

Introduction

Comparative Politics and Democracy

This book is not an introduction to political science in general, but an introduction to one of the major subfields of the discipline – comparative politics. It is designed as a book that builds upon a student’s knowledge of politics, and assumes that the student has some basic familiarity with some central questions in political science – questions such as: What is politics? What is the state? What is government? What is a political system? Although designed primarily as a book for students with some familiarity with politics and political science, this book can be used by both “beginners” in the field and by more advanced students. It can be used by more advanced students because rather than being about “countries,” it is about *theories* and *principles* in comparative politics. By adopting a *problem-based learning* approach, this can help even those students with little innate interest in comparative politics to understand how these concepts and principles can be used to make sense of hotspots like Iraq or Afghanistan.

This book is organized around a basic pedagogical principle: that students learn best when theories and concepts are understood in application to solving a problem (or problem-based learning). Hence this book is organized around a *problem*. How does one promote the development of political democracy? What are the factors that help explain the emergence of political democracy? Although some may object to the seemingly prescriptive nature of the question (the implication that democracy should exist everywhere), I adopt this focus for two reasons. First, it is a very *practical* question. Knowing the factors that affect the development of democracy can help students understand why “building” democracy in post-war Iraq

or Afghanistan is so difficult, if not impossible. Thus, the question is not prescriptive – rather it presumes that students need to ask this question first to realize that democracy may *not* be the best institutional arrangement, given a set of historical, economic, social, cultural and international circumstances. Second, it provides an issue on which “to hang our theoretical hats” – it demonstrates that some very practical questions can be addressed using theories that students read about in texts – it makes the field relevant and real.

Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method

However, before we begin to address the question about how to build a democracy, we do need to address some preliminaries – when we talk about a text book on “comparative politics,” what do we mean? How does comparative politics fit as a subfield of political science? What has characterized the evolution of comparative politics as a subfield over time and how has that evolution reflected the development of political science generally? Finally, to sum up this chapter, I offer a brief outline of how this book is organized, and why is it organized the way it is.

Turning to a definition of comparative politics, it is first important to note that comparative politics is a subfield of political science, which includes other subfields, such as International Relations, Political Thought/Theory, Public Administration, Judicial Politics, etc. In American political science, American Politics is also considered a subfield, but this view is not shared by European scholars, for instance, who simply include American politics as a case within comparative politics. In this book I share that European perspective, and consider the United States as one of the cases among many we investigate for comparative purposes.

There have been many different definitions of comparative politics offered by a variety of political science scholars. These can be divided into at least three general types: First, there are those who think of comparative politics large as the study of “other” or “foreign” countries – in most cases, this means countries other than the United States (Zahariadis, 1997, p. 2). A second approach emphasizes comparative politics as a subject of study. For instance, David Robertson (2003) defines comparative politics as simply the study of “comparative government” whose essence is to compare the ways in which different societies cope with various problems, the role of the political structures involved being of particular interest.

Most definitions of comparative politics, however, think of the field as both a *method* of study and a *subject* of study (Lim, 2006). Thus, for example, Howard Wiarda notes that the defining feature of comparative politics is that it “involves the systematic study of the world’s political systems. It seeks to explain differences between as well as similarities among countries. In contrast to journalistic reporting on a single country, comparative politics is particularly interested in exploring patterns, processes, and regularities among political systems” (Wiarda, 2000, p. 7). These topics can include:

[The] search for similarities and differences between and among political phenomena, including political institutions (such as legislatures, political parties, or political interest groups), political behavior (such as voting, demonstrating, or reading political pamphlets), or political ideas (such as liberalism, conservatism, or Marxism). (Mahler, 2000, p. 3)

Comparative politics is thus both a subject and method of study. As a method of study, comparative politics essentially is based on learning through comparison (which is, after all, the heart of all learning). There are different ways to compare, but for now it is sufficient to say that comparative politics as a method is a way of explaining difference. As Mahler (2000, p. 3) notes, “Everything that politics studies, comparative politics studies; the latter just undertakes the study with an explicit comparative methodology in mind.” As a subject of study, comparative politics focuses on understanding and explaining political phenomena that take place within a *state*, *society*, *country*, or *political system*. Defining comparative politics in this way as both a subject and method of study allows us to distinguish comparative politics, from, say, international relations which is concerned primarily (although not exclusively) with political phenomena between countries, as opposed to within countries. If we define comparative politics, at least in part, as a method of analysis, as opposed to simply the study of “foreign” or “other countries,” then it does not exclude the possibility of including the United States as a country to be studied, just as one might include Germany, or Russia, or Japan or Iraq.

So what is the comparative method? As we noted above, comparison is at the heart of all analysis. When one uses terms like bigger or smaller, greater or less, stronger or weaker to analyze anything, then by definition one is comparing. Indeed, for many scholars, being comparative is at the heart of political science. For instance, for Harold Lasswell (1968, p. 3),

comparative politics was identical to political science because “for anyone with a scientific approach to political phenomena the idea of an independent comparative method seems redundant,” because the scientific approach is “unavoidably comparative.” Similarly Gabriel Almond (1966, pp. 877–878) equated the comparative and scientific method when he argued that “it makes no sense to speak of a comparative politics in political science since if it is a science, it goes without saying that it is comparative in its approach.”

