

Introduction to Comparative Government

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Preface

An introduction to comparative government and politics in general, this book illuminates for students the political systems of six major countries which exemplify the politics, policies, and problems of democratic, Communist, and developing political systems.

Why have Britain, France, West Germany, the Soviet Union, China, and India been chosen? The reason is partly that these countries are of historical or contemporary importance and have a wealth of political experience. The politics of these countries is interesting in itself and profitable for those wanting to understand the world today. In addition, their politics often provides the main empirical data for the formulation of generalizations in comparative politics.

These generalizations result from different kinds of comparison of the six countries, among them the following:

The countries illustrate the different paths to political development and modernity, and the problems encountered as a result of development.

The three most important Western European countries can be compared with the three non-Western countries. Questions can be raised in general about differences in nature and style of politics between Western and non-Western nations.

The two foremost Communist countries—the Soviet Union and China—can be compared both with the four non-Communist countries and also with each other as differences and rivalries have emerged between them.

India, the newest independent state of the six, can be compared with the older states. As one of the most important of the developing countries it can

illustrate the problems facing the newer nations in creating stable and effective political systems.

The four liberal democratic countries can be compared with the two nondemocratic countries. Thus questions can be posed as to why some countries are more likely to be democratic than others and what factors are likely to foster democratic systems.

The six states illustrate the differences between party systems. In two countries there is a one-party regime, whereas the other four exemplify either a two-party or a multiparty system.

The first chapter, the Introduction, provides a number of alternative classifications of political systems and a general context which allows the six systems to be compared in different ways. The author of each part supplies basic information about the historical development and social relationships of each country. The political processes and major political institutions are analyzed without the use of jargon or unhelpful methodologies. Each author has also selected a number of public policy issues with which the particular country is concerned.

This book has been a long time in gestation. Both individually and collectively the six authors owe intellectual debts to many colleagues who have given valuable advice and also to our students at the different institutions. We want to thank Louise Waller, executive editor, Marianne Russell, political science editor, and Jo-Ann Goldfarb, project editor, at Harper & Row for helping to bring this project to fruition.

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chapter I

Introduction

Michael Curtis

WHY STUDY COMPARATIVE POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT?

Why should we study the political systems, behavior, and values of other countries? Why should we try to make comparisons between countries? A simple answer is that an essential part of being educated today is to know something about the politics of foreign countries. For many there is also a fascination and intellectual excitement in the study of foreign systems and in the discovery of political ways of life different from our own.

Study of foreign political systems, or comparative politics, is useful for a number of reasons. First, we can better understand our own system if we can appreciate its similarities to and differences from other systems. We can see, for example, why the United States Supreme Court can declare legislation unconstitutional while the highest court in Britain cannot. We can observe that the central authorities in the Soviet Union control the republics making up that country to a greater degree than the federal government controls the states in America.

Second, we can be more aware of the interrelationship between considerations of domestic politics and attitudes to the rest of the world. The U.S. attitude toward communism will affect administration opinion on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and that opinion may be qualified by the interests of farmers in the Midwest. Knowledge of foreign systems allow us to formulate more correctly our ideas about and our policies toward them.

Study of different systems allows us to compare the ways in which governments face similar problems and the manner in which they respond to the needs and demands of their citizens. The United States can learn both positive and negative lessons from the experience of the National Health service in Britain or from the attempts at

planning in France or from the process of industrial codetermination in West Germany.

Comparison needs both description (how political systems or parts of them work) and explanation (why they do so). Theories of many different kinds have been proposed to provide such description and explanation. Broadly speaking they are at these differing levels:

- 1. The particular, concerning a specific aspect or feature of a system
- 2. The *middle range*, concerning possible interrelationships between different features of a system
- 3. The general, concerning systems as a whole

After describing and explaining how particular institutions and processes operate, we can proceed from the specific information obtained to pose questions of a middle-range or general nature or to frame *generalizations* about different kinds of political systems. We can ask questions as to the extent and ways in which systems are democratic, their level of political development, their degree of stability or effectiveness in making decisions, or the manner in which political ideologies influence their policy.

To answer questions of this kind we need to decide on some criteria for analysis of the similarities and differences between countries. Such criteria, in turn, may often influence policy. The belief, for example, that El Salvador was an *authoritarian* but not a *totalitarian* state may have affected American policy toward that country in the 1980s.

What criteria should be used to provide generalizations of this kind? Since Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) began the study of comparative politics, countless students have analyzed the nature and quality of political regimes. They have looked at the way in which the functions of government are performed and the relationship between rulers and ruled. They have also posed questions about the kind of rules that exist and actions that are taken. They ask if the ruling groups are acting in their own interest or in the interest of the whole community. They observe how much force and how much persuasion are being exercised.

