

Comparative Inquiry in Politics and Political Economy

THEORIES AND ISSUES

RONALD H. CHILCOTE

COMPARATIVE INQUIRY IN POLITICS AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

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PREFACE

This book is intended as an introductory text for students involved in comparative inquiry in politics and political economy. My assumption is that inquiry becomes or should become comparative and that although study of a single theory, issue, country, or institution may be appropriate or necessary at any particular time, ultimately reference must be made to parallel or alternative phenomena. The willingness to examine a variety of perspectives and to explore alternative possibilities arouses curiosity, stimulates creativity, builds interest and self-motivation, and enhances comprehension of complex matters.

Two decades ago I began to synthesize and find order to the wide-ranging themes in and multitude of approaches to the comparative study of politics. The result was a book, *Theories of Comparative Politics* (1982), which presented a framework of the major trends and theoretical directions in contemporary politics. It focused on a juxtaposition of theories of political system and the state; particular and total political conceptions of culture; development and underdevelopment; and the distinctions between elites and masses through various approaches to a theory of class. The book was intended to guide advanced undergraduate and graduate students in a comprehensive and critical overview of comparative politics and to serve as a resource for teachers and as a reference work for scholars already familiar with the field. In fact, it proved especially popular among graduate students, especially at the doctoral level, although it was used at the undergraduate level and occasionally served as an introductory text. This book has been refined, rewritten, and substantially updated in a second edition (1994). A sequel also has been written, entitled *Theories of Comparative Political Economy* (forthcoming), which emanates from the plea in the conclusion of the first book for the study of politics and economics; the sequel emphasizes comparative historical themes and theories of transition, class, imperialism, state, and democracy.

The present text draws from both these books, digesting their content in a way that facilitates and provides the introductory student of social science with a theoretical basis and the foundations for comparative inquiry in politics and political economy. Its purpose is threefold: to provide an

overview of the major theories and concepts; to expose issues and summarize arguments and counterarguments; and to encourage the beginning student to pursue critical thinking in the recognition that mainstream ideas deserve scrutiny, that many essential questions remain unsettled, and that the outcome may result in the formulation and reinforcement of a personal perspective premised on one's individual learning. Those desiring to delve into a more extensive array of theories and ideas, trends, information, and sources should consult the above works.

I wish to thank Sheryl Lutjens for suggestions, insights, and criticisms in her careful reading of the manuscript. I am grateful for three anonymous reviewers, two of whom were enthusiastic about this book because it is strong in its historical grounding and comprehensive in its incorporation of classical and current social theory; the third reviewer was helpful in filling gaps in current debates and updating a draft that had become somewhat uneven as I elaborated it over many years of writing. This reviewer complained, however, that introductory undergraduate students do not have enough background to engage in theoretical debates around the issues herein. I have tried to draw out some of these debates in the present version, but I have not introduced many examples of particular countries, simply because contemporary events become rapidly dated and do not necessarily conform to individual preferences. I shall leave it to readers to search for examples, which are abundant in the comparative literature. A further complaint was that most instructors do not approach the subject from a Marxist viewpoint. I caution, however, that my work was not intended to do so. I juxtapose mainstream and alternative perspectives to awaken students to the possibility of employing various theories and methodologies, including Marxist, in their study and thinking. The desire here is to open minds to critical thinking, not to close theory to ideas that may be popular today but become obscure in the future.

