

T407016 // AUTUMN 2026 // UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Session 01. What comparison is for.

THU 17 SEP 2026

UNI MAIL M2160

DR. JIHYE PARK

PLAYER 01

Hi, I'm Dr. Jihye Park

I'm a **postdoctoral researcher** in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the **University of Geneva**. I earned my **PhD in Political Science** at the **University of Rochester**.

WHAT I WORK ON

Research

International political economy

- Politics of trade and trade agreements
- Intellectual property rights
- Development finance and foreign aid
- Firm lobbying

Quantitative methods

- Large language models and text as data
- Causal inference
- Panel data analysis

THE COURSE

Fourteen weeks, one question

Why is political life organized so differently across countries, and what follows from those differences? Each week pairs comparative research with a question a policy analyst actually faces.

W01

What comparison is for

W02

States and state capacity

W03

Regimes and measurement

W04

Democratization and erosion

Tue 6 Oct

W05

Presidents and parliaments

W06

Electoral systems

W07

Parties and representation

W08

Voters, populism and backlash

W09

Interest groups

W10

Welfare states

W11

Institutions and development

W12

Conflict and contention

W13

Globalization and compensation

W14

Final exam

The reading load is light on purpose. **One or two texts a week, read closely.** Come ready to say what the author claims and whether you believe it.

WHERE AND WHEN

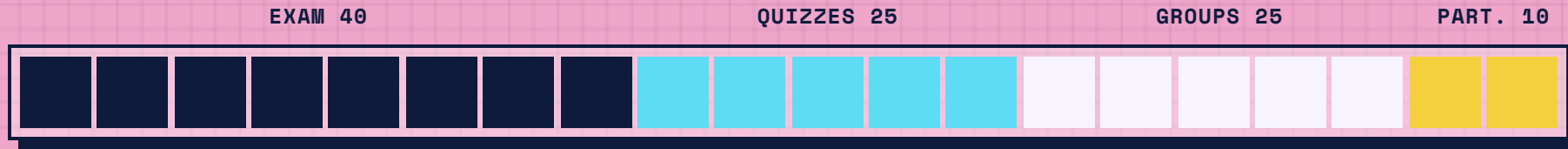
Two slots a week

THURSDAY CLASS	16:15 to 18:00 in Uni Mail M2160. The main class, following the weekly schedule.
TUESDAY COMPLEMENT	16:15 to 18:00 in Uni Mail M2170, on four dates. Practical skills the readings assume.
ROOM CHANGES	1 October in Uni Mail M R030 and 29 October in Uni Dufour U300
MOVED CLASS	Week 4 moves from Thursday 8 October to Tuesday 6 October, in Uni Mail M2170
OFFICE HOURS	Thursdays 14:30 to 16:00 in M4328. No appointment needed.
EMAIL	Jihye.Park@unige.ch

Complement attendance is **mandatory**, and what we cover there is **examinable**.

EVALUATION

How your grade adds up



COMPONENT

WEIGHT

WHEN

■ Written final exam

40%

Thursday 17 December, in class

■ Reading quizzes

25%

Six quizzes, best four count

□ In-class group work

25%

Thursday sessions

■ Participation

10%

Across the semester

RULES OF THE GAME

The fine print

25% • READING QUIZZES

Six 20-minute quizzes open the class and cover the readings and lectures since the previous quiz. Your best four count, so the two weakest drop automatically.

That drop also absorbs absences. There are no make-ups and no paperwork. Miss more than two and come see me.

25% • GROUP WORK

Groups form in week 2 and stay together. Most Thursdays you apply the week's framework to a case or policy problem you have never seen.

Each group hands in a short written output at the end of class, marked on a three-point scale. Your lowest mark drops.

10% • PARTICIPATION

I grade the quality of your engagement with the reading, on Thursdays and at the complements.

Disagreeing with the author counts. One sharp point about the text beats ten vague ones.

40% • FINAL EXAM

Written, in person and cumulative, on Thursday 17 December. You write an essay that reasons with the material, often about a country or policy problem that is new to you.

Missing the exam without a documented justification means a failing grade.

SAVE THESE

Dates to know

■	Thu 24 Sep	Groups form	
■	Thu 01 Oct	Quiz 1	UNI MAIL M R030
■	Tue 06 Oct	Week 4 class	
■	Thu 08 Oct	No class	
■	Thu 15 Oct	Quiz 2	
■	Thu 29 Oct	Quiz 3	UNI DUF0UR U300
■	Thu 12 Nov	Quiz 4	
■	Thu 26 Nov	Quiz 5	
■	Thu 10 Dec	Quiz 6	
■	Tue 15 Dec	Exam review	
■	Thu 17 Dec	Final exam, in class	

Quizzes open the class, so **be on time** on quiz days.

TUESDAYS 16:15 TO 18:00 · M2170

Complement sessions

Four sessions. Practical skills, no assigned reading unless noted.

27 Oct Concepts, measurement and validity

17 Nov Hypotheses and how they are evaluated

01 Dec Reading regression tables

15 Dec Exam review

HOUSE RULES

AI tools and email

GENERATIVE AI

Use it to understand a reading, check your own summary of an argument, or quiz yourself before the exam. I encourage all of that.