Nonetheless, as others have argued, in political science the comparative method is much more than just comparison. For the notable comparative politics scholar Arend Lijphart (1971), the comparative method is a unique approach especially designed to address a methodological problem in political science. It is a set of strategies that one uses to deal with situation of having too few cases, and too many potential explanatory factors. For instance, suppose one were to try to explain why political revolutions occur? Certainly one could examine a single case, such as the Russian Revolution of 1917. What are the potential causes that precipitated that revolutionary upheaval – perhaps it was due to the strain of World War I on Russia’s relatively underdeveloped economy? Perhaps it was due to the social and economic developments prior to World War I that had created working-class chaffing under the yolk of autocracy? Or perhaps it was because of the organizational capabilities of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party (particularly Vladimir Lenin)? Or maybe it had more to do with the undue influence of the monk Grigorii Rasputin over the Empress Alexandra, which paralyzed the Emperor Nicholas’ ability to act decisively? How would one be able to ascertain which of the potential theoretical causes (military defeat, social and economic transformation, organizational capacity of the opposition, and the political psychology of the incumbent leadership) had the most explanatory power when one has only a single case – the answer is, of course, one cannot. This is the essence of the problem of having too many explanatory variables and too few cases.

There are ways, of course, established in the natural and social sciences, to deal with this problem. In the life sciences, a common technique is the experimental method. This method, involves the use of an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group receives the treatment, or exposure to a stimulus. In many ways the stimulus can be seen as the “causal factor” we wish to test. On the other hand, the control group is exposed to the stimulus or treatment. The composition of the experimental and control groups should be identical, or as close to identical as possible.

Table 1.1 Classical experimental design.

Experimental group	Pre-test	Stimulus/treatment	Post-test
Control group	Pre-test	Placebo	Post-test

So if one were using human subjects, then one would want an identical number of men and women in each group, an identical number of representatives of different racial and ethnic group, or socioeconomic groups, etc. In addition the members of the control group receive a “placebo” (usually an inert substance which makes it less likely that the participants in the experiment realize that they are not receiving the active treatment). Thus the use of identical experimental and control groups (and a placebo) is meant to control for alternative factors that might explain difference on the post-test scores (such as gender differences or differences due to the subjects realizing they are not receiving the active treatment). By controlling for these alternative explanatory factors, one can presumably assess the true effects of the stimulus, treatment, or primary causal factor (see Table 1.1).

However, especially in the social sciences, the subjects of study are not easily amenable to experimental control, especially in the study of countries (as is the case in comparative politics). What many scholars advocate is a *quasi-experimental approach* (see Mannheim, Rich, and Wilnat, 2002) in which the logical structure of the classical experiment is pursued, but via non-experimental means. In other words, we still seek to control for the effects of alternative factors, thus isolating the effects of the variable in which one is most interested. One quasi-experimental technique is the statistical method (Lijphart, 1971). In the statistical method, we control for the effects of other variables via techniques such as linear regression (and its variants) which simultaneously estimate the effects of a number of independent variables (causes) while controlling for the effects of others. The statistical method, however, in order to work requires a generally large number of cases relative to the number of independent variables (causes) that are included in the analysis. This is a challenge for scholars studying comparative politics, when our universe of cases is limited by the number of countries, and the existence of an almost infinite number of explanatory variables. For example, if one were to try to identify all of the possible causes of political democracy, one can imagine an extremely large number of causes, probably more than the number of countries in the world. To

avoid this potential problem, one technique is to “truncate” the model, or purposely reduce the number of explanatory variables to be tested to only those “theoretically” relevant (that is, those that are mentioned in the literature). This of course is what is most often done in quantitative comparative political analysis, but the downside of this is that there are always potentially important variables that are left out of the analysis.

Another technique that is employed is the “comparative method” which Arend Lijphart (1971, p. 685) identified as a unique quasi experimental strategy used to deal with the situation of having too many potentially causal variables and too few cases. The comparative method is related to the statistical method in that it seeks to establish controls without having experimental control over the subjects of study. Thus, like the statistical method, the comparative method is “an imperfect substitute” for the experimental method (*ibid.*, p. 685). However, unlike the statistical method, the comparative method does not exert statistical control over variables. Rather control is attained through other means. The comparative method is specifically designed for a very small number of cases (*ibid.*, p. 684).

There are of course a number of different types of comparative designs, but the most common is the Similar Systems Design (sometimes known as Mill’s Method of Difference, named after John Stuart Mill), which consists of comparing very similar cases which only differ in the *dependent variable*. This allows one to “control” for a number of factors in order to assess which differences account for variation in the dependent variable. For example, in my own work (Ishiyama, 1993), I have examined the impact of the electoral system on party systems development during the political transition period just prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, comparing the then republican elections in Estonia and Latvia. These two countries were selected because they were very similar in a number of key respects. First, both had been annexed by the Soviet Union in the same year (1940) and both were characterized by ethnic bipolarity (where there were two main groups in each republic, the indigenous Latvian and Estonian populations, and the Russophones); both had similar levels of economic development, and both were regarded as “advanced” republics in the USSR. In the initial competitive elections introduced in 1989, the political systems were roughly parliamentary, and both systems were unitary. The one key dimension in which they varied was the electoral system they adopted to govern the first competitive elections. In Latvia, a single-member district plurality system was employed (as was the case in the rest of the “elections” in the USSR, at least technically). In Estonia, however, the authorities there exper-

imented with a variation of a proportional representation system called the Single Transferable Vote (STV) used in countries like Ireland and Malta. Thus, by controlling for other theoretically important variables that might explain party systems development (by selecting similar countries) one can ascertain the effect of the one variable in which they differ – in this case, the electoral system.

