



3rd Edition

the
**AMERICAN
ANOMALY**

U.S. Politics *and* Government in
Comparative Perspective

Raymond A. Smith

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in Comparative Perspective

Third Edition

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The American Anomaly

The American Anomaly systematically analyzes the U.S. political system by way of comparison with other countries, especially other industrialized democracies. It is organized into four sections, respectively covering the constitutional order, governmental institutions, political participation, and public policy. Extended case studies in each chapter draw on all the major regions of the world.

Thoroughly revised throughout, the third edition includes:

- Updates throughout to reflect recent developments, including battles for control of Congress and the White House in 2010 and 2012, the challenges and successes of the Obama presidency, and political developments including the rise of the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street.
- The addition of a ready-reference glossary defining key terms at the end of the book.
- Updates to examples from other countries, such as changes to the European Union in light of the Eurozone crisis, the Arab Spring, and the growth of China's global role.
- A substantive update to the domestic policy and foreign policy chapters.
- An update on online/web-based activism, with particular regard to the expanding role of social media.
- New tables and charts throughout.
- A companion website offering overview slides, links, and other supporting features.

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Preface to the Third Edition

This book comes directly out of discussion and interaction with my students over the past twelve years. During that time, I have had the opportunity to teach introductory American politics courses in a wide variety of settings, including in small, almost seminar-style courses in an adult BA program, in a medium-size lecture format at a public college, and in large lecture-hall settings at a major university. Regardless of the school or the format of the class, I consistently found that students are eager for information about the politics and governments of other countries, particularly for the insights about the United States that can be provided by the comparative approach.

Thus was born the idea for *The American Anomaly: U.S. Politics and Government in Comparative Perspective*. This brief volume does not aim to review all aspects of the U.S. political system—that is the task of a conventional introductory American politics textbook. Nor does it seek to systematically cover all of the major variations found in the government and politics of the countries of the world—that is the job of a comparative politics textbook. Rather, this volume has a different goal: to shed new light on key institutions, participatory processes, policy domains, and other key dimensions of the U.S. political system by examining how these are organized and practiced differently in other countries of the world. The hope is that by examining the full range of democratic political processes and governmental institutions cross-nationally, students might be able to achieve greater insight into the impact of such differences for the nature and quality of democratic representation and governance in the United States.

Studying how different countries choose to organize their politics is not only a valuable academic endeavor; it is also a valuable civic undertaking, suggesting how a long-established democracy in the United States can learn from the experience of other political systems, while also identifying features of the U.S. system that might be helpful in other countries. Over the course of this book, a number of striking patterns about the anomalous character of U.S. politics will emerge, including these:

- Among the twenty-three countries that have been independent and steadily democratic since 1950, only one other (Costa Rica) employs a strict separation-of-powers political system with a powerful president, institutionally insulated from the legislature, who serves as both head of state and head of government.
- Among these twenty-three countries, most have a lower house of parliament with far more power than the upper house, unlike the United States, in which both houses have equal lawmaking authority. Also, in only a handful of others (notably Britain, Canada, and India) are the members of the lower house of the legislature elected through a simple-majority electoral system.
- Of the nearly two dozen countries in the Western hemisphere with a separation-of-powers system, every one except the United States has experienced a collapse of democracy into single-party rule, civil war, or dictatorship since World War II.
- While judiciaries around the world are growing in significance, few have the sweeping power of the U.S. federal courts to make authoritative rulings about constitutional interpretation.
- Many countries have multiparty systems in which five, six, or even a dozen or more parties routinely play a meaningful role in politics; the stable, long-term two-party system found in the United States is a true rarity.
- At first glance, U.S. public opinion appears to be in the middle of the pack among nations of the world, but on closer inspection it becomes clear that American attitudes are more liberal than those in almost all developing countries but more conservative than those in almost all developed countries.

Despite these numerous anomalies, I have found that many American students reflexively assume that the U.S. political system must be the best system in the world and that other countries are eager to emulate it. Some intuitively felt that democracy itself required that politics and government be organized as it is in the United States. A few thought that it was somehow unpatriotic or antidemocratic to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of politics in the United States by comparing it with other countries. And a smaller but consistent number were highly critical of the United States, arguing that other countries would be better off avoiding the institutions and processes of the American political system.