Ronald H. Chilcote

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PART ONE

Introduction

FOUNDATIONS FOR INQUIRY

This introduction identifies and explains key issues, defines essential concepts, delineates theoretical directions, and notes the limitations and parameters of inquiry in (comparative) politics and political economy. My purpose is to show the importance of theory in coming to grips with the disparate material, to lay the foundations for further study, and to encourage the reader to assume a questioning stance in the recognition that all questions remain open and unsettled.¹

ISSUES

The specialist tends to view comparative politics as the study of everything political. Any lesser conception obscures the criteria for selection and exclusion of what the field might study. There is no consensus on this view, however, and defining comparative politics evokes much confusion for student and scholar alike. More concretely, comparative politics studies a broad range of political activity, including governments and their institutions as well as other forms of organizations not directly related to national government, for example, tribes, communities, associations, and unions. The term **comparative politics** sometimes is used loosely and

¹Bibliographic information for works cited in the text can be found in the References section at the end of this book. The reader will also find a glossary of terms that appear throughout the book. These terms are printed in bold in the text where an explanation occurs. Those readers desiring considerably more detail and explanation, including criticisms and annotations to an extensive survey of relevant literature, should consult my *Theories of Comparative Politics: The Search for a Paradigm Revisited* (Westview Press, 1994) and *Theories of Comparative Political Economy* (Westview Press, forthcoming).

interchangeably with **comparative government**, which usually refers to the study of countries or nation-states in Europe; the focus of that field of study is on the political institutions or structures and the activities or functions of those countries, with attention to their executives, legislatures, and judiciaries as well as such supplementary organizations as political parties and pressure groups. Stated more simply, the comparative study of government often refers to the study of foreign governments and regimes, and the term comparative politics is used for comparisons in the study of all forms of political activity—governmental and nongovernmental.

Comparative inquiry necessarily relates to economic as well as political phenomena. Increasingly, political scientists look to economic causes for political understanding, whereas economists look to political explanations. **Political economy** thus overlaps these disciplinary preferences. *Webster's New International Dictionary* (3d ed.) identifies political economy in the eighteenth century as a field of government concerned with directing policies toward the enhancement of government and community wealth. The dictionary adds that in the nineteenth century political economy was a social science related to economics but primarily concerned with government rather than commercial or personal economics. Not until recently has a tradition of political economy established itself in political science, but during the 1980s and 1990s it was clearly in vogue. Political economy has always been of interest in economics, dating back especially to nineteenth-century studies and polemics associated with the rise of **capitalism** and the implantation of bourgeois society and, since the Second World War, to the resurgence of attention by radical and Marxist political economists.

Political science, comparative politics, and political economy relate to both theory and method. **Theory** refers to sets of systematically related generalizations premised on what is happening or might happen in the real world; theory can lead to changes in the world, and the experiences of the world can shape, revise, and refine theory. **Method** is a procedure or process that involves the techniques and tools used in inquiry and for the examination, testing, and evaluation of theory; methods may be experimental, statistical, or linguistic, but the case study method, with its possibilities for theory building and gathering information, has been especially fruitful for comparative inquiry. **Dialectics** may be employed as a method in the weighing of tensions or oppositions between interacting forces, such as the search for relevant theory, and allows for the building of theory on new facts as well as for the interpreting of facts in relation to new theory. **Methodology** consists of methods, procedures, working concepts, rules, and the like used for testing theory, guiding inquiry, and searching for solutions to problems of the real world. Methodology is a

particular way of viewing, organizing, and giving shape to inquiry. Both theory and method owe a great deal to the classical political philosophers Aristotle and Plato, Machiavelli and Montesquieu, and Hegel, Marx, and Mill. Comparative politics also is indebted to the early-twentieth-century contributions of Woodrow Wilson, James Bryce, and Carl Friedrich, whose attention was directed toward the formal study of government and state. Comparative political economy finds its roots in the thought of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx, among other classical thinkers.

The present text draws on the ideas of these early thinkers but emphasizes the contributions of more contemporary comparative political scientists. The Second World War heightened interest among scholars in the study of foreign systems, especially systems in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The decline of empires after the war and the turmoil of independence in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East influenced scholars to turn their attention from the established to the new nations. The primacy of comparative politics was conspicuous in the ensuing period as this interest in research was facilitated by new technology and funded by private foundations and governments. At the same time, however, a fragmentation of case materials ensued due to differences over methods in the gathering of data, imprecision in the use of terminology, and uncertain conditions, which resulted in an unevenness in the accumulation of knowledge. Additionally, there were problems with grand theorizing politics as total systems on one level and with micro theorizing politics as analysis of human behavior on another level. There was also a tendency toward model building and the use of unrealistic classificatory schemes based on the Anglo-American experience; ethnocentrism combined with unreliable and tentative data often resulted in distorted analyses and misunderstandings of actual experiences.

