

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

T407016 // AUTUMN SEMESTER 2026 // UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE

INSTRUCTOR	Dr. Jihye Park
EMAIL	Jihye.Park@unige.ch
OFFICE	M4328, Uni Mail
OFFICE HOURS	Thursdays, 14:30–16:00, no appointment needed
CLASS	Thursdays, 16:15–18:00, Uni Mail M2160
COMPLEMENT	Tuesdays, 16:15–18:00, Uni Mail M2170, on the dates listed below
ROOM CHANGES	1 October in Uni Mail M R030, 29 October in Uni Dufour U300
MOVED CLASS	Week 4 on Tuesday 6 October, Uni Mail M2170

■ ABOUT THIS COURSE

Comparative politics asks why political life is organized so differently across countries and what follows from those differences. This course is built for students who expect to work on policy questions. Every week pairs a body of comparative research with the kind of question a policy analyst actually faces, so that the theory earns its place by explaining something a practitioner needs to know.

The course covers states and state capacity, regime types and their measurement, democratization and democratic erosion, constitutional and electoral design, parties and representation, voting behavior and populism, interest group influence, welfare states, the institutional roots of development, political violence, and the domestic politics of globalization.

The reading load is deliberately light. One or two texts a week, read closely, will serve you better than a long list skimmed the night before. Come having read them and be ready to say what the author claims and why you do or do not believe it.

■ LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- Explain the main theoretical traditions in comparative politics and apply them to cases outside the ones discussed in class.
- Distinguish a descriptive claim from a causal one and identify what evidence each requires.
- Read an empirical article in political science, including its tables, and assess whether the conclusions follow.

- Formulate a testable hypothesis about a political outcome and specify what would count as evidence against it.
- Translate comparative research into arguments that a policy audience can use.

■ COURSE STRUCTURE

The Thursday session is the main class and follows the weekly schedule below. Complement sessions meet on Tuesdays in the same 16:15 to 18:00 slot and build the practical skills the readings assume. Those sessions are listed at the end of this syllabus. Attendance is mandatory, and material covered there is examinable.

The Thursday class meets in Uni Mail M2160 and the Tuesday complements in Uni Mail M2170. Two exceptions: The 1 October session is in Uni Mail M R030 and the 29 October session is in Uni Dufour U300. Both are flagged in the schedule below.

The class of Thursday 8 October moves to Tuesday 6 October, in the complement slot in Uni Mail M2170.

■ EVALUATION

COMPONENT	WEIGHT	WHEN
Reading quizzes	25%	Six quizzes, best four counted
In-class group work	25%	Thursday sessions
Participation	10%	Across the semester
Written final exam	40%	Thursday 17 December, in class

Reading quizzes. Six quizzes are given over the semester, on the dates marked in the weekly schedule below. Each lasts 20 minutes, opens the class, and covers the readings and lectures since the previous quiz. Only your four best scores count, so the two weakest are dropped automatically. That is also how an absence is absorbed, which means there is no make-up quiz and no need to document a missed one. If you miss more than two, come and see me.

In-class group work. Most Thursday sessions include a group exercise in which you apply the week's framework to a case or a policy problem that you have not seen before. Groups are formed in week 2 and stay together. Each exercise produces a short written output handed in at the end of the session and marked on a three-point scale. Your grade is the average of your group's outputs with the lowest dropped. The work is done and submitted in class, so attendance is what makes it possible.

Participation. Assessed on the quality of your contribution to discussion in both the Thursday sessions and the complements. What counts is engagement with the reading, including disagreement with it, rather than how often you speak.

Final exam. Written, in person, cumulative, held during the full session on the last day of the semester. You will be asked to write an essay reasoning with the material rather than reproducing it, which means a question may present an unfamiliar country or policy problem and ask you to apply what you have learned. Missing the exam without a documented justification results in a failing grade. Justified absences are handled according to the faculty regulations.

■ USE OF AI TOOLS

You may use generative AI to help you understand a reading, to check your own summary of an argument, or to quiz yourself before an exam. This is a good use of the technology and I encourage it.

You may not submit text you did not write, and since every assessment in this course is written by hand in a supervised room, the practical risk is different from what you may be used to. The real risk is that outsourcing the reading leaves you with a fluent summary but no ability to argue with the author. Trust me, I can easily identify that gap!

■ EMAIL ETIQUETTE

Write to me with the course code in the subject line. Open with a greeting, address me as Dr. Park, and sign with your name. A message without them usually goes unnoticed in my inbox.

Have a look at this syllabus before you write. The rooms, the dates, the weighting and the readings are all on this page, so checking will often get you an answer faster than I can. If the syllabus is silent or unclear, write and I will help you gladly. Allow two working days for a reply. Anything that needs more than a paragraph from me belongs in office hours, where we can sort it out properly.

■ READINGS

Every assigned text should be available through the University of Geneva library. Tell me before the session if an item is genuinely unavailable.

■ WEEKLY SCHEDULE, THURSDAYS 16:15-18:00

UNI MAIL M2160 UNLESS A ROOM CHANGE IS FLAGGED

WEEK 01 — 17 SEPTEMBER

Introduction. What comparison is for.

