

Nationalism in Comparative Perspective

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: BCLA 3038

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: xxx

Course Description

This course provides a comparative exploration of nationalism, examining its historical evolution, theoretical frameworks, and contemporary manifestations across different global contexts. Using Barcelona and Catalonia as a key case study, students will analyze how cultural, political, and historical forces shape national identities and nationalist movements. The course engages with diverse topics, including varieties of nationalism, the role of historical memory and myths in shaping national identities, and the intersection of nationalism with globalization and migration. Students will critically assess the impact of nationalism on political conflicts, secessionist movements, and the rise of populist ideologies. Through a combination of academic readings, case studies, and experiential learning—including field visits to key sites in Barcelona—students will gain a deeper understanding of how nationalism is expressed, contested, and institutionalized in contemporary societies.

Content warning:

At times, this course intentionally invites students to engage with readings and content that are controversial. Students might find this disturbing. The intention is not to endorse perspectives, but rigorously engage with them. If certain material is emotionally challenging, students can discuss with the faculty before or after class. Students may also leave the classroom without academic penalty, if the discussion becomes too emotionally challenging. Students are, however, responsible for all missed material, and so should arrange to get notes from another student or see the faculty member individually.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Gain a critical understanding of key theories of nationalism and their relevance in the social sciences, considering diverse historical and contemporary perspectives
- Analyze the historical and political development of Catalan nationalism through primary and secondary sources, incorporating local voices and case studies
- Examine the influence of nationalism on political, social, and cultural life in Barcelona, engaging with contemporary debates on identity, sovereignty, and self-governance
- Develop the ability to assess the legal and political dimensions of independence movements in Europe, with a focus on sovereignty and self-determination
- Compare different forms of nationalism across world regions, evaluating their historical, sociopolitical, and cultural contexts
- Conceptualize the roles of myths, historical narratives, and collective memory in shaping national identities and political movements
- Hone the ability to decode symbols, language, and cultural expressions that contribute to national identity, integrating experiential learning such as field studies, performances, and testimonials
- Engage in independent research and critical discussions on nationalism using interdisciplinary approaches and diverse methodologies.

Experiential Learning & Field Visits

Field study and experiential learning components may include:

- Palau de la Generalitat: Seat of the Catalan government and a key site in Catalonia's self-governance and independence movements.
- National History Museum of Catalonia: Exhibits on Catalan history, national identity, and political movements, fostering discussions on historical memory.
- El Born Cultural Centre: Preserved ruins and exhibitions on Barcelona's past, offering insights into historical narratives and urban memory in nationalist discourse.

Course Prerequisites

None

Required Reading / Materials

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Balcells, Laia. "Mass Schooling and Catalan Nationalism." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 19, no. 4 (2013): 467–486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2013.847602>.
- Balfour, Sebastian, and Alejandro Quiroga. *The Reinvention of Spain: National Identity since Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Beissinger, Mark R. "How Nationalisms Spread: Eastern Europe Adrift the Tides and Cycles of Nationalist Contention." *Social Research* 63, no. 1 (1996): 97–146.
- Boylan, Brandon M. "In Pursuit of Independence: The Political Economy of Catalonia's Secessionist Movement." *Nations and Nationalism* 21, no. 4 (2015): 761–785. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12121>.
- Brancati, Dawn. "Decentralization: Fueling the Fire or Dampening the Flames of Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism?" *International Organization* 60, no. 3 (2006): 651–685.
- Brubaker, Rogers. "Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches." *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 1 (2012): 2–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2011.00486.x>.
- Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Cederman, Lars-Erik, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min. "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis." *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (2010): 87–119. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887109990219>.
- Cramer, Kathryn. *Goodbye, Spain? The Question of Independence for Catalonia*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Dasgupta, Rana. "The Demise of the Nation State." *The Guardian*, April 5, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/apr/05/demise-of-the-nation-state-rana-dasgupta>.

- Deutsch, Karl W. "Social Mobilization and Political Development." *The American Political Science Review* 55, no. 3 (1961): 493–514. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1952679>.
- Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000534>.
- Fukuyama, Francis. "Why National Identity Matters." *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 4 (2018): 5–15. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0058>.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.
- Germann, Micha, and Nicholas Sambanis. "Political Exclusion, Lost Autonomy, and Escalating Conflict over Self-Determination." *International Organization* 75, no. 1 (2021): 178–203. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000316>.
- Goodman, Sara Wallace. "Fortifying Citizenship: Policy Strategies for Civic Integration in Western Europe." *World Politics* 64, no. 4 (2012): 659–698. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887112000184>.
- Guibernau, Montserrat. *Catalan Nationalism: Francoism, Transition, and Democracy*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- . *The Identity of Nations*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*. Translated and edited by Max Pensky. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.
- Hale, Henry E. "Explaining Ethnicity." *Comparative Political Studies* 37, no. 4 (2004): 458–485. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414003262906>.
- Hechter, Michael. *Containing Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
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- Hobsbawm, E. J. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Horowitz, Donald L. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.
- Jacobson, Stephen. "The Origins of the Ambiguity: Nation and Empire in Catalonia from the Middle Ages to the 1880s." *Studies on National Movements* 2, no. 1 (2014): 1–31.