On the other hand, there is the Most Different Systems Design/Mill's Method of Similarity: it consists in comparing very different cases, all of which, however, have in common the same *dependent variable*. The goal is to find the common circumstance (or common denominator) which is present in all the cases that can be regarded as the cause (or independent variable) that explains the similarity in outcome.

The Evolution of Comparative Politics

The Ancients and comparative politics

Where did comparative politics come from? How has the field evolved over time? To some extent the study of comparative politics is as old as the study of politics itself. The earliest systematic comparisons of political systems were carried out by the Ancient Greeks. For instance, Plutarch tells a story, in his *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, of the scholar Lycurgus of Sparta who traveled widely around Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean recording the strength and weaknesses of the political regimes among the various city-states he encountered. However, the two most noteworthy scholars in Ancient Greece, at least in terms of their impact on comparative politics, were Plato and Aristotle. *The Republic* by Plato and *Politics* by Aristotle are widely viewed as the first great works of political science, covering such key issues as the nature of power, characteristics of leadership, different forms of government, and the relationship between state and society and economics and politics.

Although both Aristotle and Plato had much in common (particularly in terms of their desire to understand the design of the *ideal* political system), the approaches to understanding and knowledge (or epistemologies) were quite different. On the one hand, Plato was much more concerned with what *should be* and with normative issues such as justice and right than Aristotle (although Aristotle was motivated by these concerns as well). However, where the two really differed was in their understanding of

how humans come to know things. For Plato, to understand involved insight. Indeed, Plato thought of understanding as much more than just observation or reality. Thus, for instance, his “Parable of the Cave” is a metaphor for ignorance and knowledge.

The parable goes something like this: Imagine a cave in which prisoners are chained to a wall so all they see are the shadows thrown on a wall in front of them by the light shining behind them from the mouth of the cave. All they have known and see are these shadows which they mistakenly perceive as reality. Yet if one were freed, and saw the daylight behind, that person would see things as they really are, and realize how limited one’s vision was in the cave (Plato, 1945, p. 516). Merely observing perceived reality is thus not real. Discovering what *should* be is what is real for Plato. From Plato is derived the *normative* tradition in political science.

On the other hand, Aristotle (1958) really represents a more “empirical” tradition in the study of politics and had a much more direct impact on the development of comparative politics. Aristotle collected approximately 150 of the political constitutions of his time, mainly from the Greek city-states but from other places in the Eastern Mediterranean as well. In addition, he used these “data” to try to answer the question of what best promoted political stability, and examined the social, cultural, and economic factors that contributed to the emergence of political stability. Most noteworthy was his development of a six-part classificatory scheme where he identified “ideal” types or models of political systems, based upon the number of people ruling, and whether the rulers ruled for all or for themselves (which he considered degenerative or corrupt). The scheme is illustrated in Table 1.2.

In this scheme, there could be the legitimate rule by one (monarchy), the few (aristocracy), and the many (polity). Each of these could degenerate into different forms, especially if the rulers chose to rule to enrich themselves as opposed to the promotion of the interests of all. Thus, monarchy could degenerate into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, and polity into

Table 1.2 The Greek system for classifying political systems.

<i>Rule by</i>	<i>Legitimate form</i>	<i>Corrupt or degenerative form</i>
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy

democracy (which Aristotle equated with mob rule). Beyond this, Aristotle also analyzed whether these political systems had forms of local governance apart from a central elite, and what the socioeconomic base of power was as well. He found that the most unstable political systems were pure oligarchies and pure democracies, but the system that had combined aspects of oligarchy and democracy with a strong “middle class” were most politically stable.

Aristotle was perhaps the first true systematic “comparativist.” Aristotle derived his generalizations from the observations he made, and formulated theories (or explanations) as to what caused political stability or instability. Although primarily motivated (as was Plato) by the desire to build a better state and promote the “good life,” the methodology employed by Aristotle was more akin to the empiricism that is evident in modern political science. Indeed, within Aristotle’s analysis one can find all of the basic ingredients of modern political science – theory, hypotheses, analysis, and empiricism.

An early Roman political theorist who also contributed to the development of comparative politics as a field was Cicero. Cicero’s primary contribution was his emphasis on natural law, or the notion that there were laws that structured the universe, including societies, that could be discovered, and act as the basis for ordering political life. As with the Greeks, Cicero was also interested in the “normative” issue of what is the best form of government. Using essentially Aristotle’s framework, Cicero argued for a mixed system that employed both aristocratic and features of the “polity” system that Aristotle had identified, and contended that this was the best possible arrangement for the Roman Republic.