Why we compare, what a case is, and the trade-off between depth and breadth.

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

WEEK 02 — 24 SEPTEMBER

States and state capacity.

Where states come from and why some can deliver policy while others cannot.

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.

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.

WEEK 03 — 1 OCTOBER

ROOM UNI MAIL M R030

QUIZ 1

Regimes and how we measure them.

Democracy, autocracy, and the hybrids in between. What a democracy index does and does not capture.

Munck, Gerardo L., and Jay Verkuilen. 2002. "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices." *Comparative Political Studies* 35(1), 5–34.

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2002. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13(2), 51–65.

WEEK 04 — TUESDAY 6 OCTOBER

MOVED FROM 8 OCTOBER

ROOM UNI MAIL M2170

Democratization and democratic erosion.

How regimes change, and why recent breakdowns look different from the coups of the twentieth century.

Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. 2006. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 2.

Lührmann, Anna, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2019. "A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New About It?" *Democratization* 26(7), 1095–1113.

WEEK 05 — 15 OCTOBER

QUIZ 2

Executive design. Presidents and parliaments.

Whether the choice between presidential and parliamentary government affects regime survival.

Linz, Juan J. 1990. "The Perils of Presidentialism." *Journal of Democracy* 1(1), 51–69.

Cheibub, José Antonio. 2007. *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 1.

WEEK 06 — 22 OCTOBER

Electoral systems.

How the rules for translating votes into seats shape party systems and government formation.

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.

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

WEEK 07 — 29 OCTOBER

ROOM UNI DUF04 U300

QUIZ 3

Parties and representation.

What parties are for, and what happens when they detach from the electorate.

Katz, Richard S., and Peter Mair. 1995. "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party." *Party Politics* 1(1), 5–28.

WEEK 08 — 5 NOVEMBER

Voters, populism and backlash.

Competing accounts of the populist surge and the evidence behind each.

Mudde, Cas. 2004. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* 39(4), 541–563.

Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. 2019. *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 1.

WEEK 09 — 12 NOVEMBER

QUIZ 4

Interest groups and who gets the policy they want.

Lobbying, business power, and the gap between public opinion and enacted policy.

Gilens, Martin, and Benjamin I. Page. 2014. "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens." *Perspectives on Politics* 12(3), 564–581.

Baumgartner, Frank R., Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, and Beth L. Leech. 2009. *Lobbying and Policy Change*. University of Chicago Press, chapter 1.

WEEK 10 — 19 NOVEMBER

Welfare states and redistribution.

Why rich democracies redistribute at such different rates.

Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. 1990. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton University Press, chapter 1.

Iversen, Torben, and David Soskice. 2006. "Electoral Institutions and the Politics of Coalitions: Why Some Democracies Redistribute More Than Others." *American Political Science Review* 100(2), 165–181.

WEEK 11 — 26 NOVEMBER

QUIZ 5

Institutions and development.

The institutional account of long-run growth and the debate over how much it can carry.

Acemoglu, Daron, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson. 2001. "The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation." *American Economic Review* 91(5),

1369–1401.

North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 1.

WEEK 12 — 3 DECEMBER

Conflict and contention.

What predicts civil war, and whether grievance or opportunity does the explanatory work.

Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97(1), 75–90.

Cederman, Lars-Erik, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min. 2010. "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel? New Data and Analysis." *World Politics* 62(1), 87–119.

WEEK 13 — 10 DECEMBER

QUIZ 6

Globalization, compensation and domestic politics.

Openness exposes governments to risks they are then asked to absorb. We start from the classic compensation argument in rich democracies and then follow the same logic into the developing world, where the side payment for accepting a costly international rule may arrive as foreign aid.

Rodrik, Dani. 1998. "Why Do More Open Economies Have Bigger Governments?" *Journal of Political Economy* 106(5), 997–1032.

Park, Jihye. 2026. "Aid, lending, and TRIPS." *The Review of International Organizations*, Online First. [Open Access](#)

WEEK 14 — 17 DECEMBER

Final exam.

Written, in class, cumulative.

■ COMPLEMENT SESSIONS, TUESDAYS 16:15-18:00

UNI MAIL M2170

These sessions are practical and there is no assigned reading unless noted.

27 OCTOBER

Concepts, measurement and validity.

Moving from an abstract idea such as state capacity or democracy to something countable, and recognizing when an indicator has drifted away from the concept it claims to capture.

17 NOVEMBER

Hypotheses and how they are evaluated.

Writing a hypothesis that could be wrong, identifying the observable implication that would falsify it, and telling a genuine test apart from a restatement.

1 DECEMBER

Reading regression tables.

Coefficients, standard errors and confidence intervals, what statistical significance does and does not tell you, and how control variables, interaction terms and fixed effects change what a table shows. We work through tables from articles already assigned in this course.

15 DECEMBER

Exam review.

The session prepares you for the final exam. We work through the format, the kind of reasoning a strong answer shows, and field your questions.