A word of caution is necessary at this stage. The modern method of political science known as behavioralism has sought, among other things, to formulate general statements applicable to large numbers of particular cases. It argues that a necessary scientific approach means a search for generalizations, regularities of behavior, and,—even more ambitiously,—laws of the social and political processes. Yet, though the search for generalizations is necessary, it can never end in complete success because of the multiplicity and diversity of human activities and the play of chance factors that affect the political process.²

In recent years two major additions have been made in the study of comparative politics. The area of interest was once largely limited to those few countries in Western Europe and the English-speaking world with highly developed institutions and a familiar history. These countries were the principal powers of the world; now there are over 155 nation states (see Figure 1.1). Students are therefore also interested in the politics of the newer nation states, in which an increasing part of the world's population lives, and try to include these states within the scope of the generalizations about comparative politics. Moreover, students are not content merely with descriptions of political insti-

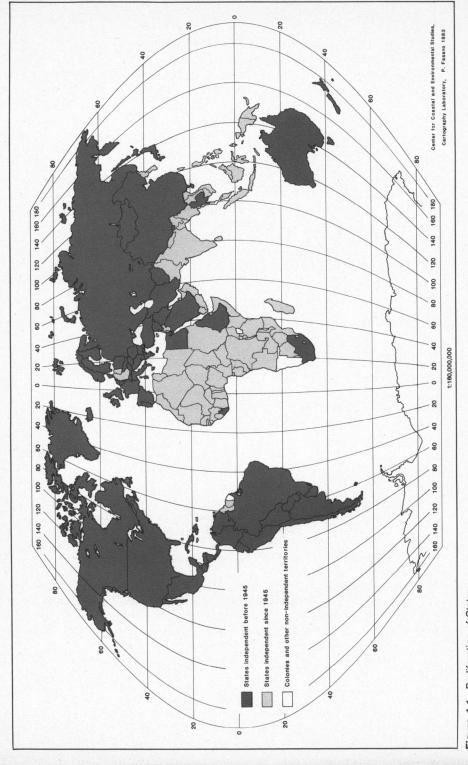


Figure 1.1 Proliferation of States

tutions and constitutional arrangement; more attention is now paid to nongovernmental and social organizations and to the political behavior of individuals and groups.

This book takes these considerations into account. Each chapter deals with four essential aspects of the particular country in the following order:

- 1. Factors that have helped shape political behavior. Historical background, geography, economic and social conditions, ethnic and caste groups, religious beliefs and ideologies.
- 2. The political process. The ways in which rulers are chosen, the role of political parties and interest groups, the manner in which individual citizens participate in politics.
- 3. The major political institutions. The way they exercise power, the interrelationship between them, and the restraints on them.
- 4. Public policy. Certain basic functions attended to by political institutions in all systems, such as internal order and external security, resolving the competitive demands of individuals and groups, raising expenditure to pay for services provided by government, regulating the behavior of citizens in differing ways.

WHAT IS BEING COMPARED?

This book examines the politics of six countries: Britain, France, West Germany, the Soviet Union, China, and India. Why have they been chosen? The reason is partly that these countries are of historical or contemporary importance and have a wealth of political experience. The study of their political systems is interesting in itself and profitable for those wanting to understand the world today. In addition, their politics often provide the main empirical data for the formulation of generalizations in comparative government.

These generalizations result from different kinds of comparison of the six countries. Some of the bases of comparison are the following:

- 1. These countries illustrate the different paths to political development and modernity, with the problems encountered as a result of development.
- 2. The three most important Western European countries can be compared with the three non-Western countries. Questions can be raised about general differences in nature and style of politics between Western and non-Western nations
- 3. The two foremost Communist countries—the Soviet Union and China—can be compared both with the four non-Communist countries and also with each other as differences and rivalries have emerged between them.
- 4. India, the newest independent state of the six, can be compared with the older states. As one of the most important of the developing countries it can illustrate the problems facing the newer nations in creating stable and effective political systems.
- 5. The four liberal democratic countries can be compared with the two nondemocratic countries. Thus questions can be posed as to why some countries are more likely to be democratic than others and what factors are likely to foster democratic systems.
- 6. The six states illustrate the differences between party systems. In two of these

countries there is a one-party regime, while the other four exemplify either a two-party or a multiparty system (see Figure 1.2).

CLASSIFICATION OF SYSTEMS

Every political system is at once unique and different from all others and is in flux. Britain presents an interesting mixture of traditional and modern political forms. France, though an old state, has had its political continuity disrupted by frequent changes of system and internal divisions. The Soviet Union was the first Communist system to be established; its ruling party controlled not only its own system but also the policies of Communist parties in other countries for many years. In China, the largest and most populous Communist state, the vast majority of the people are peasants, not proletarians as Marxist theory suggests. West Germany is a prosperous democracy which arose rapidly from the devastation caused by the Nazi regime. India is the largest state to emerge from colonial rule after World War II which has remained essentially democratic in character.

Since political systems do not fit neatly in rigid categories, all classification is at best partial and temporary. Nevertheless, classification serves to illuminate some politically meaningful similarities and dissimilarities. Of the many ways to classify political systems, a few are discussed here.

