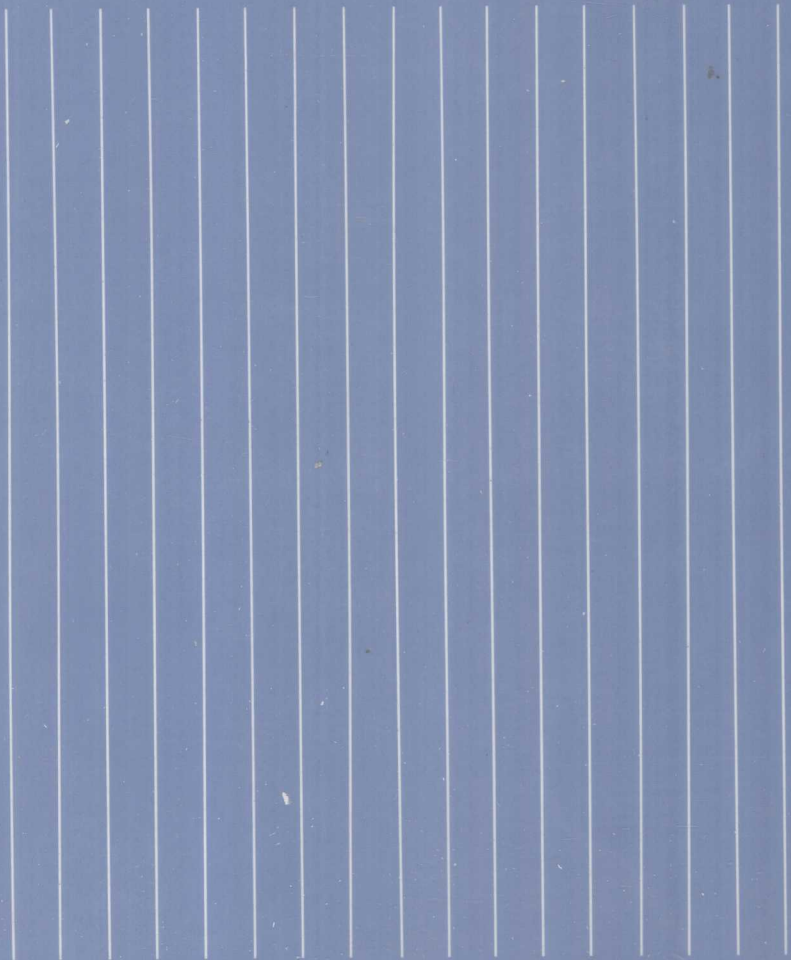
THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY

A Comparative Introduction to Political Systems and Society



HARMON ZEIGLER

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A Comparative Introduction to Political Systems and Society

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To Pat, who locked one door,
and Irving who did not lock another.

Preface

In the Epilogue I write, "We are living at a propitious moment." Indeed, we are. Without telegraphing too much of the plot, I urge you to consider some evidence of change in political lives and institutions. In March, 1989, Soviet voters—for the first time not facing a completely rigged choice—voted against several dozen Communist Party leaders; a month later, Mikhail Gorbachev sacked 100 members of the Central Committee—including Andrei Gromyko, a legendary symbol of the Cold War. The Central Committee endured more "involuntary" turnover in a couple of months than has the American Democratic Party in the House of Representatives in three decades! The Communist party, also known as the "vanguard of the proletariat," was obviously less esteemed than its leaders assumed. Leadership isolation is not a unique problem. Generally elites are far more apt to believe life is satisfactory than are masses.

What *is* remarkable is that once totalitarian parties, admittedly with fits and starts and with the outcome very much in doubt, are giving up *some* of their power. Westerners easily apply the term "democratic" to any process which seems superficially so. In the case of the USSR, the intent is to keep the Communist Party in its leadership role, but with *intra*-party competition enhanced. Far less democratic than a genuinely competitive electoral system, the USSR experiment was intended to channel dissatisfaction and hence avoid the tragedy that befell China.

In China, simultaneously with the Soviet election, students, mourning the death of a prominent reformer, demanded—in massive demonstrations—more "democracy" (most admitted that they had no idea what the word meant, merely that it was not what the party espoused). The brutal suppression of these demonstrations in the summer of 1989 by the presumably pragmatic factions of the party showed the futility of the search for stability without legitimacy. Even so, China may not be able to return completely to its totalitarian past. One cannot demonstrate—a political act—but one can still listen to Beethoven, which was not the case a few years ago. Yet there is not now, nor has there ever been, much enthusiasm for the accoutrements of democracy, even among non-Marxists.[1]

In Poland at the same time, the party leadership agreed to face up to the possibility of defeat by sanctioning relatively open elections. Although Poland's rulers had crushed a revolt in 1981, they ultimately gave in to the trade union Solidarity. But surely the party did not anticipate humiliating defeat. Solidarity candidates won all but nine of the parliamentary seats they contested; seats automatically allocated to the Communist went unfilled in 294 out of 299 cases, since the majority of voters scratched their names off the ballot (thus denying them the required 50 percent). In the summer of 1989, Solidarity entered the Polish parliament as the first elected opposition in a Communist country.