This volume holds that every political system maximizes some values at the expense of others. For example, oppressive dictatorships can provide a great deal of stability, but few people would choose to live in such a system because of the freedom, equality, responsiveness, flexibility, and other values that would be compromised. Even within the family of democracies, different approaches to political institutions and processes can emphasize some values

over others. To highlight these comparisons, extended case studies are presented in each chapter that draw upon all of the major regions of the world, including Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Latin America, North America, and Oceania. While individual examples are drawn from dozens of political systems, a special emphasis is put on the twenty-three countries that have been independent and steadily democratic since 1950, a group consisting largely of Western European parliamentary democracies. (The political systems of these twenty-three countries are systematically compared in Chart 1 following this preface.) Given their strong historical and cultural linkages to the United States, a particular focus is placed on the English-speaking nations of the British Commonwealth, with every chapter specifically structured to include some discussion of politics or government in both Canada and Great Britain. In this third edition, many of the chapters include tables that provide additional context by situating the United States as one of sixty “major democracies.” These countries represented the fully independent states in the world that in 2010 were rated by the nongovernmental organization Freedom House as being “free” (as opposed to “partly free” or “not free”) in terms of the political and civil rights afforded to citizens. (Note that the exact list of which countries are categorized as “free” may vary slightly from year to year.) Only countries with populations over one million were included; most of those excluded were small Caribbean or Pacific nations whose political systems are modeled on those of former colonial occupiers and therefore follow patterns similar to those discussed in the context of Britain, France, Portugal, and the Netherlands.

A Note to Instructors

The American Anomaly is designed primarily to be used as a supplemental textbook in introductory American politics courses for those professors who wish to employ a comparative perspective that goes beyond the brief, boxed features about other countries that are so common in textbooks. To this end, it is intentionally organized to parallel the usual chapter headings found in the core introductory American politics textbooks, and it is assumed that students have or at least have access to such textbooks. However, the book can also be used profitably in other courses, most notably introductory comparative politics classes. Frequently, the textbooks for such comparative politics provide single-chapter coverage of the politics and governments of various countries, but often the United States is—perplexingly—*not* included in such texts. (For an overview of the comparative content of *The American Anomaly*, see Chart 2 after this preface.)

The American Anomaly may be of particular value to the increasing number of students who were raised or educated outside the United States and who may find this volume helpful in translating their understanding of

politics from their own country to the American context. It can also be a useful introduction for American students who are beginning to study the politics of other countries, particularly those with parliamentary governments. The volume is organized into four sections on the constitutional order, governmental institutions, political participation, and public policy, comprising thirteen chapters that parallel the organization of many American politics courses. Extensive case studies in each chapter draw on all the major regions of the world, with examples from dozens of political systems. It is an ideal supplemental text to help college students to truly understand American politics and government in comparative perspective. This revised third edition includes updates to reflect domestic developments from the first Obama term, the emergence of the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street, Republican victories in 2010, and the presidential election of 2012, along with global events such as the Eurozone crisis and the Arab Spring. The third edition also incorporates many new charts and graphs, and a ready-reference glossary.

To keep this volume relatively brief and readily accessible to a wide range of students, many topics have not been included. For instance, the study of how modern mass media frame political issues or how public opinion surveys achieve random samples is important, but these topics are not discussed in this volume because the comparative approach would not particularly shed much light on them. Likewise, topics that might be extremely important in the study of some other countries, such as details of how parliamentary coalitions are formed in Western Europe or how the military plays a political role in Central Africa, do not have much relevance to the study of U.S. politics and therefore are also excluded from this volume.