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- Mylonas, Harris. "The Future of 'New Nationalism'." *GW Magazine*, April 2021.
- Mylonas, Harris, and Maya Tudor. *Varieties of Nationalism: Communities, Narratives, Identities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.
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- Posen, Barry. "Nationalism, the Mass Army and Military Power." *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993): 80–124. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539098>.
- Renan, Ernest. What Is a Nation? (Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?, 1882). In *What Is a Nation? and Other Political Writings*, 247–63. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
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- ▮ Taras, Ray. *Liberal and Illiberal Nationalisms*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- ▮ Turnbull-Dugarte, Stuart J. "Explaining the End of Spanish Exceptionalism and Electoral Support for Vox." *Research & Politics* 6, no. 2 (2019): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168019856188>.
- ▮ Wimmer, Andreas. "Why Nationalism Works." *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 2 (2019): 27–34.

Additional Sources

Documentary / Films

- ▮ Alba Sotorra and Gerardo Olivares, dirs. *Two Catalonias*. Barcelona: Netflix, 2018. 1 hr., 56 min. <https://www.netflix.com/title/81016300>.
- ▮ Cramer, Kathryn, director. *Goodbye, Spain? The Question of Independence for Catalonia*. 2014.
- ▮ Gibson, Gary, director. *Spain's Secret Conflict*. Sobirania i Progrés, 2009.
- ▮ Hart, David, and Alastair Reid, directors. *The Spanish Civil War*. PBS, 1983.
- ▮ Loach, Ken, director. *Land and Freedom*. United Kingdom: PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, 1995.
- ▮ Térmens, Ramon, director. *Catalunya über alles!*. Spain: A Contracorriente Films, 2011.

Podcasts

- ▮ Catalan News Podcast: The 2014 Catalan Self-Determination Vote—10 Years On. Podcast. Catalan News, February 2024. Accessed February 20, 2025. <https://www.catalannews.com/podcast/item/podcast-the-2014-catalan-self-determination-vote---10-years-on>.
- ▮ Geography Is: Catalanian Independence—Why This Region Wants to Leave Spain.

Podcast. Geography Is, 2023. Accessed February 20, 2025.

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History as it Happens: Goodbye to Catalonia? Podcast. Historiansplaining, January 2025. Accessed February 20, 2025.

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Historias Podcast: Historicizing the Catalan Independence Movement. Podcast. Historias Podcast, October 14, 2017. Accessed February 20, 2025.

<https://historiaspodcast.org/2017/10/14/special-episode-1-historicizing-the-catalan-independence-movement/>.

History Extra Podcast: Scots and Catalans. Podcast. History Extra, 2018. Accessed February 20, 2025.

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Past Present Future: Democracy vs. Nationalism with Lea Ypi. Podcast. Apple Podcasts, November 2023. Accessed February 20, 2025.

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The Daily: The Rise of Nationalism Across the Globe. Podcast. Intelligence Squared, 2023. Accessed February 20, 2025. <https://www.intelligencesquared.com/events/the-daily-the-rise-of-nationalism-across-the-globe/>.

The Sobremesa Podcast: A New History of Catalonia with Andrew Dowling. Hosted by The Sobremesa Podcast. Spotify, 2023. Accessed February 20, 2025.

<https://creators.spotify.com/pod/show/thesobremesapodcast/episodes/A-New-History-of-Catalonia-with-Andrew-Dowling-e1pm174>.

- UP Ideas Podcast: Comparative Studies on Nationalism featuring Eric Storm.
Universiteit Leiden, January 2025. Accessed February 20, 2025.

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Participation in class	15%
Field study reflections (2 at 15%)	30%
presentation	20%
Final paper (proposal/outline 5%, paper 30%)	35%
Overall grade	100%

Assessment Details

Active participation is essential in this course. Students are expected to attend each class and field study course component as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. The course integrates lectures, discussions, and small group work to analyze the weekly readings within the broader course context. Students must complete all assigned readings (approximately 30 pages per class session) before each class and come prepared to engage thoughtfully in discussions. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Graded assignments include:

- **Participation:** Students are expected to contribute actively to class discussions, engage thoughtfully with course materials, and participate in field study activities. Participation includes responding critically to peers, demonstrating an understanding of diverse perspectives, and fostering a collaborative learning environment.
- **Field study reflections:** Students will submit two reflection papers (500-700 words each) based on their experiences and observations during field visits. These reflections will critically connect the field studies to course concepts, demonstrating analytical engagement with nationalism in practice. Each piece should incorporate specific observations, draw connections to course readings, and demonstrate thoughtful

analysis.