In the latter part of 1989, the world witnessed Czechoslovakians engaged in unprecedented street demonstrations, nationwide strikes, and refusal to compromise on their demands for the radical diminution of the role of the Communist Party. The prelude to all this was the fall, or at least the fissure of, the wall that had separated the Germans. The dust has not settled, but one of the ideas explored in the following chapters emerges: The integration of culture and political institutions is a powerful drive. Decades of superimposed ideology are ultimately a poor substitute.

While other less ideologically committed autocracies—Chile, for instance—also gave every indication of accepting a more open system, it is to the citadel of Marxism, the Soviet Union, where totalitarianism began, that the eyes of the academic world have turned. For there (where Lenin once proclaimed that "National wars against the imperial powers are not only possible and probable; they are inevitable, progressive, and revolutionary"), socialism's end was declared by Gorbachev, who defined the once rigid ideology as a belief in "dignity among men." Truly we are all socialists now.

Those of us, most I assume, who were not there when the totalitarian revolution began are fortunate to be here when it ends. To political scientists such rare events, the beginnings and endings of revolutions, are like Halley's comet. They do not come along, as do elections, almost every day. The upheavals in the USSR and its European allies have the additional advantage (to scholars, not politicians) of rekindling interest in federalism, a subject almost forgotten except among Americanists. The surge of nationalism in Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Georgia reminds us again of its potency.

Less apparent changes, ignored by the ubiquitous television, add yet more excitement: the United States slipped, virtually unnoticed, into economic decline, becoming a borrower rather than a lender, fueling its addiction to the "world's highest standard of living," with an ever increasing foreign debt. Its political process disabled by excessive fragmentation, the United States' model of the political and economic process seems as isolated as does, say, Cuba's. The United States' grand experiment—separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism (combined with more recent innovations such as presidential primary elections, political action committees, or "iron triangles")—is as outmoded as is Marxism.

None of these changes happened "overnight." But the opportunity presented by them seemed too good to pass up. Be warned that "change," "flux," and "transformation" are to the political scientist what "root canal" is to a dentist: gold. When I speak of change I do *not* mean utopia. The switch in the USSR from a command to a mixed economy will make that country less impoverished and less belligerent. The deterioration of the American political process will make *that* country less internationally competitive, economically. But human nature does not change and the fundamental

structure of the political process is stable. Elites rule masses; the rationale, not the process, changes. The original totalitarian revolutions—and those that followed—did not substitute community for individuality, equality for oppression. The current changes will be equally *incremental* but equally significant.

Walking the corridors at conventions, schmoozing with editors and colleagues had convinced me that (1) the time was right for an introductory book that was "ironic;" and (2) that I could write it, having coauthored *The Irony of Democracy* through eight or so editions. Irving Rockwood, then editor at Longman, and later private consultant (who probably figured I owed him one for the couple of dogs with which I saddled him), originally enticed me. Irving deserves the annual Nerves of Steel Award for not expiring (and for not bouncing me) at an early meeting in New York which I—for reasons too complex to recount here—was neither intellectually, physically, nor emotionally in any shape to attend. By lunch (at the *Algonquin* . . . excellent soft-shelled crabs), Jerry Manheim (a friend and colleague who was advising Longman on the project) had managed to—discreetly—tell me just how bad my first efforts were (as if I needed to know!) and to slip me an outline to guide me in a new start. I often wonder if Irving's decision to, as they say, "pursue other opportunities," was somehow related to this experience.

Shortly thereafter, David Estrin became editor and—in 1985 at *Antoine's* in New Orleans—reaffirmed his and Longman's commitment. A year or so later, lunching at *Place Pigalle* in Seattle (where David tasted Washington's superb "microbeers" and declared them to be superior to those of England), he found one of the strengths of the manuscript to be its propensity for providing "new data for old questions." This, it seemed to me, was what I had intended. So I finished it. Upon receiving the final draft, my editor and friend (still!) wrote, "It has been a long road . . ." And how! It seemed like a good idea at the time.

These days, publishers are wont to talk about "market segmentation" and "product differentiation." "Market segmentation" means that there is no "market leader." The market for introductory texts is said to be segmented. Maybe, but so is political science, judging from the extant introductory texts. "Product differentiation" means, as one might surmise, making your "product" different (but not *too* different, since publishers always have one eye cocked toward the curriculum).

