



UNIVERSITÉ  
DE GENÈVE

## Comparative Politics (Politique Comparée)<sup>1</sup>

BA Lecture, Fall Term 2026

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### Lectures (with Ray):

Tuesdays 14:15-16:00; Uni-Mail, Room: M S160

### Tutorials (with Alvarado):

Wednesdays 16:15-18:00; Uni-Mail, Room M R060

## Summary

Why are some states democratic and others not? How do institutions differ across democracies, and what difference does it make by which rules a parliament is elected? How do political parties organize societal conflicts? These and many more questions are at the core of the introductory class of comparative politics.

The lecture introduces students to the field of comparative politics, which analyses the politics of individual countries from a comparative perspective. We start with a broad view on different types of regimes and regime change and then move our focus to institutions, actors, and finally to outcomes.

The accompanying tutorial deepens the students' knowledge about the content of the lecture, provides additional material to better understand how research in comparative politics works (e.g. measurement of concepts, application of comparative methods) and gives students the opportunity to apply the learned concepts and theories in group exercises and case studies.

## Course Goals and Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain core concepts in comparative politics.
- Understand the main theoretical approaches used to explain differences in political outcomes across countries.

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<sup>1</sup> This course was originally developed by Prof. Lukas Haffert; the syllabus and reading list follow their design.

- Think critically about the consequences of different political institutions.
- Synthesize and clearly organize large amounts of material from lectures and assigned readings.
- Have developed strategies for independently applying theoretical concepts.

## Course Requirements

Students are expected to have completed weekly assigned course readings in advance of each class.

### Exam (80% of final grade)

Closed book exam, 90 minutes.

Questions are formulated in English, but students may answer them in English or French. The questions will refer to the contents of lectures and tutorials, including assigned readings. Example questions will be discussed throughout the semester.

### Take-home question (20% of final grade)

In addition to the exam, students are expected to write one exam-like question during the semester (in English).

This take-home question is written up to mimic an exam question, but students will have additional time to answer it and may freely consult lecture materials to do so.

Each week's take-home question is presented at the end of the weekly lecture and thereafter uploaded to Moodle. Students must select one question in advance, by signing up on Moodle. The number of students per week is capped and places are served on a first-come-first-served basis.

Answers to take-home questions **may not exceed 300 words** and are due on **Friday at 11:59 AM** after the respective lecture. Responses to take-home questions should be uploaded as PDF files on Moodle; students must clearly indicate their **name, student number and a word count** at the top of the page.

Students will receive feedback on their answers and answers are discussed at the beginning of the next session.

*Note: The take-home questions give you the chance to practice for the exam, and we encourage you to use it for this purpose!*

## Use of Artificial Intelligence

Using artificial intelligence language models, such as ChatGPT or Claude, for answering take-home questions is not monitored and will not be penalized. However, it is strongly discouraged, as take-home questions are meant as a possibility to practice and to receive meaningful feedback.

*You can only learn from the take-home question if you put in the effort yourself!*

## Organizational Matters

The course is credited 6 ECTS points and consists of 13 lectures and 2 tutorial sessions.

All course materials are made available via Moodle. On the platform, the course is dubbed '**Comparative Politics (BA Lecture, Fall 2026, T207036)**' and the course code is T207036 (2026).

## Tutorials

Each student is expected to attend two tutorial sessions, undertaken in a smaller setting. The division of students into tutorial groups is based on the first letter of their surname:

- Group 1 (surname A-D), Uni-Mail M R060: 30 September; 21 October
  - Group 2 (surname D-M), Uni-Mail M R060: 07 October; 28 October
  - Group 3 (surname N-Z), Uni-Mail M R060: 14 October; 11 November
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# Lectures

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## Lecture 1: Introduction (15.09)

What Do We Explain in Comparative Politics—and How?

Agenda Points & Guiding Questions

- Organisational matters; course structure and exam
- What is comparative politics?
- Course goals and learning outcomes: what you will (and will not) learn
- What do we seek to explain in comparative politics?
- How do we explain political outcomes? Structural, institutional, and cultural approaches

Readings:

Background reading (non-mandatory): Hall, Peter A. und Rosemary Taylor. 1996. Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms. *Political Studies* 44(5): 936-957.

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## Lecture 2: Democracy (22.09)

Guiding Questions:

- What is a democracy?
- The problem of measurement and classification
- What is the relationship between democracy and economic development?

Readings:

- Mandatory: Adam Przeworski and F. Limongi (1997): Modernization: Theories and Facts. *World Politics* 49: 155-184.
  - Background Reading: Perez-Linan, Aníbal A. (2020): "Democracies", in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): *Comparative Politics*. 5th Edition. Oxford, 86-102
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## Lecture 3: Autocracy (29.09)

Guiding Questions:

- Democracy, Autocracy, and in between?
- Why do autocracies hold elections?
- The problem of succession

Readings:

- Mandatory Reading: Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way (2010): *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge, 3-24.

- Background Reading: Lindstaedt, Natasha (2020): “Authoritarian Regimes”, in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): Comparative Politics. 5th Edition. Oxford, 103-116.

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#### Lecture 4: Democratic Backsliding (6.10)

Guiding Questions:

- Is democracy truly unassailable in rich countries?
- Has the way in which democracies collapse changed?
- What can be done to prevent democratic backsliding?

Readings:

- Mandatory Reading: Bermeo, Nancy (2016): On Democratic Backsliding. Journal of Democracy 27: 5–19.
- Background Reading: Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018): How Democracies Die. New York: 13-38.

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#### Lecture 5: Backsliding in the US (13.10)

Guiding Questions:

- How can we use the content of the last sessions to make sense of the US elections?
- Is there minority rule in the US?
- Are the US a case of democratic backsliding?