Students of comparative politics face yet another problem, that of value-free investigation. Many political scientists emphasize attention to explicit assumptions and to systematic and quantitative investigations. Such investigators assume the role of objective social scientists, separating themselves from the role of active citizens, but there is now a widespread understanding that values enter into all investigations of politics and that we must be aware of the consequences of bias in problem selection, concept formation, gathering of data, interpretation, and theory construction and verification.

The above discussion implies a systematic procedure for social science investigation, similar to the work of natural scientists, who look for regularities in the abstractions that they identify in the nonhuman world. Social science often borrows the theories and rules of natural science to study the human world, but human behavior tends to be ubiquitous and

consequently unpredictable; the emphasis on regularity may obscure any recognition of irregularity; and values, beliefs, and personal preferences might intrude on the scientific enterprise so that in the end little understanding will be gained. Such has been a concern of many people interested in comparative politics.

Comparative political science may insist on the primacy of politics, but the student should explore the relationship of politics to other disciplines to learn their relationship to comparative political inquiry. We could discover, for example, the contributions of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski in anthropology; Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim in sociology and political sociology; and John Maynard Keynes, Karl Marx, and Adam Smith in economics and political economy. The emphasis on the meaning of value judgment and neutrality and the implications of objectivity in the study of politics, for example, may be attributable to Weber, who wrote about such problems in his *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1949). Durkheim in his *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1938) suggested rules for the observation of social facts, classification of social types, and explanation of social facts; such rules are widely applied in contemporary comparative politics. Unlike Weber and Durkheim, Marx did not prepare a manual on theory and method, but those concerns are evident throughout his writings. He was a comparativist who focused on the monarchies of Europe but also extended his analysis elsewhere, most notably to Asia. Marx would explain the societal equilibrium emphasized by Durkheim and Weber as a consequence of actions of a **ruling class**. The ruling class enforces rules and norms that legitimize the relations of production, which arise from particular means and forces of production and may become outmoded as change and equilibrium become dialectical parts of a single process. Later I elaborate on the contributions of Marx and demonstrate that his theory and methodology tend to run counter to the dominant tendencies of the contemporary literature of comparative politics.

TERMINOLOGY

Theory involves viewing and thinking. The student of comparative politics must relate theory to description, analysis, and synthesis. **Description** is a statement about the parts or relations of something; it may involve classification, identification, and specification. **Analysis** is the separation or breaking up of the whole into its fundamental parts and subjecting them to detailed qualitative or quantitative examination; analysis may involve clarification and explication. **Synthesis** is the combining of the parts into the whole, of diverse ideas and forces into a coherent or cohesive complex.

The literature tends to discuss theory in general terms, and definitions are likely to reflect the preferences of individual authors, so for the reader to gain a deeper understanding of theory and its usefulness in inquiry, I now turn to a discussion of some terms that appear throughout the text: concepts; generalizations, propositions, and hypotheses; types and levels; approaches; and models and paradigms.

Comparative politics and political economy suffer from ambiguity and imprecision of concepts. A **concept** is a theoretical construct or universal term. Conceptualization should be clear and well formulated, devoid of ambiguity and any multiplicity of meanings that may obfuscate connotation. Conceptualization must be realized prior to description and classification, prior to quantification and measurement, prior to the testing of the theory. Comparative politics makes use of concepts in theory building. Concepts may be worked into definitional schema, classificatory arrangements, or systematic orderings that accompany a particular theoretical approach. Measurement and evaluation procedures may come into play. The resulting data and information are then subject to either qualitative or quantitative analysis. (**Qualitative analysis** relates to generality and sometimes imprecision, whereas **quantitative analysis** relates to specificity and exactness, criteria often exaggerated in an age of technological advances.) The more essential economic concepts used in political economy include, for example, **necessary production** in the satisfaction of basic human needs for food, drink, and so on and **surplus production**, which evolves with inventions and new knowledge that make possible increases in labor productivity. These types of production, of course, relate to the **economic base**, or **infrastructure**, and to concepts such as **mode of production**, **forces of production**, **relations of production**, and **means of production**. On the political side, attention to the political **superstructure** may focus on the **state**, **class**, and **ideology**.