I am pleased to report that, at no time during the writing of this book, did anybody at Longman use these loathsome phrases. Presumably Longman does not believe that only books which match up with the exact needs of a market survey should be published; either that, or the company has poor judgment. Let me tell why I think the former explanation makes more sense. Here is what I set out to do:

1. To lay out the differences between individualist and collectivist theories, cultures, and politics;
2. To write as much about "the view from the streets" as about the view from the top (that is, to describe everyday life as well as elite decisions);
3. To be eclectic, using sources and ideas often overlooked (Eastern ideologies such as Confucianism, fiction and music to encapsulate culture);
4. To describe the *consequences* of theories as well as their *intent;*
5. To ask questions for which there is no ready answer;

6. To impose new data on old questions;
7. To teach skepticism.

Although these ambitions appear to be straightforward, they conceal the internecine warfare of our discipline. The first point requires that I use "the t-word" (totalitarianism). I do so unself-consciously not because of any silly ideological dispute but because (1) totalitarian governments are becoming scarce and hence, need to be understood in the event they enjoy a resurgence of elite support, and (2) that they existed at all, however briefly, is testimony to man's irrational bent. One might study the Chinese custom of binding women's feet or the Muslim tradition of female circumcision with the same combination of fascination and horror.

Of the remaining points, teaching skepticism might strike many of you as wanting an explanation. Simply put, in politics as in life, things are rarely as they seem. People yearn for, and politicians (joined on occasion by gullible academics) supply simple answers to complex questions. This book, whatever else it might do, does not lend credence to the American addiction to easy conspiracy theories or to single-cause explanations. It interweaves two themes, point and counterpoint: the conflict between *individualism* and *collectivism* and the tension between the *public* and the *private*. The two are, of course, inextricably intertwined. In 1989, when a woman was brutally beaten and raped in New York's Central Park by a group of teenagers who did it for fun ("wilding," as they said), explanations abounded. But one comment seemed unusually captivating to the student of political theory and behavior: "Something has gone wrong in our balance of individualism and community—our obligations to one another are being attacked by exaggerated devotion to self."[2] Does life imitate art? Among the comments about this act of harsh—even for New York—brutality, comparisons with the Anthony Burgess novel and movie, *A Clockwork Orange* (discussed in Chapter 1), abounded. Those who watched Malcolm MacDowell humming "Singin' in the Rain" while he performed his acts of "ultraviolence" find "wilding" an apt phrase. The balance between individualism and collectivism is a recurrent theme in this book. The "wilding" episode's explanations ranged from those who follow Rousseau and Marx (socialization, alienation) to modern Hobbesians ("Call them savages, black savages.")[3]

As a *leitmotif,* the book suggests that much of what appears to be change is illusion, that there are *constants:* elites rule masses and resources are unequally distributed. No government has ever altered these fundamental "laws" and none ever will. This view is against empty rhetoric and sloganeering; it is against ideology. David Mamet, American playwright, has a character in Speed the Plow say, "Why are nickels bigger than dimes? Because that's the way it is."

The structure of the book is as follows:

1. Chapter 1. Here the main themes of the book are set forth: individualism versus collectivism and public politics in contrast with private politics.
2. Chapter 2. This chapter addresses one of political science's most elusive problems: the interaction of culture and political life.
3. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 cover the origins, structure, and performance of polyarchies (or democracies).

4. Chapter 7 describes that most pervasive of forms of government, authoritarianism. A fundamental distinction is made between authoritarian government and
5. Totalitarian government, the subject of Chapters 8 and 9. As the name indicates, totalitarian governments seek total control, an improbable aspiration but one which has wreaked havoc in our century.

   The themes, individualism and collectivism, public and private, are carried through from the *least* to the *most* intrusive types of polities.
6. In Chapter 10, revolution and its consequences (how polities are changed and for what) leads into the two last empirical chapters.
7. Chapters 11 and 12 are about public policy, political economy, and the seeming inability of governments to accomplish their goals.
8. I conclude with the obligatory Epilogue in which I argue that ideologies, especially inclusive and deeply felt ones, are serious impediments to our ability to understand—and hence presumably accept or try to change—our personal and public political arenas.