Readings

- Mandatory Reading: None
- Background Reading 1: Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt, 2023. Tyranny of the minority : why American democracy reached the breaking point, Ch. 6, “Minority Rule”, pp. 165-197.
- Background Reading 2: Carrier, McKenzie & Thomas Carothers, 2025. Democratic Backsliding in Comparative Perspective. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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#### Lecture 6: Electoral Systems (20.10)

Guiding Questions:

- What are the main electoral systems?
- What effects do different electoral systems have?
- Why do different countries have different electoral systems?

Readings:

- Mandatory Reading: Döring, Holger and Philip Manow (2015): Is Proportional Representation More Favourable to the Left? Electoral Rules and Their Impact on

Elections, Parliaments and the Formation of Cabinets. *British Journal of Political Science*, 47(1): 149-164.

- Background Reading: Gallagher, Michael (2020): "Elections and Referendums", in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): *Comparative Politics*. 5th Edition. Oxford, 178-192.

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## **Lecture 7: Government Systems (27.10)**

### *Parliamentarism and Presidentialism*

#### Guiding Questions:

- What are the main forms of organizing governments?
- What are the differences between separation of powers and fusion of powers?
- Is presidentialism more susceptible to democratic backsliding?

#### Readings:

- Mandatory Reading: Juan Linz (1990): The Perils of Presidentialism. *Journal of Democracy* 1(1): 51-70.
- Background Reading: Müller, Wolfgang (2020): "Governments and bureaucracies", in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): *Comparative Politics*. 5th Edition. Oxford, 139-158.

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## **Lecture 8: Veto Players (10.11)**

### *Federalism, Constitutionalism and Courts*

#### Guiding Questions:

- What is a veto player?
- What effects does a higher number of veto players have?
- What are the effects of federalism?
- What do constitutional courts do?

#### Readings:

- Mandatory Reading 1: Scheppele, Kim Lane (2021): The U.S. Supreme Court in Global Comparison. Testimony for the Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court, p. 1-6 & 15-20.
- Mandatory Reading 2: Doerfler, Ryan and Samuel Moyn. (2020): Making the Supreme Court Safe for Democracy. Beyond packing schemes, we need to diminish the high court's power. *The New Republic*, October 2020.
- Background Reading: Stone Sweet, A. (2020): "Constitutions, rights, and judicial power", in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): *Comparative Politics*. 5th Edition. Oxford, 159-177.

## **Lecture 9: The Welfare State (17.11)**

Guiding Questions:

- Why is the welfare state an institution?
- How can we think about the effects of the welfare state?
- How did the welfare state come about?
- How do welfare states change?

Readings:

- Mandatory Reading: Kammer, Andreas, Judith Niehues and Andreas Peichl (2012). Welfare regimes and welfare state outcomes in Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy* 22(5), p. 455–471.
  - Background Reading: van Kersbergen, Kees and Philip Manow (2020): “The Welfare State”, in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): *Comparative Politics*. 5th Edition. Oxford, 376-394.
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## **Lecture 10: Parties (24.11)**

Guiding Questions:

- What is the role of parties in democracies?
- How do party systems differ?
- How have parties changed?

Readings:

- Mandatory Reading: Katz, Richard S. and Peter Mair (1995): Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party. *Party Politics* 1(5): 5–28.
  - Background Reading: Katz, Richard S. (2020): “Political Parties”, in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): *Comparative Politics*. 5th Edition. Oxford, 213-230.
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## **Lecture 11: Interest Groups (1.12)**

Guiding Questions:

- What are the main interest groups affecting politics?
- Which forms of influence do these interest groups have?
- What is the relationship between interest group politics and electoral politics?

Readings:

- Mandatory Reading: Hacker, Jacob S., & Paul Pierson (2010): Winner-Take All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States. *Politics & Society*, 38(2), 152-204. Read only to page 182!
- Background Reading: Erne, Roland (2020): “Interest Groups”, in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): *Comparative Politics*. 5th Edition. Oxford, 252-266.

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## Lecture 12: Social Cleavages (8.12)

Guiding questions:

- What is a social cleavage?
- Which cleavages have historically shaped European party systems?
- How does the cleavage contribute to understanding contemporary developments?

Readings:

- Mandatory: Lipset, Seymour Martin and Stein Rokkan (1990 [1967]): "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments", in P. Mair (ed.), *The West European Party System*. Oxford, 91–138.
- Background Reading: Caramani, Daniele (2020). "Party Systems", in: Caramani, Daniele (ed.): *Comparative Politics*. 5th Edition. Oxford, 231-251.

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## Lecture 13: Summary & Discussion (15.12)

Guiding questions / Agenda points:

- Is democracy in crisis?
- If so, is this primarily an institutional or a substantive crisis?
- Last questions before the exam

Readings:

This class is not accompanied by any readings.

# Tutorials

## Tutorial I (Measurement): Democratic Backsliding and Institutional Change

Group 1: 30 September 2026

Group 2: 7 October 2026

Group 3: 14 October 2026

Mandatory Readings:

Gerschewski, Johannes. "Explanations of Institutional Change: Reflecting on a "Missing Diagonal"." *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 1 (2021): 218-33.

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## Tutorial II (Testing): The Radical Right

Group 1: 21 October 2026

Group 2: 28 October 2026

Group 3: 11 November 2026

Mandatory Readings:

Schäfer, Armin (2022): Cultural Backlash? How (Not) to Explain the Rise of Authoritarian Populism. *British Journal of Political Science* 52(4): 1977-1993.

Bhambra, Gurminder K. (2017): Brexit, Trump, and 'Methodological Whiteness': On the Misrecognition of Race and Class. *The British Journal of Sociology* 68(S1): S214-S32.

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