COURSE PROPOSAL
Historical Memory: An Empirical Political Science Approach

Irene Martín Cortés
Department of Political Science and International Relations, Autonomous University of Madrid

Target Audience
Master's students in Political Science and related fields at Greek universities. This course is designed to be accessible to graduate students with an interest in political science, history, and quantitative methods.

Language of Instruction
English and / or Greek

Format
12 sessions, 3 hours each (36 contact hours total)

Course Description

This course offers an in-depth exploration of historical memory and its political, social, and institutional implications from the perspective of empirical political science. Students will engage both classic and contemporary debates on collective memory, transitional justice, and memorial policies, focusing on citizens' attitudes and public opinion as analyzed through large-scale survey data.

While drawing on cases from Southern Europe (especially Spain and Greece), the course situates these in a comparative, global context—encouraging reflection on the methodologies, normative debates, and political stakes of memory in post-conflict societies.

Memory is not only a matter of historiographical debate; it shapes national identity, influences voting, informs state legitimacy, and generates conflict or reconciliation. Students will critically examine the tools states and societies use to construct, contest, and negotiate memories, drawing especially on recent survey research and quantitative methodologies.

Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course will:

Understand the central theories and empirical methodologies used to analyze collective memory and transitional justice.

Critically evaluate how survey-based studies measure attitudes toward past political conflicts and memorial policies.

Interpret comparative data from cross-national projects on memory and public opinion (including REPAST and POLMEMO).

Assess the impact of historical memory on democratic attitudes, trust, reconciliation, and voting behavior.

Design and present policy recommendations for memorialization based on empirical findings.

Key Topics (Indicative Session Plan)

1. Introduction: The Memory Turn in Political Science

2. Theoretical Foundations: Collective Memory, Politics, and Identity

3. Methodological Challenges: Measuring Attitudes & Memory

4. Transitional Justice: Concepts, Mechanisms, and Public Opinion

5. State and Non-State Actors: Narrating the Past

6. Individual Experiences and Social Identities: Victims, Perpetrators, and Bystanders

7. Memory Wars: Polarization and Fragmented Narratives

8. Generational, Regional, and Ideological Patterns in Memory Attitudes

9. The Spanish and Greek Cases in Comparative Perspective

10. International Perspectives: Beyond Europe (Latin America, Africa)

11. Evidence-Based Policy: Designing Memorial Policies

12. Final reflection on the contents of the course

Assessment

Participation and contribution to discussion (20%)

Student presentations (data interpretation/report, 30%)

Final empirical project/paper (50%)

Core Readings (Selection)

Aguilar, P., Balcells, L., & Cebolla-Boado, H. (2011). Determinants of attitudes toward transitional justice: An empirical analysis of the Spanish case. Comparative Political Studies.

Mathias, A., Páez, D., Espinosa, A., Rimé, B. (2021). Truth Commissions: Individual and Societal Effects.

Revkin, M., Alrababah, A., & Myrick, R. (2023). Evidence-based transitional justice: Incorporating public opinion into the field, with new data from Iraq and Ukraine.

Erll, A., Nünning, A., & Young, S. (2008). Cultural memory studies: An international and interdisciplinary handbook.

David, R. (2017). What we know about transitional justice: Survey and experimental evidence.

Additional readings will include empirical articles from course projects and classic works in memory studies.

Teaching methodology

Lectures, group discussion, empirical data analysis, and student presentations. Case studies, data workshops, and reading of empirical articles are included throughout.

All sessions will encourage analytical thinking, data literacy, and the ability to translate empirical findings into policy recommendations.

Instructor's Profile

Irene Martín is lecturer at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the Faculty of Law. She holds a BA in Law (1994), a BA in Political Science and Administration (1996), an MA in Social Sciences from the Juan March Institute (1998), and a PhD from UAM (2004).

Her research interests are related to political and electoral attitudes and participation and currently her research focuses on the impact of past conflicts on voting. She has been visiting researcher at the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies at Princeton University (2007), the University of Athens (2008), the University of Montreal (2012), and the Hellenic Observatory of the London School of Economics (2018).

She has coordinated the H2020 REPAST Project – Revisiting the Past, Anticipating the Future – Strengthening European Integration through the Analysis of Conflict Discourses (2018-2021) at UAM and the POLMEMO Project (2021-2025) funded by the National Ministry of Science.

She has served as Vice-rector for Internationalization at UAM (2021-2025), Rector's Delegate for Internationalization (2014-2017), Vice Dean of International Relations (2010-2014), Coordinator of the Master's Program in Democracy and Government (2007-2009; 2018-2019); coordinator of the UAM-Sciences Po Bordeaux Double Degree (2014-2018); coordinator of the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree EUROSUD – South European Studies (2018-2021).