least two-thirds of the total assessed activities in the course or module.

To take part in the resit process, students must have earned a course average of at least 3,5 out of 10.

The resit will consist of submitting any pending coursework by the resit deadline, followed by a written exam with the same structure as the final exam.

Single Assessment

According to my experience, this course cannot be taken in a non-attendance format. The methodology used-combining lectures and practical sessions-makes it impossible for the content to be compiled into a single textbook for independent study.

Before choosing this type of assessment, it is important to consider a relevant fact: numbers don't lie. In the two years this option has been available, 9 students have chosen it. None have passed the course, and only one was able to take the resit exam.

Nevertheless, if you decide to proceed with this option, the single assessment will consist of an exam that includes the same final exam taken by continuous assessment students, plus additional questions on the practical exercises and seminars held throughout the course. This exam will account for 100% of the final grade.

To be eligible for the resit, you must obtain a minimum score of 3.5 on the exam. The resit exam will be of the same format as the final exam.

Bibliography

Core Bibliography.

- Aldrich, J. (2012). *Why Parties? A Second Look.* Madrid: CIS.

- Duverger, M. (1951, Spanish trans. 1957). *Political Parties.* Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

- Katz, R.S. & Crotty, W. (Eds.) (2006). *Handbook of Party Politics.* London: SAGE (selected chapters).

- Katz, R.S. & Mair, P. (1995). "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party." *Party Politics*, 1(1), pp. 5-28.

- Michels, R. (1915). *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy.* Madrid: Amorrortu.

- Montero, J.R., Gunther, R. & Linz, J.J. (2007). *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges.* Madrid: Trotta.

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

- Panebianco, A. (1982, Spanish trans. 1990). *Political Parties: Organization and Power.* Madrid: Alianza Universidad.

- Sartori, G. (1976, Spanish trans. 2005). *Parties and Party Systems.* Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

- von Beyme, K. (1982, Spanish trans. 1986). *Political Parties in Western Democracies.* Madrid: CIS.

- Ware, A. (1996, Spanish trans. 2004). *Political Parties and Party Systems.* Madrid: Istmo.

Suggested Complementary Bibliography.

- Casal Bértoa, F. & Piccio, D. (2019). "The Legal Regulation of Political Parties." *European Political Science*, 18(3).

- Cross, W. & Blais, A. (2012). *Politics at the Centre: The Selection and Removal of Party Leaders in the Anglo Parliamentary Democracies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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

- Hopkin, J. (2001). "Bringing the Members Back in?" *Party Politics*, 7(3).

- Poguntke, T. & Webb, P. (2005). *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Scarrow, S. (2015). *Beyond Party Members.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Software

Office

Groups and Languages

Please note that this information is provisional until 30 November 2025. You can check it through this link. To consult the language you will need to enter the CODE of the subject.

Name	Group	Language	Semester	Turn
(PAUL) Classroom practices	1	Spanish	first semester	morning-mixed
(TE) Theory	1	Spanish	first semester	morning-mixed