Comparative politics and political economy tend to combine qualitative and quantitative techniques of research. In research, concepts sometimes are called variables. **Variables** are concepts that have quantitative or qualitative attributes. Numerical values, such as age or size, can be utilized with **quantitative variables**, whereas nonnumerical values are employed with **qualitative variables**. Variables also may be dependent or independent. **Dependent variables** depend on at least one other variable; **independent variables** are completely autonomous from other variables. Although these definitions may assist the reader in understanding the terminology, a word of caution is in order. Sophisticated techniques are not an escape from questions of substantive theory nor do they necessarily help us to understand causality, that is, why and how dynamic changes occur and impact on the course of history. However precisely terms are defined, conceptualization undoubtedly will suffer in comparative

investigation. Differing language connotations from culture to culture also may pose a problem.

The terms **generalization**, **proposition**, and **hypothesis** are often used interchangeably, although different connotations and nuances of language may be associated with each term. Certainly there is no widespread consensus as to the meaning of many terms, but the discussion that follows attempts clarification. Qualitative analysts usually stress the term "generalization", and quantitative analysts may employ the term "hypothesis"; "propositions" may be the concern of either type of analysis. A generalization is a general statement of uniformities and regularities. It is the simplest form of explanation. Knowledge of subject matter is essential to the capacity to generalize. Eugene Meehan (1965) identified three forms of generalization: a universal generalization that in some cases may be a law because it has withstood intensive testing; a probabilistic generalization that based on experience likely is valid (frequently referred to as a proposition); and a tendency generalization, expressed in tentative and conjectural terms (thus being a hypothesis, which may be true but is not yet tested). Thus laws are universal, propositions are probabilistic, and hypotheses are tentative.

Generalizations, propositions, and hypotheses are especially useful in sciences such as chemistry and physics, which rely on precise measurement and complex and detailed classifications. Classifications depend on uniformities and similarities. Political science and political economy find explanations of human behavior limited if only uniformities and similarities are noted, however. Since human behavior is usually unpredictable, diversity and dissimilar patterns of behavior become important in the study of politics. The demand for the study of patterns of dissimilarity, as well as irregularity, echoed by Roy Macridis (1955) and other specialists in comparative politics over the past decades, has caused skepticism about the application of science to politics.

Two types of explanatory reasoning are prominent in theory. **Induction** is the process of inferring a generalization from a pattern of specific observations, whereas **deduction** is the application of the rule that if a universal generalization is true then a lesser generalization can be true. In comparative politics, induced generalizations and propositions are suspect because they may be viewed as deterministic or deemed to be correct and true when in fact conclusive evidence may be lacking or deviant cases to disprove them may exist. Since political science has few if any universal generalizations or laws, deductive explanation is unlikely to have much impact on the discipline (this reservation is not held by the social scientists who emphasize such terms as "scientific method" and "rules of science" in the theoretical literature).

Three levels of theory are identifiable: global, middle range, and narrow gauge. **Global, or grand, theory** seeks universal conceptualizations; the efforts to establish such theories for comparative politics have been largely discredited because of their generality, vagueness, and abstraction. **Narrow-gauge theory** has suffered from a preoccupation with technique rather than substance; often sensitive issues of politics are obscured by limiting the scope of inquiry to small problems and to easily manageable data. Among the social sciences global theory is also known as **macro theory** and narrow-gauge theory may be called **micro theory**. Between these extremes is the **middle-range theory** preferred by most practitioners of comparative politics; this level emphasizes the study of institutions (structures) and their activities (functions).