Comparative political scholarship in the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment

The coming of Christianity and the Middle Ages dampened the development of comparative politics as a field. This is because the most noteworthy Christian political theoreticians of the age, particularly Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, but others as well, saw little value in investigating the merits or shortcomings of “other” political systems. Rather, they argued, the goal of politics was to establish a Christian kingdom, and what that was could be accomplished best by study of history and the primary spiritual texts of the day. Augustine in particular argued that the Christian kingdom was the end product of history and human development. The work of

Augustine greatly influenced the Catholic Church (but also later Protestant thinkers like John Calvin). However, given that the answer to the best form of government was already known, there was little need for the use of systematic comparative methods favored by Aristotle and Cicero in the past to discover the ideal political system.

What really stimulated the revival of comparative politics were real world changes, particularly the discovery of the new world and the era of exploration from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. It was during this time that Western Europe came into contact with a variety of different political systems, such as the “Middle Kingdom” of China, to the east, and indigenous empires of the Western Hemisphere. At about the same time, there emerged the modern nation-states in the aftermath of the Hundred Years War (the wars between Catholics and Protestants) during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was during this time that Portugal, Spain, France, England, Holland, Prussia, and Sweden, and others, emerged as separate political entities with distinct political cultures (often linked to either Catholicism or Protestantism), distinct economic systems, and distinct political forms. Further, the rediscovery of the scientific method during the Renaissance and the scientific discoveries of Newton and Galileo fundamentally altered our understanding of the universe, ushering in a new era of interest in comparative political analysis.

One of the first “political scientists” who wrote in the sixteenth century during this time of transformation in Europe was the scholar Nicolò Machiavelli. Machiavelli was most noteworthy for his contributions to political theory, particularly his analysis of power, but he was also a keen student of comparative politics. Machiavelli was primarily motivated by his desire to promote Italian political unification (at the time Italy was divided into a number of principalities, papal states, and Hapsburg/Austrian possessions), and the restoration of the glory of Rome. In particular, Machiavelli was interested in identifying models for emulation from other countries. His favorite case was that of Spain and particularly the actions of Ferdinand of Aragon, who, together with Queen Isabella of Castile, had unified Spain by manipulating the nobility, the Catholic Church and other rivals (Machiavelli, 1946).

Another major contributor to the development of comparative politics in the eighteenth century was the French political thinker Montesquieu. Unlike other earlier thinkers of the age of Enlightenment, such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who examined the characteristics of one country (England) and assumed universal applicability, Montesquieu was explicitly

comparative in his investigations. In particular, he is most noteworthy for his argument that the best form of government is one that involves the separation of powers (between legislative, executive, and judicial branches). However, Montesquieu also argued that a link existed between climate, culture, and political outcomes. For instance, he argued that authoritarianism was more likely in hotter climates than in colder ones, because hotter temperatures promoted laziness and passivity, thus inviting authoritarianism. Religion, he argued, could be used to combat such tendencies, particularly by instilling cultural norms of hard work and diligence (Montesquieu, 1949).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau also contributed to the development of comparative politics, particularly via his analysis of economic development on the human condition, and his attempt to understand the state of nature via his study of “primitive” nomadic societies of the time. Rousseau was especially critical of the corrupting influences of private property. Rousseau believed that private property created divisions between people, led to individual greed, and ultimately the exploitation of one by another. Thus, the naturally harmonious nature of humankind was corrupted by private property. Rousseau called for a new social contract in which social harmony would be restored via government through the general will. However, in Rousseau’s ideal political system, only the small elite (who knew the general will) would rule for the benefit of all. Rousseau’s political solution (although not his analysis) is often thought of as a forerunner to modern totalitarianism, where a small elite (or one person) knows what is best for all, and where the Führer, or Duce, or Vozhd, need not consult with the population to figure out what is best (Rousseau, 1964).

Two other scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who contributed greatly to the development of comparative political theory were Karl Marx and Max Weber. Marx, along with his long-time collaborator Friedrich Engels, was a major critic of capitalism and fashioned a “scientific” approach to understanding the laws of history and the evolution and collapse of human societies. Most noteworthy is Marx’s focus on economic determinism, or the idea that economic relations of production are the determining feature in the development of the social and political superstructure of society. In short, all social, cultural, and political institutions are designed to serve the economic interests of the dominant class (which class dominated varied from historical period to historical period). For Marx, whoever controlled the means of production (or the things used to make other things – such as land, water, resources,

machines, etc.) dominated. During ancient times in the slave societies of Greece and Rome, the slave owners controlled the means of production (slaves). Under feudalism, the control over the land made the feudal lords the dominant class. Economic dominance translated into political dominance. Hence, for Marx, economics was the primary factor explaining political development.

It is important to note that Marx, like earlier political thinkers from the Ancients to Rousseau, was also motivated by a normative concern over what was best, despite his emphasis on scientific socialism. What really motivated Marx was a justification to explain the demise of capitalism and the end of private property, which, like Rousseau, he believed to be at the root of all human problems. Once unshackled from the chains of private property, humankind would be free to realize its greatest potential in a classless, stateless, and nationless world, where it is possible for one to do what one wills where one can: “to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as [Marx has in] mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic” (Marx, in Tucker, 1972, p. 124).