Similarly, *The American Anomaly* is informed by the long and rich tradition of studies on the cultural and historical roots of American exceptionalism. However, it does not directly engage that literature, partly in order to offer a fresh perspective and partly to provide an institutionally oriented approach that will make this volume a good fit for use alongside most introductory American politics textbooks. Because this book will, ideally, be just the starting point of the comparative study of the U.S. political system for many students, a brief bibliographic essay on American exceptionalism is provided at the end of the book. The third edition includes two chapters on domestic policy (including socioeconomic policy, civil liberties, and civil rights) and on foreign policy. However, discussion of public policy is also woven throughout the book. At various points, readers will find consideration of how anomalous features of the American political system have affected public policy in areas as diverse as freedom of expression, freedom of religion, the right to bear arms, due process guarantees, social welfare spending, taxation policies, education, disaster relief, racial integration, war powers, foreign policy, and immigration.

As the instructor wishes, individual chapters of this book may be assigned when various topics are discussed throughout the semester. Given the brevity of this volume, it can also be assigned as a whole at the outset of the semester,

or each of the four parts of the book may be assigned together at appropriate points in the course. The parts may be read in any order, although it is recommended that Part I be read first, particularly chapter 4, which introduces the parliamentary system of government. It is also beneficial for chapters 9 and 10, respectively on voting and elections and on political parties, to be read sequentially. Each chapter includes suggestions for further reading, one exercise for Web-based exploration, and a chapter question, which can be used as the basis for a written assignment and/or a classroom discussion.

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Chart 1 Comparison of 23 Established Democracies

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year of Current Constitution</i>	<i>Unitary or Federal?</i>	<i>Separation of Powers?</i>	<i>Head of State</i>
United States	1789	Federal, with 50 states and 6 territories	Yes	President elected by the Electoral College, which is allocated according to popular vote
Australia	1901	Federal, with 6 states and 2 territories	Some; upper house and High Court can check the executive	Ceremonial governor general, appointed by prime minister, represents British monarch
Austria	1920; restored in 1945 after World War II	Federal, with 9 states	No	Popularly elected ceremonial president
Belgium	1831	Federal, with 3 regions and 3 language communities	No	Hereditary ceremonial monarch
Canada	1867; Charter of Rights and Freedoms added in 1982	Federal, with 10 provinces and 3 territories	No	Ceremonial governor general, appointed by prime minister, represents British monarch
Costa Rica	1949	Unitary	Yes	Popularly elected president
Denmark	1953	Unitary, but with home rule for 2 overseas territories	No	Hereditary ceremonial monarch

<i>Head of Government</i>	<i>Structure of Legislature</i>	<i>Judicial Review?</i>	<i>Electoral System</i>	<i>Party System</i>
President elected by the Electoral College, which is allocated according to popular vote	Symmetric bicameralism; both houses popularly elected	Supreme Court and other federal courts have judicial review	Single-member plurality	Two-party
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Symmetric bicameralism; both houses popularly elected	High Court has judicial review	Single-member transferable vote for lower house; proportional representation for upper house	Two-party plus
Chancellor elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; both houses popularly elected	Constitutional Court has limited judicial review	Proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; both houses popularly elected (some seats in upper house are appointed)	High Council for Justice has limited judicial review	Proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; lower house popularly elected, upper house appointed	Supreme Court has judicial review but can be overridden	Single-member plurality	Two-party plus
Popularly elected president	Unicameralism; popularly elected	Supreme Court of Justice has significant judicial review	Proportional representation for legislature; single-member plurality with runoff for president	Two-party plus
Prime minister elected by parliament	Unicameralism; popularly elected	Supreme Court does not have judicial review	Multimember proportional representation	Multiparty

(Continued)

Chart 1 (Continued)

Country	Year of Current Constitution	Unitary or Federal?	Separation of Powers?	Head of State
Finland	1919	Unitary	Some; president and parliament can check each other	Popularly elected president with significant powers
France	1958	Unitary	Only when president and parliamentary majority are of different parties	Popularly elected president with significant powers
Germany	1949	Federal, with 16 Länder	Some; upper house can block laws on issues related to the Länder	Ceremonial president elected by parliament and Länder legislatures
Great Britain	No single written constitutional document	Unitary, with devolved powers to Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales	No	Hereditary ceremonial monarch
Iceland	1944	Unitary	No	Popularly elected largely ceremonial president
India	1950	Federal, with 28 states and 7 union territories	No	Ceremonial president elected by parliament and state legislators