- **Presentation:** Each student will deliver a 10-minute presentation, followed by a brief Q&A session, focusing on concepts discussed in an assigned reading. Presentations must integrate an element of the local context (e.g., Catalonia or Spain) and critically engage with course themes such as identity, sovereignty, and historical narratives. Students are encouraged to incorporate multimedia elements and primary sources to support their analysis. The presentation should demonstrate independent research, analytical depth, and clear communication, effectively linking historical and contemporary perspectives on nationalism.
- **Final paper:** A 3,500- to 4,000-word individually written research paper on a topic related to nationalism, approved by the instructor. Students will conduct independent research, engage critically with course readings, and incorporate external academic sources. A research proposal and outline will be required as part of the writing process.

Course Content

Unit 1

Introduction to Nationalism: Defining Nations, Identity, & Belonging

- What defines a nation? Is it shared language, culture, history, or something else? How do nations differ from ethnic groups or states?
- How is national identity constructed and maintained? What role do historical narratives, collective memory, and cultural symbols play in shaping a sense of belonging?
- What is the relationship between nationalism and political power? How has nationalism influenced state formation, conflict, and the idea of sovereignty?

Unit 2

Varieties of Nationalism: Definitions, Forms, & Influences

- How do different types of nationalism emerge and evolve? What factors—such as political leadership, historical context, or globalization—shape the distinct forms nationalism takes in different societies?
- Can nationalism exist without a shared ethnic or cultural identity, and how does it intersect with other political ideologies?
- How does nationalism operate at different levels—local, national, and global? What are the implications of nationalism for international relations, domestic policies, and individual identity formation?

Unit 3

Myths, Memory, & Nationhood: The Historical Foundations of Catalan Nationalism

- How do constitutive stories shape national identity? What role do foundational myths, historical narratives, and collective memory play in defining a nation?
- How have key historical events and symbols shaped Catalan nationalism? What are some of the major sites of memory and historical references that reinforce Catalan identity, such as the 1714 Siege of Barcelona and cultural resistance under Franco?

- How does historical memory interact with politics in the construction of national identity? In what ways have competing narratives of history been used to either reinforce or challenge Catalan nationalism?

Unit 4

The Historical & Social Origins of Nationalism

- Compare key theories on the origins of nationalism, including modernist and constructivist perspectives.
- Analyze the role of print capitalism in shaping national consciousness.
- Evaluate the impact of industrialization on national identity formation.
- Explore diverse pathways to nationhood, from linguistic unification to political movements.

Unit 5

The Spread & Durability of Nationalism

- Explore how nationalism spreads through education, military institutions, and political mobilization.
- Assess the role of mass schooling in shaping national identity across different historical contexts (Including Catalonia).
- Evaluate the resilience of nationalist sentiments in both occupied and independent states.

Unit 6

Secessionism, Irredentism, & Nationalist Conflicts

- Differentiate between secessionism and irredentism, exploring their causes and impact on nationalist conflicts.
- Examine political exclusion and lost autonomy as key drivers of separatist claims and conflict escalation.
- Assess economic, political, and institutional factors in determining secessionist

movements' success or failure.

- Evaluate the role of international law, diplomacy, and external intervention in shaping outcomes.
- Compare cases like Catalonia, Scotland, Quebec, and Flanders to understand secessionism in democratic settings.

Unit 7

Nationalism & Political Violence

- Examine how ethnic grievances, state exclusion, and political marginalization contribute to nationalist violence.
- Identify the conditions under which nationalist movements escalate into insurgencies, civil wars, or armed conflicts.
- Assess the role of state policies, exclusion, and marginalization in fueling nationalist violence.

Unit 8

Nationalism, Migration, & Populism

- The impact of migration on national identity, citizenship, and cultural integration.
- The role of multiculturalism, tolerance, and political trust in shaping attitudes toward ethnic minorities.
- Case studies of nationalist and xenophobic movements, with a focus on far-right politics and anti-immigration sentiments in Spain.
- The intersection of nationalism, authoritarianism, and labor migration policies, including challenges faced by migrant workers in non-democratic states.

Unit 9

Globalization & Nationalism

- Nationalism's Survival in a Global Era: Can traditional national identities withstand the pressures of globalization?
- Global vs. Local Authority: How does global governance challenge national sovereignty?
- Economic Globalization Breeding Populism: Why does increased global economic integration fuel right-wing populist movements?
- Regional Autonomy Amid Global Forces: Does globalization intensify regions' desires for self-governance within nations?

Unit 10

The Present & Future of Nationalism

- Explore how inclusive national identities can enhance social cohesion and political stability in an interconnected world.
- Resurgence of Nationalism: Analyze the rise of exclusionary nationalist movements globally and their implications for liberal democracies.
- Inclusive vs. Exclusive Nationalism: Evaluate the potential of inclusive nationalism as a counter to divisive identity politics, fostering unity while respecting diversity.
- National Identity's Role: Examine how a shared sense of national identity contributes to effective governance and mutual trust among citizens.

Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).