Max Weber, on the other hand, contended that economic development was not all that drove political development. Indeed, cultural attributes of countries play an important role in explaining political life. Thus, for instance, he argued the importance of cultural and religious factors in explaining economic development and industrialization. In particular, he noted the importance of the Protestant Reformation in Europe in driving the Industrial Revolution, and compared Protestantism with some of the world’s other great religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam to provide contrasts. However, Weber was also notable in arguing for the independence and autonomy of political factors in explaining societal development. Unlike Marx, who contended that all historical change could be reduced to an economic explanation, Weber argued that development was the product of multiple causes, including the political ones. For Weber, politics was autonomous from economics (unlike Marx) and for him the leaders’ political choices can have a vital and independent effect on historical change (Weber, 1964).

In sum, the evolution of comparative politics from the Ancients until the twentieth century was characterized by two common features. First, there has always been a tradition of using comparative political inquiry as a means to effect improvements in the existing political system. This certainly was the goal of the Ancients as it was for Machiavelli, Montesquieu,

and Rousseau, and arguably for Marx and Weber as well. Thus, scholars of comparative politics have traditionally been very interested in the practical application of what they studied. Second, there was a growing emphasis over time (in a way, a rediscovery of the Aristotelian tradition) on empiricism and a move away from the universalistic philosophical approaches of the Middle Ages. However, quite apart from these intellectual developments (which were largely concentrated in European scholarship), comparative politics scholarship in the United States developed along quite different lines.

*Comparative politics and the behavioral revolution
in political science*

While the field of comparative politics was fairly well developed in Europe, in the United States comparative politics remained relatively underdeveloped at the beginning of the twentieth century. Very few colleges and universities even offered programs in “politics” (usually it was subsumed under History programs), let alone offer courses in the way of the study of countries other than the United States (Ishiyama, Breuning, and Lopez, 2006). Wiarda (2000) argues that this was mainly because of the isolation of the United States from world events (the product of geography) and the inaccessibility of other countries. There were of course a few exceptions, such as future President Woodrow Wilson’s (1889) book *The State*, in which Wilson used cases from the European experience to investigate the evolution of the American state. However, what little comparative scholarship that existed, was limited to a few courses on European governments.

This emphasis on Europe continued well into the twentieth century. Further, most scholarship in early political science was largely descriptive of formal and legal institutions, such as descriptions of legislatures, executives, and judiciaries (see Ogg, 1915; Neumann, 1951; Finer, 1970; for a critique of this approach, see Macridis, 1955). In particular, the focus was on describing how formal political institutions operated – although other political actors were sometimes included (such as political parties), relatively little attention was paid to issues of public opinion or interest group activity, or anything beyond formal laws and governmental procedures (for some good examples of this formal institutional approach, see Ogg, 1915; Neumann, 1951; also for some of the goals advocated by the American Political Science Association regarding the study of comparative government, see Haines, 1915).

All of this was to change with the aftermath of World War II (1939–1945). As Robert Dahl (1961) noted, World War II had a profound effect on the evolution of American political science in general and the study of comparative politics in particular. The war and its aftermath created a demand for the knowledge and skills of political scientists, particularly to address issues such as how to build (or rebuild) democracy in the former totalitarian states that the allies had fought during the war, Germany and Japan. Further, with the onset of the Cold War, there emerged a need to understand the motivations of Soviet and Communist leaders, what caused the spread of communism, what led to the demise of incipient democratic experiments among the newly independent states that were spawned by decolonization, and how to promote political stability. The national security of the United States drove these concerns, and as a result, knowledge of other countries began to be valued. Along with this rising interest also there emerged more funding and money available to support comparative political research, particularly through institutions such as the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and private funding sources such as the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations (Dahl, 1961). This growing interest in politics outside the United States had also been reinforced by the influx of European scholars who had fled Fascist tyranny before and after the war (scholars like Hannah Arendt, most noteworthy for her seminal study on totalitarianism) (Arendt, 1971).

Although there was an increasing interest in the politics of other countries in American political science, by and large, the scholarship in the immediate post-war period remained largely descriptive and focused on legal institutional characteristics of countries. However, even before the war, there had been rumblings of change. In particular, the beginnings of a movement that was to fundamentally reshape American political science was emerging as early as the 1920s. This movement began as a very small group, largely concentrated in the fledgling American Political Science Association which had been founded in 1906. This group of scholars argued for a more systematic approach to the study of politics, modeling techniques of inquiry borrowed from the natural sciences. In the first half of the twentieth century, there had been several scholars, most notably Charles Merriam, Arthur Bentley, and others, who had pioneered the use of quantitative studies of politics. In particular, from 1923–1940, Merriam and his colleagues at the Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago launched a radical new approach to the study of politics – the so-called “Chicago School” of political science. The faculty of the Chicago

School produced seminal studies of voting behavior, urban politics, African American politics, political psychology, comparative politics, the causes of war, political parties, public administration, and methodology (see Heaney and Hansen, 2006). These studies were among the first to use advanced empirical methods in political science, including survey experiments; content analysis; and correlation, regression, and factor analysis. At the same time, the Chicago School's notion of "science" embraced qualitative methods and historical analysis, which often were presented side-by-side with quantitative analysis. Above all else was Merriam's view (Merriam was the chair of the political science department at the University of Chicago) that a political science should be useful, and that the findings based upon close empirical observation should be used to better government and society. Perhaps more importantly, though, were the student products of the work of that department, those students who later became the professors of the post-war era, for they were to help lead in the 1950s and 1960s what later became known as the behavioral revolution in political science. These included, among others, future luminaries in the field such as V.O. Key Jr., Harold D. Lasswell, David B. Truman, Gabriel A. Almond, and Herbert A. Simon. These graduates of the Chicago School were the vanguard of the behavioral revolution that fundamentally reshaped political science, a revolution that created the science of politics that exists today.