<i>Head of Government</i>	<i>Structure of Legislature</i>	<i>Judicial Review?</i>	<i>Electoral System</i>	<i>Party System</i>
Prime minister elected by parliament	Unicameralism; popularly elected	Supreme Court does not have judicial review	Multimember proportional representation; single-member plurality with runoff for president	Multiparty
Prime minister appointed by president, confirmed by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; lower house popularly elected, upper house indirectly elected by local elected officials	Court of Cassation does not have judicial review; there is a Constitutional Court within the executive	Multimember proportional representation for lower house of parliament; single-member plurality with runoff for president	Multiparty
Prime minister (chancellor) elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; popularly elected lower house, upper house appointed by the Länder	Constitutional Court has judicial review	Mixed single-member plurality and proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; popularly elected lower house, mostly appointed upper house	Supreme Court does not have judicial review	Single-member plurality	Two-party Plus
Prime minister elected by parliament	Unicameralism; popularly elected	Supreme Court has some judicial review	Multimember proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; lower house popularly elected, upper house chosen from states	Supreme Court with some judicial review	Single-member plurality for lower house; proportional representation for upper house	Multiparty

(Continued)

Chart 1 (Continued)

Country	Year of Current Constitution	Unitary or Federal?	Separation of Powers?	Head of State
Ireland	1937	Unitary	No	Popularly elected ceremonial president
Israel	No single written constitutional document	Unitary	No	Ceremonial president elected by parliament
Italy	1948	Unitary	Usually not, although Senate can sometimes check lower house and executive	Ceremonial president elected by parliament and regional delegates
Japan	1947	Unitary	No	Hereditary ceremonial monarch
Luxembourg	1868	Unitary	No	Hereditary ceremonial monarch
Netherlands	1814	Unitary, but with home-rule in overseas territories	No	Hereditary ceremonial monarch
New Zealand	No single written constitutional document	Unitary	No	Ceremonial governor general, appointed by prime minister, represents British monarch

<i>Head of Government</i>	<i>Structure of Legislature</i>	<i>Judicial Review?</i>	<i>Electoral System</i>	<i>Party System</i>
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; lower house popularly elected, upper house drawn from various sectors of society	Supreme Court has some judicial review	Multimember proportional representation	Two-party Plus
Prime minister elected by both houses of parliament	Unicameralism; popularly elected	Supreme Court has some judicial review	Proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Symmetric bicameralism; members of both houses popularly elected	Constitutional court has some judicial review	Proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; both houses popularly elected	Supreme Court has some judicial review	Mixed single-member plurality and proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by parliament	Unicameralism; popularly elected	Supreme Court does not have judicial review	Proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by lower house of parliament	Asymmetric bicameralism; lower house popularly elected, upper house chosen by provinces	Supreme Court does not have judicial review	Proportional representation	Multiparty
Prime minister elected by parliament	Unicameralism, popularly elected	Supreme Court does not have judicial review	Mixed single-member plurality and proportional representation	Two-party Plus

(Continued)

Chart I (Continued)

Country	Year of Current Constitution	Unitary or Federal?	Separation of Powers?	Head of State
Norway	1814	Unitary	No	Hereditary ceremonial monarch
Sweden	1974	Unitary	No	Hereditary ceremonial monarch
Switzerland	1874	Federal, with 26 cantons	Yes	Ceremonial president, rotating each year among Federal Council members

This comparison chart is based on the list of twenty-three democracies compiled by political scientists Arend Lijphart, Robert Dahl, and others. It reflects the countries that have been independent since 1950 and have experienced uninterrupted democracy since that time. As countries with a span of several decades of democratic self-government, these countries represent many of the most relevant points of comparison for the United States. Note that India is sometimes excluded from the list because of a state of emergency that was declared there between 1975 and 1977, although this was accomplished through existing constitutional mechanisms. Other countries that have had some democratic practices since 1950 are excluded for such reasons as long stretches of single-party rule (e.g., Mexico), undemocratic intervention by the military (e.g., Turkey), or achievement of independence after 1950 (e.g., Jamaica).