Among the approaches to the study of politics are the normative, structural, and behavioral approaches. The **normative approach** represents a traditional tendency, dating to times before philosophy was divorced from politics; it looks to desirable cultural values in society and emphasizes norms in the form of rules or rights and obligations that are considered desirable. For example, it is often an assumption of U.S. political scientists that democracy is premised on shared rather than divisive values, and these investigators look for compromise, bargaining, and consensus as the components of a democratic society. Proponents of the **structural approach** tend to examine issues of system maintenance and stability; whole societies or nations are studied with an emphasis on separation of powers among the legal governmental institutions. Structures in the form of the **state** and its matrix of agencies and agents may evolve through law and enforcement and basic rules spelling out the limits of negotiation. Sometimes referred to as a sort of superstructure, the state and its apparatuses may delegate power to agents who follow the objectives of a ruler, as, say, in the redistributive societies of the ancient Egyptians or the slavery system of the Greek and Roman empires as well as the medieval manor or the ruler and ruling classes under various forms of capitalism. Structures are also analyzed in the form of **groups** and **classes** and their economic interests so that attention is directed to the struggle between economic classes. The **behavioral approach** focuses on the individual and the small group as the unit of analysis, with attention to motivations, perceptions, attitudes toward authority, and other considerations.

The distinctions among these approaches reveal the many tendencies employed in the study of comparative inquiry. The mainstream of the social sciences has tended to use the structural or structural-functional approach, labeling it middle range in theoretical orientation. There also has been a tendency to pursue narrow, micro orientations through the behavioral approach. Disillusionment with the failure of behaviorism to deal

with the issues and problems of society and with the tendency of structuralism to deal with segments of systems without relating them to the whole society has led many professionals to emphasize the normative approach.

An important debate has ensued over whether our comparisons must be carried out in field research that incorporates the history and culture of particular situations or be empirically based around formal or abstract models in which data are tested and manipulated. This debate may be cast in terms of normative or empirical theory or subjective or objective analysis. The bottom line in these distinctions lies in the question whether social science is really scientific. Is it possible, for instance, to cast a science out of human behavior and to be able to predict behavior? During the 1950s and 1960s behavioral science attempted to answer in the affirmative with survey data of individual preferences. That tradition carried on into the 1980s and 1990s with an emphasis on formal theory carried to the extent that it was unclear in many disciplines, political science and sociology, among them, whether one needed to be an area specialist as well as a scientist. Whereas an older generation of scholars may have conducted comparative research abroad in particular countries, today a younger generation, caught up in statistical data and abstract theoretical models, may be less inclined to go to the field. The fact is that travel to the field not only permits familiarity and sensitivity to other cultural situations but also mitigates the ethnocentrism and bias that can be associated with presumably scientific work.

Classificatory arrangements and frameworks are useful in the search for theory. A **typology** divides and orders information and facts along the lines of classifications and frameworks, often in subtle ways, so as to allow the use of quantitative techniques. The use of models in the study of comparative politics has broader implications. A **model** brings disparate parts together and demonstrates relationships. Models tend to simplify representations of the real world. They can facilitate understanding but they do not explain. They help comparative specialists bring order to the mass of information available to students of comparative politics. Models, like typologies and classifications, are limited, however. They are mental constructions, not theories, although they are often distorted to signify theoretical advancement. In contrast, a **paradigm** is a scientific community's perspective on the world, its set of beliefs and commitments—conceptual, theoretical, methodological, instrumental. A paradigm guides the scientific community's selection of problems, evaluation of data, and advocacy of theory. This book identifies the mainstream and alternative paradigms of comparative politics.

