

Comparative Regionalism: Regional Integration beyond the EU

Root Number:	520520
Semester:	Fall semester- HS2026
ECTS:	6
Lecturer:	Dr. Kirthana Ganeson
Dates:	Wednesdays, 16:15 – 18:00
Room:	Silva Casa Auditorium (Auditorium 020), World Trade Institute.

Course Description

This course examines regionalism in international trade and governance with a focus on integration processes beyond the European Union (EU). While the EU is often the primary reference for regional cooperation, and arguably even a good starting point given its high level of integration, there are also diverse institutional designs and political dynamics that shape regional cooperation worldwide that warrant attention. Studying regional agreements such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Mercosur, the Pacific Alliance, the Andean Community, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) enables students to develop a comparative understanding of how and why states pursue regional integration in an increasingly multipolar global order.

Drawing on political science and related disciplines, the course explores three central themes: (1) the drivers and motivations behind regional integration; (2) the performance and sustainability of these regional entities; (3) the diffusion and adaptation of institutional models across regions; and (4) forum shopping between regional agreements, including preferential trade agreements (PTAs) and customs unions, and the multilateral trading system. These issues are made relevant by including current geopolitical tensions, supply-chain reconfigurations, societal issues such as the effects of climate and gender equality, and renewed debates over the future of global economic governance.

This course is structured around seminar-style discussions, interactive materials such as short informative videos and in-class polls, and contemporary case studies. Students will also benefit

from contributions by invited experts and guest lecturers. By extending the study of regionalism beyond a Eurocentric lens, this course equips students to critically assess regionalism and whether today's regional dynamics serve as building blocks or stumbling stones for global cooperation.

Lecturer

Dr. Kirthana Ganeson is a postdoctoral researcher at the World Trade Institute, currently working on the GENEVA CONSENSUS project, which examines the ideological evolution of UNCTAD and other trade-related international organizations in Geneva, primarily the World Trade Organization (WTO).

She is a Singaporean national and holds a Bachelor's Degree with Honours in Political Science (with a minor in Philosophy) from the National University of Singapore, and a Master's degree in International Political Economy from the Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

During her doctoral studies, her research explored the intersection of trade and democracy within preferential trade agreements (PTAs). She played a key role in developing the TRADEM dataset, which systematically maps democracy-related provisions across 742 PTAs. Her doctoral dissertation examined the effects of international trade on democracy with a focus on the European Union.

Kirthana's research interests include norm diffusion in international trade, regionalism and the political economy of Global South perspectives in trade governance, development-oriented approaches to international economic relations, and economic inequality.

Guest Lecturer: PD Dr. Rodrigo Polanco

PD Dr. Rodrigo Polanco is a Legal Adviser for Spanish and Portuguese-speaking jurisdictions at the Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, a Senior Lecturer, Researcher, and Academic Coordinator of Master's Programmes at the World Trade Institute (WTI), University of Bern, and a visiting professor at the University of Chile. Rodrigo holds a Bachelor's degree, a Diploma in Air and Space Law, and a Master of Law from the Universidad de Chile, an LL.M. in International Legal Studies from New York University (NYU), and a PhD in Law from the University of Bern, and a habilitation ("Privatdozent") from the same University.

Rodrigo has published extensively as an author and editor with leading international academic publishers and international journals on investment law, trade law and comparative law. He has worked as a consultant for the World Bank, the United Nations, the International Trade Centre (ITC), Trade Impact B.V., and the Center for Economic and Social Research (CASE) on trade and investment issues.

He coordinated the WTI/SECO Project, which supported regional competence centres for trade law and policy in Peru, South Africa, Vietnam, Indonesia and Chile, and the SNIS Project “Diffusion of International Law: A Textual Analysis of International Investment Agreements”.

Rodrigo is a co-founder of the Electronic Database of Investment Treaties (EDIT), and a co-founder and member of the board of Fiscalía del Medio Ambiente (FIMA) a Chilean non-profit environmental organization. He is also a member of the editorial board of the journals The Journal of World Investment & Trade (Brill), Asia Pacific Law Review (Taylor & Francis), Revista de Derecho Económico (Universidad de Chile), and Justicia Ambiental (FIMA).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand and explain key concepts and theories of regionalism
- Compare the structures and trajectories of major regional integration institutions
- Use interdisciplinary perspectives to identify drivers that motivate countries to pursue regionalism
- Critically examine the relationships between regionalism and multilateralism
- Engage in lively seminar discussions on specific cases of regional integration
- Collaborate effectively in a diverse space of international and mixed-level student groups

Exams and Grades

This final course grade will be made up of one in class presentation, one seminar paper and class participation.

- In-class Presentation
- **Every Wednesday from the 16th September, 16:15-18.00 – 9th December 16:15-18:00**
 - Weight: 40% of your final grade.
- Seminar Paper
- **Friday 18th December 23:59 [TBC]**
 - Weight: 40% of your final grade.
- Class Participation
- Find information on the attendance policy below.
 - Weight: 20% of your final grade

Course Overview and Schedule

Class	Date	Day	Time	Lecturer	Topic
1	16. Sep	Wednesday	16:15- 18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Why Study Regionalism?
2	23. Sep	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Theories of European Integration
3	30. Sep	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Key Concepts and Methods
4	7. Oct	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Regionalism Beyond Europe
5	14. Oct	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	The African Union and African Regionalism
6	21. Oct	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	The ASEAN Way
7	28. Oct	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Mercosur and Latin American Regionalism
8	4. Nov	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Student Presentations
9	11. Nov	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Student Presentations
10	18. Nov	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Student Presentations
11	25. Nov	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Student Presentations
12	2. Dec	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Critical Approaches to Regionalism
13	9. Dec	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Contemporary Challenges and the Future of Regionalism
14	16. Dec	Wednesday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Reading Week
15	18. Dec	Friday	16:15-18:00	Kirthana Ganeson	Submission Date for Seminar paper

Required Texts

The readings that facilitate this course varies according to the weekly agenda and draw from a wide variety of scholars and their journal articles across disciplines and schools of thought. The supplementary readings for each week are listed below each week's agenda. However, the **Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism** serves as a comprehensive companion across all themes addressed in this course.

Börzel, Tanja A., and Thomas Risse (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism (2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 7 Apr. 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199682300.001.0001>

A full reading list will be available to students who are enrolled in the course.

Course Policies

During Class

As this class is designed as a seminar style, students are encouraged to interact with the course materials and teachings. Class participation accounts for 20% of the final grade. Along with attendance, this is an assessment of the quality and substance of your engagement with the material and with your peers. During the weeks of student presentations, presenting students must open with 2–3 guiding questions drawn from their article; all other students are expected to have read the accompanying discussion memo and arrive with at least one question or critique.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected at all lectures. Students are permitted up to **two absences** during the semester without needing to provide an explanation or documentation. For any additional absences, a valid excuse should be submitted before class whenever possible. In extenuating circumstances, valid excuses with supporting documentation will be accepted after class. Each unexcused absence beyond the two allowed absences will result in a **1-point deduction** from the participation grade.

Accommodations and Accessibility

I am committed to creating an inclusive classroom where all students can participate fully. If you have a disability, chronic illness, or any accessibility needs that require adjustments to study or exam conditions, please reach out to me as early as possible so we can work together to find suitable accommodations. This aligns with the guidelines from the Office of Equal Opportunities at the University of Bern, and my goal is to support your learning in a way that is fair and accessible.