This desire to bring a more systematic approach to the study of comparative politics began to gain traction in the 1950s. In particular, many scholars were quite critical of the formal and legal descriptive focus of most comparative scholarship which dominated the field. In 1955, a seminal book was published by Roy Macridis of Brandeis University entitled *The Study of Comparative Government*, in which he attacked what he called the "traditional approach" in comparative politics (Macridis, 1955). In short, Macridis argued that there were five things wrong with this traditional approach. First, it was *parochial on Europe*. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with studying Europe, in fact many classic comparative texts, such as the work of Frederick Austen Ogg (1915) at the beginning of the twentieth century, were fine pieces of scholarship. However, with an almost exclusive focus on European cases, there is a tendency to use Western blinkers to study non-Western phenomena. For instance, in many of the societies of pre-colonial West Africa, there was a relatively democratic tradition of electing "kings" and these kings would serve on a rotating basis, circulating among the more notable families in the community. However, when the British arrived, they employed the same method of indirect rule

they had used elsewhere (such as in India). This would involve authorizing the “king” to rule in the name of the British Crown. The “king” was then provided with the symbols of office (such as a hat) and a stipend from the colonial government. Since the British understood king to mean a hereditary title (as it was in Europe), they appointed not only the current office holder (which had been a rotating system before) for life but also all of his heirs to rule in perpetuity – thus this practice, informed only by the European experience (that is, parochialism), served to undermine indigenous African democratic institutions (Crowder, 1968). Parochialism thus undermines true understanding of “foreign” political processes, and for Macridis this was a major problem with the traditional approach in comparative politics.

Second, the traditional approach for Macridis was descriptive rather than analytical and explanatory. By this he meant that the focus of comparative politics up to that point was largely on describing how political institutions worked as opposed to explaining why they emerged in the first place, or what effect they might have on political behavior. A crucial element, “the why” question, was essentially missing from the traditional approach.

Further, Macridis argued that the traditional approach was “essentially monographic.” Many works up to that point had examined “political systems” but almost exclusively on institutional actors (such as the legislature, the judiciary, etc.) rather than taking into account actors outside of institutions – such as interest groups, individuals, etc. Thus, the traditional approach for Macridis was overly formalistic and legalistic.

A fourth criticism offered by Macridis was that the traditional approach was not comparative at all, but was really dominated by the study of individual countries. Even scholarly texts that were presented as “comparative” (meaning these included studies of more than one country) did not really compare. Rather individual chapters of such works were devoted to individual cases, and relatively little effort was made to compare and contrast across countries (a good example is Ogg, 1915; see also Finer, 1970). Finally, he claimed the traditional approach was “essentially static”; in other words, formal legalistic, or institutional approaches did not attempt to explain political change. Rather, the political “organism” was merely described as it existed, with no accounting of why it emerged in the way it did, and how it would change over time.

This disquiet over the traditional approach, coupled with trends in American political science more generally, led to the “behavioral revolu-

tion” in political science (Dahl, 1961). The essence of the new behavioralist approach was characterized by the desire to employ scientific methods from the natural sciences, particularly the emphasis on theory and empiricism. Second, advocates of behavioralism emphasized the importance of interdisciplinarity. To explain political phenomena, it was now necessary to focus on non-institutional explanations for politics (that is, economics, sociology, psychology) as well as scientific method and mathematics. Perhaps most controversially was the emphasis on the value-free nature of science. From this perspective, political scientists should not be concerned with values – rather the focus should be on facts not what should be (for a critique of behavioralism on this point, see Bay, 1965). Finally, there was the idea that a common set of terms and concepts should be developed in order to more systematically examine political behavior. From this perspective, what was missing from the study of politics, as opposed to the natural sciences, was a common set of understandings and definitions regarding key concepts used in the analysis of politics, such as “power,” “political system,” “democracy,” etc.

In comparative politics, one of the first attempts to establish a framework and a common vocabulary to facilitate a more systematic, behavioral, approach to the field was offered by David Easton (1957). Easton argued for the adoption of a “Systems Approach” to the study of politics, in which he argued that the political system could be understood in much the same way as a biological system. Like biological systems, political systems do not exist in isolation, and therefore should not be studied as such (which traditional formal-legal analysis was apt to do). Political systems are surrounded by environments – these environments are made of other systems: physical, social, economic (Figure 1.1). Also one can distinguish between

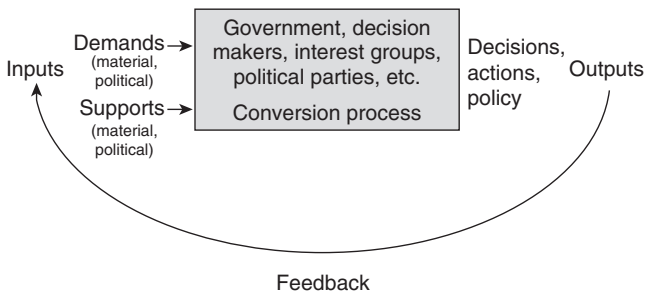


Figure 1.1 The political system.

those environments that are intra-societal versus extra-societal (or for a country, international) environments.