Every assessment is handwritten in a supervised room. The real risk is ending up with a fluent summary and no ability to argue with the author.

Trust me, I can spot that gap.

WRITING TO ME

- Put **T407016** in the subject line
- Open with a greeting, address me as Dr. Park, sign with your name
- Check the syllabus first. Rooms, dates and weights are all there.
- Allow two working days for a reply
- Anything longer than a paragraph belongs in office hours

LEVEL 01

WHAT COMPARISON IS FOR

Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review* 65(3), 682-693.

WARM-UP · 3 MINUTES WITH YOUR NEIGHBOR

A federal office sends you one question

Would compulsory voting raise turnout in Switzerland?

01

Which places would you look at?

02

What else differs between those places and Switzerland?

03

Would the experience of one country be enough to convince you?

WHY COMPARE

Compared with what?

DESCRIBE

Is Swiss turnout low? A single number means little until it sits next to other countries.

EXPLAIN

Check whether a factor travels with an outcome across cases, while holding other things roughly constant.

ADVISE

Before recommending a reform, look at what it did in places that already tried it.

For Lijphart, comparison is **a method of control**. We compare to rule out rival explanations for the relationship we care about.

LIJPHART 1971

Four ways to test a claim

Experimental	You assign the treatment yourself. The strongest control, and rarely possible with whole countries.	■ ■ ■ ■
Statistical	Many cases. You control for rival factors mathematically, through partial correlations.	■ ■ ■ □
Comparative	The same logic with too few cases for statistics. Control comes from choosing cases carefully.	■ ■ □ □
Case study	One case, studied in depth. It can generate hypotheses, probe them, or show where a theory fails.	■ □ □ □

The squares show how much control each method gives over rival explanations.

THE CORE PROBLEM

Many variables, small N

VARIABLES THAT MIGHT MATTER ►

CASES ▲

Four countries and fourteen candidate explanations. Almost any story fits the data. Lijphart suggests four ways out.

- 01 Add cases where you can, across more countries or a longer period
- 02 Combine related variables into fewer categories
- 03 Pick comparable cases that are alike in many respects and differ in the variables you study
- 04 Let theory narrow the list to the few variables that matter most

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

A case of what?

A case is one instance of the thing you want to explain, bounded in space and time.

Switzerland

Canton of Schaffhausen

The 2023 federal election

A single popular vote

One country can supply one case or hundreds. Your question decides whether the unit is a country, a canton, an election, a vote, or a voter.

CHOOSING CASES

Most similar or most different

MILL'S METHOD OF DIFFERENCE

Most similar systems

	CASE A	CASE B
Background factors	same	same
Explanatory factor	yes	no
Outcome	yes	no

Hold the background fixed. See whether the one factor that differs moves with the outcome.

MILL'S METHOD OF AGREEMENT

Most different systems

	CASE A	CASE B
Background factors	differ	differ
Explanatory factor	yes	yes
Outcome	yes	yes

Let the background vary. See whether the one shared factor comes with a shared outcome.

John Stuart Mill set out both logics in *A System of Logic* [1843]. Lijphart's comparable cases follow the most similar design.

THE TRADE-OFF

Depth or breadth

◀ DEPTH

BREADTH ▶

1 CASE

Case study

GAIN

Context, sequence and precise concepts

RISK

Hard to generalize

A FEW CASES

Small-N comparison

GAIN

Control through case choice, detail intact

RISK

Too many variables for the cases

MANY CASES

Large-N statistics

GAIN

General patterns and estimates of uncertainty

RISK

Thin measures that stretch concepts

Many of this semester's readings sit on the right, and the Tuesday complements teach you to read them.

WATCH OUT

Three traps

SELECTING ON THE OUTCOME

Study only the countries that democratized and every factor they share looks like a cause. You also need the cases where it did not happen.

Geddes 1990

CASES THAT COPY EACH OTHER

Neighbors learn from and imitate one another, so countries are rarely independent observations. This is known as Galton's problem.

STRETCHED CONCEPTS

Carry a concept to too many places and it ends up meaning very little. Sartori calls this conceptual stretching.

Sartori 1970

YOUR TURN · 5 MINUTES IN PAIRS

Back to the federal office

ACROSS CANTONS

Schaffhausen

The only canton that still requires citizens to vote, and its turnout is regularly among the highest in the country. Same federal ballots, different rule.

OVER TIME

The Netherlands

Dropped compulsory voting in 1970. Turnout at the next national election fell sharply.

Which design is each comparison? What does it settle, and what could still fool you?

NEXT UP

Before Thursday 24 September

Week 02. States and state capacity.

READ

Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." In *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol. Cambridge University Press, 169-191.

READ

Hanson, Jonathan K., and Rachel Sigman. 2021. "Leviathan's Latent Dimensions. Measuring State Capacity for Comparative Political Research." *Journal of Politics* 83(4), 1495-1510.



Thu 24 Sep

Groups form in class



Thu 01 Oct

Quiz 1

UNI MAIL M R030



Tue 06 Oct

Week 4 class

M2170

PROGRESS SAVED

QUESTIONS?

Office hours Thursdays 14:30 to 16:00 in M4328

JIHYE.PARK@UNIGE.CH

JIHYEPARK.ME/COMPARATIVE-POLITICS-MASPO-FALL2026