CONCEPT

Comparative Political Systems: State Forms, Regimes, Electoral Rules and Institutions

15 – 19 March 2027
Amsterdam - Zuidas business district hotel



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Introduction:

Government relations, diplomatic and policy teams are often asked to explain how another political system works before a visit, a negotiation or a market decision, yet briefings still rely on labels such as federal or parliamentary without showing where decisions are actually made. This Core Concept course on comparative political systems builds a structured method: state forms, executive models, legislatures, electoral rules, party systems, courts, bureaucracy and local government, read side by side with neutral indicators. Participants produce a Comparative Institutional Profile of two fictional case systems.

Course Objectives:

- Apply most similar and most different systems designs to select and code cases for a structured comparison of two political systems
- Classify a state by its form, executive model and legislative structure, and explain how each arrangement allocates authority
- Compare majoritarian, proportional and mixed electoral rules and calculate how they translate votes into seats and party fragmentation
- Distinguish constitutional review models, civil service arrangements and decentralisation types to locate where policy is decided and implemented
- Assess institutional stability with neutral indicators such as government duration, cabinet turnover and veto player count
- Produce a Comparative Institutional Profile and implications memo that informs business and diplomatic engagement

Target Audience:

- Government relations staff responsible for briefing management on how decisions are taken in other political systems
- Diplomatic and international cooperation staff responsible for preparing visits, negotiations and system briefs
- Policy analysts responsible for drawing lessons from institutional arrangements in other jurisdictions
- Research and think-tank staff responsible for comparative studies of governance and institutions
- International business and market entry staff responsible for understanding the public decision environment of partner markets

Course Outline:

Day 1: Comparative Politics Foundations and Case Selection

- Comparative Politics Scope: Institutions, Political Behaviour and Regime Outcomes
- Most Similar Systems Design and the Method of Difference
- Most Different Systems Design and the Method of Agreement
- Case Selection Matrix and Variable Coding Sheet for Two Systems
- Institutional Vocabulary Glossary: State, Regime, Government and Constitution

Day 2: State Forms, Executive Models and Legislatures

- Unitary, Federal and Confederal State Forms: Division of Sovereign Authority
- Presidential and Parliamentary Executives: Confidence Votes, Fixed Terms and Separation of Powers
- Semi-Presidential Subtypes: Premier-Presidential, President-Parliamentary and Cohabitation
- Absolute, Constitutional and Parliamentary Monarchies: Succession Rules and Royal Prerogative
- Unicameral and Bicameral Legislatures: Upper Chamber Composition and Veto Powers

Day 3: Electoral Rules, Parties and Party Systems

- Plurality and Majoritarian Formulas: First-Past-the-Post, Two-Round System and Instant-Runoff Voting
- Proportional Formulas: Closed and Open Party-List and Single Transferable Vote
- Mixed-Member Proportional and Parallel Voting Seat Allocation Exercise
- District Magnitude, Electoral Thresholds and Disproportionality Calculation
- Party System Typology: Dominant-Party, Two-Party and Multiparty Fragmentation Count

Day 4: Courts, Bureaucracy, Decentralisation and Institutional Stability

- Constitutional Review Models: Centralised Constitutional Court Versus Diffuse Judicial Review
- Bureaucracy and Public Administration: Career Civil Service, Ministerial Cabinets and Agency Autonomy
- Decentralisation Types: Deconcentration, Delegation and Devolution to Local Government
- Institutional Stability Indicator Set: Government Duration, Cabinet Turnover and Veto Player Count
- Coalition Formation and Minority Government Scenarios in Fragmented Legislatures

Day 5: Case Work: Comparative Institutional Profile of Two Systems

- Fictional Case Dossiers: Constitutional Texts, Election Returns and Cabinet Records
- Decision Pathway Map: Who Proposes, Approves, Vetoes and Implements Policy
- Side-by-Side Institutional Comparison Grid for the Two Case Systems
- Foreign Political Environment Implications Memo for Business and Diplomatic Engagement
- Comparative Institutional Profile Presentation and Peer Review Panel

Skills You Will Gain:

- Comparative Research Design
- Case Variable Coding
- Executive Model Classification
- Electoral Formula Analysis
- Party System Measurement
- Constitutional Review Mapping
- Decision Pathway Mapping
- Institutional Profiling

Why Attend This Course:

- Leave with a Comparative Institutional Profile of two fictional case systems, including a decision pathway map and an implications memo
- Replace shorthand labels in briefings with a coded comparison of where authority sits and who can block a decision
- Interpret election results by calculating seat allocation, thresholds and fragmentation directly
- Exchange comparative practice with peers from ministries, diplomatic missions, research units and international business teams

Conclusion:

Comparative political systems analysis turns a foreign political environment into a set of institutions that can be described, compared and anticipated. The course moves from the scope and methods of comparative politics and case selection, through state forms, executive models and legislatures, to electoral formulas and party systems, then to constitutional review, bureaucracy, decentralisation and stability indicators. The final day applies the method to two fictional case systems and produces a Comparative Institutional Profile with a decision pathway map and an implications memo for business and diplomatic engagement.