

T407016 // AUTUMN 2026 // UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Session 05. Executive design. Presidents and parliaments.

THU 15 OCT 2026

UNI MAIL M2160

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QUIZ 2 · 15 MINUTES

Quiz First

COVERS

Sessions 03 and 04. Levitsky and Way 2002, Munck and Verkuilen 2002, Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, and Lührmann and Lindberg 2019.

FORMAT

Ten questions worth 2 points each.
Six single choice and four select all that apply.

RULES

Closed book. Phones and laptops away. Write your name and student number at the top of the sheet.

Your best four of the six quizzes count. **Pens down when time is called.**

PREVIOUSLY

Last week, this week

SESSION 04

- Acemoglu and Robinson on why elites concede democracy and when they take it back
- Lührmann and Lindberg on autocratization led by elected incumbents

SESSION 05

- Linz on why presidential democracies break down
- Cheibub and Limongi on whether the evidence backs him
- One group exercise

Last week asked how regimes change. **This week asks whether the way a democracy picks its government affects how long it lasts.**

OPENER · ANY VOLUNTEERS?

You are writing the constitution of a new democracy

Should voters elect the head of government directly?

01

What does a directly elected leader give voters?

02

What happens when the leader and the legislature disagree?

03

How do you remove a leader who has failed?

Who chooses the government?

	PARLIAMENTARY	PRESIDENTIAL
Head of government	A prime minister who needs a majority in parliament	A president elected by the people
Term	As long as parliament's confidence lasts	Fixed
Removal	A vote of no confidence	Only by impeachment
Head of state	Usually someone else, a monarch or a weak president	The president
Examples	Britain, Spain, West Germany	United States, Chile, Brazil

"The superior historical performance of parliamentary democracies is no accident."

In 1990 the United States was the only presidential democracy with a long record of constitutional continuity. **Linz expects parliaments to matter most where cleavages run deep and parties are many.**

LINZ 1990 · DUAL LEGITIMACY

Two mandates, one fixed clock

CHILE 1970

Allende, 36.2 percent

A plurality won by a heterogeneous coalition gave him a six-year mandate to run the government.

SPAIN 1979

Suárez, 35.1 percent

A plurality of about the same size left him working with other parties to sustain a minority government.

"Who has the stronger claim to speak on behalf of the people: the president or the legislative majority that opposes his policies?"

No democratic principle settles that dispute, Linz argues. **In the past the armed forces were often tempted to step in as a mediating power.**

Government crisis or regime crisis?

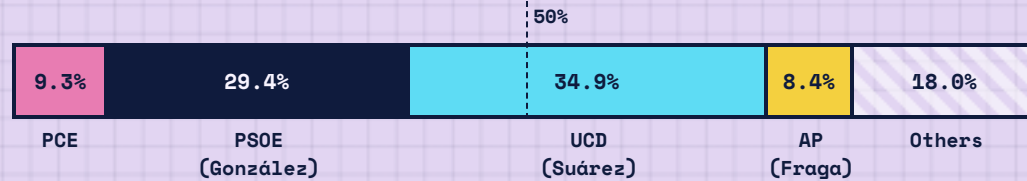
WHEN	PARLIAMENTARY	PRESIDENTIAL
The leader loses support	A vote of no confidence and a new prime minister	Impeachment or resignation under pressure, both slow and uncertain
The leader dies	Parliament picks a successor	A vice-president voters may never have wanted in charge, like Isabel Perón
Events change	Coalitions shift, grand coalitions form, new elections are called	Winners and losers stay fixed until the term ends

"What in a parliamentary system would be a government crisis can become a full-blown regime crisis in a presidential system."

The clock also breeds urgency, what Hirschman called "the wish of *vouloir conclure*." A president barred from reelection rushes to build "his Brasilia."

Spain 1977 as a presidential race

FIRST FREE ELECTION AFTER FRANCO · SHARE OF THE VOTE



LEFT TO RIGHT · ORDER FROM LINZ · SPACING ILLUSTRATIVE



- 01** The winner takes the whole executive for a fixed term. The losers wait four or five years with no share of power.
- 02** No party had a majority. A left united behind González would have needed the Communists, and a popular-front mood would have run the campaign.
- 03** Suárez could hardly have united the right with Fraga's AP, which stood for continuity with Franco.
- 04** In a close race, small extremist parties can claim to be the decisive bloc.