The Number and Kinds of Rulers

Aristotle is usually regarded as the father of comparative political analysis. His classification was based on the number of people who participated in governing (one, few, or many); on the ethical quality of their rule, depending on whether it was in the general interest or in their self-interest (A or B); and on their socioeconomic status (C). Those regimes that served the interests of the ruling group only were perversions of the true constitutional forms (see Table 1.1).

Aristotle clearly preferred the aristocratic form (2A) because the mean was most desirable. Other classical theorists in ancient Rome thought that simple forms of government would degenerate and that stability depended on the existence of a "mixed state" with all the social classes either participating or being represented to some degree.

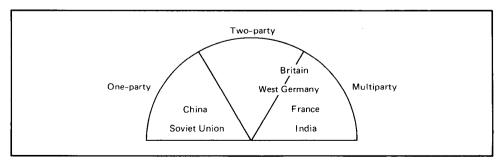


Figure 1.2 Party Systems

| | Α | В | C Social Group | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--|
| Number of Rulers | Rule in The General Interest | Self-Interest Rule | | |
| 1. One | Monarchy | Tyranny | King | |
| 2. Few | Aristocracy | Oligarchy | The wealthy | |
| 3. Many | Polity or democracy | Ochlocracy | The poor | |

Table 1.1 THE ARISTOTELIAN DIVISION

The Aristotelian theory has been useful in indicating the number and nature of the governing group. The United States would be in category 3A. But in all systems a relatively small number of people either rule or dominate the political process. This group is sometimes termed the political elite. The elite may remain closed to outsiders as in aristocratic systems or may be exclusive as in Communist or military-dominated systems. In such a case the system is likely to be monolithic in that only a single or a limited political point of view is allowed. In other systems the elite is open to the emergence of individuals from a diversity of backgrounds and with different views. The elite then consists not of members of one group but of a number of groups and individuals competing for political power. Systems of this kind which allow for choice among competing elite groups are known as pluralistic.

Political Culture

Anthropologists have used the concept of culture to provide a total picture of the life, actions, and beliefs of a community. For comparative politics the concept of political culture has been used to classify those community-held beliefs, feelings, and values that influence political behavior. In each community there are sets of attitudes toward the political system. They will depend on knowledge of the way in which the system operates, its personnel and its policies. They will also depend on the ability of people to participate in the political process and on the degree to which the system is accepted as legitimate (the right of rulers to exercise power).

In all countries the political values, norms, and behavior patterns, or political culture, are transmitted to present and future citizens. This political socialization is produced by a variety of agencies such as the family, school system, religious bodies, mass media, popular literature and art, fable, heroes, and popular mythology. In developed systems, such as the United States, the family has been thought of as the dominant factor in the process of socialization, though this view has recently been qualified.³ In other systems socialization can take place either unconsciously, such as by membership in a caste in India, or more deliberately, as in the communes in China or the kibbutzim in Israel. The impact of all these agencies of socialization varies according to changes in population, and according to social relations, technological innovation, and political events.⁴

Political Development

Attempts to classify systems according to stages of political development have been stimulated by the creation, since 1945, of a large number of states, all trying to establish

viable political systems and modernize their economies and societies. One influential early theory of political types was formulated by Max Weber, who classified societies as follows:⁵

Traditional. Based on conformity of the people, rule on the basis of tradition or divine law by a monarch or aristocracy whose power is made legitimate by status or heredity.

Charismatic. Political leadership based on personal magnetism and devotion, and often exercised by a military leader or religious prophet.

Bureaucratic. A constitutional regime in which the legal rules are established and officials adhere to those rules and exercise authority according to known procedures.

Modernization is relatively easy to define, but it is more difficult to define political development. Many recent studies compare two "ideal types" of societies— traditional and modern—to help explain economic, social, and political differences.⁶

Some of the comparisons made are the following:

- 1. In traditional societies the vast majority of the population is engaged in agriculture, which accounts for a large part of the gross national product (GNP) of the country. In modern societies, such as that of the United States, only a small percentage of the population works in agriculture, which accounts for a small part of the GNP; in the United States it is now under 3 percent. Instead, the population works in industry and, to an increasing degree, in providing services, which in some countries now account for the majority of the work force.
- 2. In traditional societies the chief social relationships were the family, the tribe, or the clan, from which the dominant values derived. In modern societies there is a more complex and diverse set of relationships. Individuals belong to a variety of different groups, such as trade unions, business associations, religious faiths, and political and social organizations. The chief values come from a wide variety of sources. Science and technology will be significant factors, though religious and traditional values may still remain to some extent.
- 3. In traditional countries the population is less literate, on average much poorer, shorter lived, and more rural than in modern countries.
- 4. Politics in traditional countries have been less differentiated than in modern systems, where political functions are carried out by different categories of people and where political rule is justified by rational principles rather than by concepts like divine right or heredity.

The distinction between traditional and modern does not imply any judgment of inferiority or superiority regarding individuals or societies. Many traditional societies have produced significant cultures, elaborate political structures, and efficient administrative systems.

Factors such as greater industrialization, application of technology and science, economic growth leading to increases in gross national product and per capita income