Divergent lines of thinking in comparative politics affect these aspects of theory and inquiry. Those people influenced by Max Weber, for in-

stance, tend to stress the notion of **ideal types** or situations. The ideal is projected as a possibility that might be realized through time. For example, U.S. democracy often is recognized as an idealized political type that given time might be realized by a less developed society, a process that implies a unilinear progress through which societies evolve. When backward societies are not able to advance, the ideal may become confused with reality. In contrast, Marxists might relate theory to real situations, not ideal types, and seek an explanation of underdevelopment in the historical interplay of social forces in relation to production.

This discussion has emphasized the traditional terminology of social science, but many of these terms are applicable both to the mainstream and alternative lines of thought that are delineated throughout this book.

THEORETICAL DIRECTIONS

Since 1953 the major theoretical trends in the comparative field have tended to cluster around such concepts as state and system as institutional frameworks, class and group in society, individual and collective preferences in culture, capitalist and socialist development, and representative and participatory democracy.² These themes constitute chapters in this book, pursuant to my intention of identifying the major contributions in the field of comparative politics and explaining how each has become a central thrust in the field and what its relationship is to political economy.

Institutional Frameworks

During the early 1950s the traditional concern with the state was supplanted by the influence of systems analysis. Three writers were particularly influential in using the political system as a macro unit in comparative politics. David Easton in *The Political System* (1953) and other works set forth a concept of political systems graphically illustrated in a box with its inputs of demands and supports and outputs of decisions and policy. Influenced by the functionalist anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) as well as by the sociologists Max Weber (1949) and Talcott Parsons (1951), Gabriel Almond first offered a simplistic classification (1956) that included non-Western and newly independent nations. He then set forth categories of structure and function, relating them to all systems in the introduction to *The Politics of*

²See Bill and Hardgrave (1973) for an earlier introduction to comparative political theory. Also, Rustow and Erickson (1991) provide a useful mix of theoretical and practical experience.

Developing Areas (Almond and Coleman, 1960). Later he related his conception of system to culture and development. Finally, Karl Deutsch in *The Nerves of Government* (1963) drew heavily upon the cybernetic theory of Norbert Wiener in postulating a systematic model of politics.

Almond and other comparativists convincingly argued in the late 1950s that the notion of the state had been long obscured by a multitude of conceptualizations and should be replaced by the political system, which was adaptable to scientific inquiry in the emerging age of computers. Despite his effort to construct the parameters and concepts of a political system, Easton recognized that political science owed its existence to the traditional emphasis on the state. These two political scientists, however, insisted, well into the 1980s, on the importance of the political system as the core of political study. Alternative work appeared with the publication of Ralph Miliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) and Nicos Poulantzas's *State, Power, and Socialism* (1978), and they engaged in a debate over whether the state was instrumentally dominated by a ruling capitalist class or potentially autonomous through its structural apparatuses. This sort of debate led to the call by the political sociologists Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (1985) in *Bringing the State Back In* for more attention to the question of the state, signifying that despite the objections of Almond and Easton, the comparative mainstream had come full circle and restored a focus on the state to its important place in the study of politics.

Class and Group Formations

From the 1920s, studies of elites and ruling classes absorbed the attention of political sociologists and political scientists who examined community power. During the 1950s C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* (1956) looked at the question of power and who rules and noted a concentration of power at the community and national levels, only to be attacked by Robert A. Dahl in *Who Governs?* (1961) and others who relied on a pluralistic conception of politics. Comparativists tended not to be distracted by the pluralist-elitist debates of the early 1960s, and even Dahl, who turned to Europe, noted a relationship between pluralism and socialism as one means of achieving democracy. William Domhoff in *Who Rules America?* (1967) described a network of social, political, and economic power in the United States and was able to replicate Dahl's study of New Haven and show in *Who Really Rules? New Haven and Community Power Reexamined* (1978b) that perspective on power as concentrated or pluralistic largely depends on the methods and questions employed in empirical study.

Comparative inquiry moved in at least two directions. One looked at elites and masses in several nations, whereas another turned to questions