A presidential election "would have been far more divisive," Linz concludes. **He adds that a centrist electorate defuses the danger, as Goldwater and McGovern learned.**

CHEIBUB AND LIMONGI 2002

The gap is real

1 in 23

Presidential democracies that died in a given year, 1946 to 1999.

1 in 58

Parliamentary democracies that died in a given year.

1 in 8

Democracies of either type that died at income levels like sub-Saharan Africa's.

"We have good reasons to doubt that we understand what causes this difference."

Three claims under test

MAJORITARIAN IMPERATIVE

INCENTIVES FOR COOPERATION

CENTRALIZED DECISION MAKING

Minority governments and deadlock

- 01 Minority cabinets governed parliamentary democracies 22 percent of the time from 1946 to 1999.
- 02 Presidents lacked a majority in about 40 percent of presidential years, close to the third of parliamentary governments in industrialized democracies.
- 03 Strom shows that minority cabinets can be a rational choice when parties can shape policy from outside government.
- 04 Deadlock needs a veto the legislature cannot override. Parliaments deadlock too when government follows government and no stable majority forms.

CHANCE A PRESIDENTIAL DEMOCRACY DIES IN A GIVEN YEAR · TABLE 1

DEADLOCK BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS



SEATS HELD BY ALL CABINET PARTIES



SEATS HELD BY THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY



The authors find no empirical basis for the fear of deadlock. **Look at the bottom pair before you agree.**

Presidents build coalitions too

SHARE OF GOVERNMENTS THAT ARE COALITIONS · TABLE 2

LARGEST PARTY UNDER HALF THE SEATS



LARGEST PARTY UNDER A THIRD



01 Most prime ministers leave office without an election, 56 percent in 21 industrialized democracies from 1946 to 1995. The threat of early elections is a weak source of party discipline.

02 The two systems differ in the fallback. If no deal is struck, a parliament faces new elections and a president keeps every portfolio.

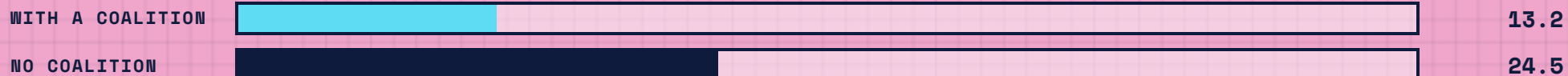
03 Paralysis needs unusual rules. In only 4 percent of presidential years could a president veto a bill with no override.

Coalitions grow more common as parties multiply, in both systems. **That cuts against Mainwaring's fear that presidentialism and multipartism are a difficult combination.**

Do coalitions keep presidents alive?

EXPECTED LIFE OF A PRESIDENTIAL DEMOCRACY, IN YEARS

LARGEST PARTY HOLDS A THIRD TO A HALF OF THE SEATS



LARGEST PARTY HOLDS UNDER A THIRD



MODERATE FRAGMENTATION

The president's party is usually the largest, holds about a third of the seats and faces other large parties. Coalitions go with short lives, and the authors call this puzzling.

HIGH FRAGMENTATION

Coalitions form more often, and they more than double the expected life of the regime.

Who sets the agenda?

THE GOVERNMENT SETS IT

THE ASSEMBLY AND ITS COMMITTEES SET IT

PARLIAMENTARY

BRITAIN

Cabinet bills passed with a 0.97 chance from 1945 to 1978. Backbench bills almost never passed.

FRANCE, THIRD AND FOURTH REPUBLICS · ITALY

Assembly presidents set the agenda, committees could block bills, and Italian deputies could vote in secret.

PRESIDENTIAL

BRAZIL AFTER 1988

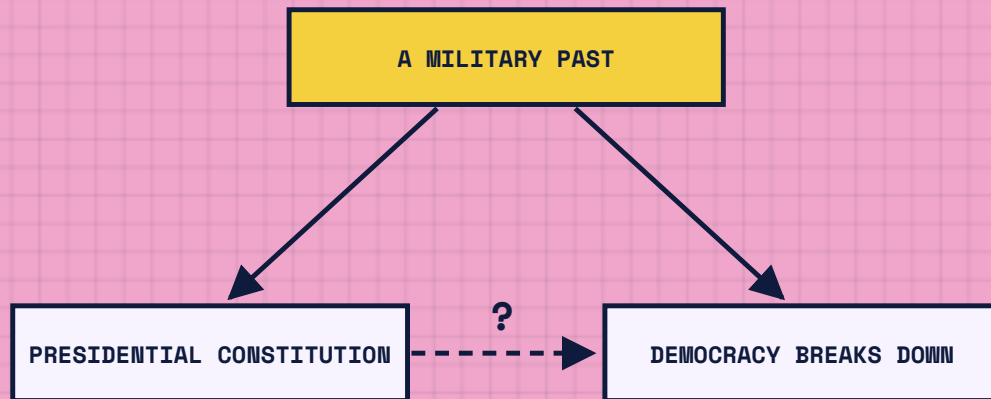
The president issues decrees, requests urgency and alone introduces budget and tax bills. Presidents introduced 86 percent of the bills enacted.