From these environments emerged “inputs,” including demands and supports. Demands can be political – for instance, a demand to participate politically via the right to vote, the demand to recognize political freedoms, such as speech and assembly, etc. However, demands can also be for material goods and services as well (such as building a new highway, or tax breaks for industry to spur economic growth). Supports can also be material or political. Material supports include tax receipts which are revenues extracted from the environment, but also political support for actions to be taken by the political system.

The political system itself for Easton is a social system through which values are authoritatively allocated. This meant that the system includes much more than just formal governmental structures but also other actors that impact the process by which decisions are made that are binding on a society. This can include formal governmental structures, but also interest groups, political parties, individual leaders, etc. What is included in the political system would depend on what kind of regime it is – democracy, autocracy, one-party state, military junta, etc. In addition, the political system includes some kind of conversion process by which demands and supports are processed to produce policy outputs. In many ways, the political system is like an organism that processes demands (like the need to eat, procreate, etc.) takes in nutrients, and expels actions. However, these actions have a feedback effect in that they affect both the intra-societal and extra-societal environments in which the political system exists. Thus instituting tax breaks may have the effect of stimulating the economy leading to inflation and hence a demand to control inflation. Or deciding to go to war may affect the international order (as it did after World War II) which in turn creates new enemies and new challenges. For Easton, the key question is how political systems persist, and his generic conclusion is that survival requires successful conversion of demands on the system into outputs that are more or less acceptable to the environment from which the original demands originated.

Over the years there have been many critics of Easton’s systems approach (for a summary, see Susser, 1992). In particular, many scholars have wondered what actually goes on inside the “black box” of the political system – that is, what is involved in the conversion process by which demands and supports are converted into policy. Second, many wonder about its utility, whether the systems approach did anything at all in helping to explain

political phenomena. For instance, does it help explain the collapse of democracies? Does it explain why different kinds of political systems emerge? If theory is meant primarily as a means to explain and predict political developments, systems theory appears ill-equipped to do that.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman (Almond and Coleman, 1960; and Almond, 1956) introduced a modification of the mechanistic theories of David Easton, a modification which they referred to as “structural functionalism.” Again, like Easton, Almond sought to establish a common set of terms and concepts in order to more systematically compare political systems across very different countries. Almond’s innovation was to introduce an approach to political systems that not only examined its structural components (as Easton had done) but, more importantly the *functions* performed by the political system as a whole. Structural functionalism holds that a political system is made up of structures such as interest groups, political parties, the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, and the bureaucracy. However as Almond points out, two countries may have on the surface appear to have the same political institutions, but what differentiates these systems are the ways in which these institutions function. These functions (which all systems need to perform) can be performed by different institutions. For instance, interest groups serve to articulate political issues in many systems. However, in other systems, interests are articulated through family connections and/or patronage networks. In some systems (such as Western democratic ones), parties then aggregate and express interests in a coherent and meaningful way. On the other hand, in some military authoritarian regimes, it may be that the military aggregates interests. In some systems, government in turn enacts public policies to address these interest demands, or perhaps the Communist Party is charged with implementing policies (as was the case in the former Soviet Union); and bureaucracies finally regulate and adjudicate them differences in policy implementation. Although the functions may be the same, different structures perform these functions, and this is what differentiates types of political systems.

In addition to the “process functions” (interest articulation, interest aggregation, policy making, regulation and adjudication), there are also system-maintaining functions, that is, functions that maintain the survival of the system over the long run, by cultivating popular support for the political system and recruiting new leaders to succeed the current one. These include political socialization, political recruitment, and communication. For Almond, political socialization means the process by which a

system passes down values, beliefs, and aspects of the political culture that helps sustain the system. The agents of socialization include families, schools, political parties, religion, as well as other agents that inculcate in the next generation the system's dominant political values. Political recruitment refers to the process by which new leaders are cultivated and vetted to succeed the current political generation. Finally, communication refers to the way in which the political system disseminates information to ensure its proper functioning. For instance, the media plays an important role in distributing information to citizens or those who are among the politically relevant, upon which they make political decisions. However, the media also helps to shape values and preferences.

Although a considerable advance over Easton's systems approach, structural functionalism is also plagued by some important shortcomings. First, it is at its heart, quite conservative – the centerpiece of the approach is the assumption that the primary goal of any political system is to ensure its own survival. Thus systems in this approach are not particularly adaptive or innovative (which may not really capture how political systems actually operate, some being more innovative and adaptive than others). Second, it seems to be based largely on Western democratic models and Western concepts, particularly with regard to the process functions, and may not describe these processes in non-Western and/or non-democratic systems very well. Finally, the approach itself is rather static in that it does not account for how existing systems and the structures that perform these functions came to be in the first place.