The structure and certainly the tone of the book are less conventional than many publishers or editors would have preferred. As noted above, I have used a more heterogenous collection of sources than is usual. I want to suggest a *unity* of knowledge. When C. P. Snow, English scientist and novelist, wrote of "the two cultures" (science and literature, art, and music, and so on), his own career belied his lament that cultures were too disparate to connect. The fusion should borrow from both cultures. Scientists need the insecurity imposed upon them by philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities. Social scientists need the neutrality and rigor required of natural scientists. One obvious example of this is Thomas Hobbes's oft-quoted assertion that without the Leviathan (a powerful, autocratic central government) life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." What a golden opportunity for empirical theory! One can "operationalize" these terms and actually *find out*. Thus, my wish to impose new data upon old questions is associated with my respect for *both* cultures. Two old friends, Heinz Eulau and John Orbell, fathered and nourished my commitment to theory and data; Orbell on Hobbes, and Eulau on Edmund Burke, stand as models of scholarship.

David Estrin, who encouraged my inclinations, is, miracle of miracles, an editor because he loves books; he *reads* them; he *read* my manuscript. We talk about ideas (and about baseball and wine). He is, in the truest sense, an intellectual, and thus keeps me from adding "intellectual editor" to my growing list of oxymorons (bottled beer, decaffeinated coffee, short-sleeved dress shirts, and so on). Surely, his colleagues in the "biz" regard him as an antediluvian throwback and scorn him as they head for the latest seminar on "making a thin market fat" or some such (today books, tomorrow condos). The operative appellation for such folk is "belly editor" (since they spend most of their time paying for—and eating—food). Don't misunderstand me. Estrin and I share an interest in food (one glance at either of us dispels any contradictory notion).

But there is more. Others at Longman associated with this project picked up the boss' perverse habits: they too read. Elsa van Bergen gave each revision a *microscopic* read, not just for style, but also for content and logic. Her exhaustive reviews were,

simply, among the finest editorial work I have encountered in about three decades of writing. Is she the best? There are none better (there is one, Ellen Brownstein at "another publisher," who ties her first place). Jerry Manheim did the same. I know it sounds trite, but I could not have written the book if Jerry had not gotten me on track, eliminating several dead ends, and keeping me pointed in the approximately right direction. There is more here than meets the eye, since the first drafts were truly awful. During the last stages of the project, Marie-Josée Schorp applied her sense of humor and mediated between me and copy editors. Anybody who can plow through this much that often is either dedicated or driven. My debt to these fine people is immense.

At the University of Puget Sound, my colleague Arpad Kadarkay acquainted me with the Marx–Shakespeare connection (Marx could quote Shakespeare's major tragedies from memory). David Berg proved to be sufficiently compulsive, running down the errant note, and—most importantly—working up the questions which end each chapter (he, with a student's eye, seemed a logical choice). It is a tribute to the quality of the University of Puget Sound's students that Berg wrote questions considered by Longman to be "too complex for the average student." True enough: UPS students are *not* average. Among the students here who read and evaluated the manuscript, Kelley Dock, Kathy Dragoo, and David Quast earn my gratitude. Al DeMarco collected and organized much of the statistical information with admirable tenacity. Dan Hansen worked up much of the data for Chapter 10. Elin and Charlie, two good friends, kept the level of discourse affable. In retrospect, I enjoyed writing the book; I learned a lot about politics and about myself. I learned that some publishers do indeed care about ideas, and that some colleagues are remarkably generous with their time.

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NOTES

1. See Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), pp. 225–232.
2. Richard Reeves, "Not Just Drugs, Race or Poverty, but America," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, May 5, 1989, p. 11.
3. Ibid.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

The Idea of the Polity

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GOVERNMENT IN THE FAMILY OF ORGANIZATIONS

"Who gets what, when, how." That's a definition of politics by one of the most distinguished practitioners of political analysis, Harold Lasswell. Politics is no more than an effort to achieve goals or interests. When, as is usually the case, our interests are seemingly in conflict with someone else's, those who impede our progress must be made to stop.

This sounds like a primal drive. But consider the results of a survey from 1988:[1]

How Important Is Politics in Our Lives?

Very important	12%
Somewhat important	41%
Not very important	30%
Not at all important	16%
Don't know	1%

Another recent questionnaire revealed that most Americans do not know what a deficit is, do not know where Nicaragua is, and do not have even primitive levels of information about politics:[2]

Know majority party in the House of Representatives	51%
Know representative from own legislative district	32%
Know name *and* party of representative from own district	25%

Do you find this lack of information shocking? Before recoiling in horror, answer a few questions yourself:

To which part of the paper do you turn first? Sports? Comics? Horoscope?
Do you *read* a paper regularly?
Rank the following in order of your concern:
- Making good grades
- Achieving peace in Nicaragua
- Pledging the right fraternity/sorority
- Getting a good job
- Passing trade legislation that encourages international competition
- Reducing the federal deficit
- Housing the homeless
- Improving your appearance
- Combating drug use

If you are like most students, you now realize how little you care about "politics," although you care very much about achieving personal goals. Success and failure in the private sector can be the cause of major changes in individual lives. A person may care