UNITED STATES

Committees hold the gates. The president cannot introduce bills and has only a package veto.

Tsebelis gave the agenda to the government in parliaments and to the legislature in presidential systems. **His rule fits two of the four cells.**

The constitution or the country?



- 01** Presidential democracies emerge more often from military dictatorships than from civilian ones. Cheibub and Limongi note that this makes them likelier to fall back into dictatorship.
- 02** With origin held constant, presidential democracies still die sooner, as Przeworski and his coauthors found in 2000.
- 03** Last week's chapter offers a mechanism. A directly elected president is likelier to be populist, threatens the elite more and may invite more coups [Acemoglu and Robinson, p. 35].

Session 01 warned about how cases are selected. **When the cases that adopt an institution differ from the rest, comparing their outcomes mixes the two.**

COMPARE THE READINGS

Two readings, one gap

	LINZ 1990	CHEIBUB AND LIMONGI 2002
Question	Does the form of government decide whether democracy survives?	Do the incentives said to follow from each form explain the survival gap?
Evidence	Reasoning about institutions, Chile, and a counterfactual Spain	Data on democracies from 1946 to 1999, and cases from Brazil to Italy
What drives breakdown	Dual legitimacy and fixed terms	How decision making is organized
The United States	The stable exception, thanks to diffuse parties	The exception, a president with little agenda power
Bottom line	New democracies, above all divided multiparty ones, do better with parliaments	"If parliamentary regimes have a better record of survival than presidential regimes, it is not because they are parliamentary."

Cheibub and Limongi grant that parliaments survive longer. **Which of Linz's links do they break, and which still stand?**

GROUP EXERCISE · DRAFT THE EXECUTIVE

A transitional assembly asks your group for advice

Should the new constitution give the country a president, or a prime minister who answers to parliament?

Fifteen years of military rule ended last year, and officers still sit on the transition council. Last month a founding election filled a 300-seat assembly by proportional representation.

PARTY	PROFILE	VOTES	SEATS
Democratic Centre	Negotiated the exit from military rule	31%	94
Social Democrats	Main opposition to the old regime	27%	82
Agrarian League	Rural, strongest in the north	14%	42
Workers' Front	Radical left, disciplined, union base	12%	36
National Order	Defends the old regime	10%	30
Regional parties	Four small parties	6%	16

DRAFT A · PRESIDENTIAL

A president elected for six years with no reelection, and a runoff if no one wins half the vote. The assembly sits for four years. The president names the cabinet and can veto bills, and two thirds of the assembly can override.

DRAFT B · PARLIAMENTARY

A prime minister and cabinet who need the assembly's confidence. A ceremonial president chosen by the assembly. The prime minister may call early elections.

Cheibub and Limongi, Table 3. Presidential democracies whose largest party held under a third of the seats had an expected life of 54.9 years with a coalition government and 23.9 years without one.

- 01 Make Linz's case against Draft A with these results. Who reaches the runoff, which allies does each finalist need, and what can go wrong once the winner takes office?
- 02 Make Cheibub and Limongi's reply. Which facts in the file would they weigh first, and which clauses would they write into Draft A?
- 03 Choose a draft as a group and name the biggest risk it leaves.

The country, parties and results are invented.

NEXT UP

Before Thursday 22 October

Week 06. Electoral systems.

READ

Carey, John M., and Simon Hix. 2011. "The Electoral Sweet Spot: Low-Magnitude Proportional Electoral Systems." *American Journal of Political Science* 55[2], 383-397.

READ

Lijphart, Arend. 2012. *Patterns of Democracy*, 2nd edition. Yale University Press, chapter 8.



Thu 22 Oct

Week 6 class on electoral systems



Tue 27 Oct

Complement on concepts, measurement and validity

M2170



Thu 29 Oct

Quiz 3 opens the class. It covers Sessions 05 and 06.

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PROGRESS SAVED

QUESTIONS?

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

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BEFORE YOU LEAVE



Rate each group member's participation in today's exercise. **Required before you leave the room.**