The behavioral revolution reached its zenith in the 1970s. However, at about the same time many scholars were questioning the direction in which the behavioral revolution had taken political science (Bay, 1965). In general, there have been two key criticisms of the behavioral approach. The first relates to the insistence that science is value-free. Yet how is it possible to be objective when studying something as value-laden as politics? Although there is no denying that facts do exist, analysis of what those facts actually mean often intersects with the particular preferences or values that we hold. We are human and to be human means that we have values and opinions which color what we observe as truth and evidence. To deny this is to deny political science a purpose.

Second, critics of behavioralism, like Christian Bay, have also argued that because of behavioralism's emphasis on quantification, the focus in political science has shifted in the direction of methodological trivia. Indeed,

counter to the original intentions of Charles Merriam and the leading scholars in the Chicago School, behavioralism has caused political science to focus increasingly more on empirical method as opposed to application. Indeed, behavioralism, from this perspective, has caused scholars to focus on issues of methodological trivia (such as what is the best way to correct for heteroskedasticity in regression models) as opposed to focusing on big questions such as “is democracy a good thing?”

As a result of these criticisms, since the 1970s, several “post-behavioral” approaches have emerged, particularly those related to postmodern and constructivist approaches to politics. Such approaches contend that social and political realities are largely social constructions, created by humans to place order on a chaotic reality. These constructed realities are not amenable to an approach that assumes there is a reality waiting to be discovered through an “objective” science of politics. More related to comparative politics, however, is the neo-institutional movement (associated with scholars such as James March and Johan Olsen, 1984; Rein Taagepera and Matthew Shugart, 1989; and Bernard Grofman and Arend Lijphart, 1984, and others). This approach essentially argues that what has been missing from the behavioral revolution is applicability. In essence, the behavioral revolution, in its rush to identify factors affecting politics outside of political institutions and formal legal structures, had in fact abandoned the study of formal/legal political structures. Issues like the structure of the executive, or the type of electoral system adopted by a particular political system, had been largely ignored by the behavioralists, in their rush to find non-institutional explanations for political phenomena. The neo-institutionalists argue, on the other hand, that via the study of the effects of political institutions, political science can return to its historical roots, where the purpose of study was to discover something useful and applicable. Indeed, although human decision-makers have little control over the factors that may affect the development of democracy (such as political culture, or the level of economic wealth), human decision-makers do have control over rule-making and constitutions – political institutions are more malleable than cultural, economic, or social variables. This new institutionalism has given rise to a new generation of scholars who advocate a focus on the design of political institutions to affect outcomes such as political democracy, thus making political science generally (and comparative politics more particularly) relevant and applicable. Thus by the end of the twentieth century, comparative politics has, in a sense, come full circle. Like the Ancients, the

new emphasis is on how to make comparative politics applicable, and applicability is best accomplished through the careful design of constitutions and political rules.

The Plan of this Book

One of the principal themes of this book is to demonstrate the applicability of comparative politics to contemporary political problems. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the central problem addressed is, how does one design a system that best promotes political democracy? Of course, there is no universally applicable design, and there is no guarantee that such designs will work. The answer clearly depends on some unique historical, economic, social, cultural, and international circumstances that each country faces. Indeed, which institutional arrangements are chosen depends on whether they “fit” these circumstances.

The remainder of this book is designed with this problem in mind. The book is organized into two major sections. In the first section, I outline the contextual factors that detract from or promote the development of democracy, the “soil,” if you will, in which the democratic “seed” might be planted. The second section deals with the elements of the “design” of the system – the menu of institutional choices. These include the design of the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, election laws, and the territorial arrangement of the political systems (particularly issues regarding federalism).

Thus, in Chapter 2, we examine the development of democracy in historical perspective, in particular focusing on the experiences of established, old democracies and illustrating their alternative paths to political democracy. These cases include Great Britain, France, the United States, Germany, Russia, and Japan. The use of historical cases to identify patterns of democratic development accomplishes two things. First, it underlines the “uniqueness” of the Western democratic experience, and how to some extent, democracy developed by “accident” under conditions quite different from those faced by countries in political transition now. Second, using these cases identifies the common historical, social, and economic conditions that helped to promote (or detract from) the development of democracy.

In Chapters 3 through Chapter 6, we illustrate the contextual conditions which promote or present problems for democratic development: Economics and Political Development (Chapter 3); Political Culture and

Ethnopolitics (Chapter 4); Social Structure and Politics (Chapter 5); and the Democratization and the Global Environment (Chapter 6). In each of these chapters we examine the prevailing theoretical approaches to how these dimensions affect political development and the emergence of political democracy.

In the second section (Chapter 7 through Chapter 10) we illustrate the institutional “choices” available – which electoral systems to choose (Chapter 7), how to arrange the executive, and especially the pros and cons of presidential versus parliamentary versus “mixed” systems, as well as the internal structuring of the legislative process (Chapter 8). Chapter 9 then deals with the design of the judicial system and the issues related to territorial arrangement of the political system (including issues such as federalism and varieties of local empowerment). Chapter 10 will sum up the principles identified in the book and apply these principles to a set of illustrative cases.

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