

A stylized map of Europe is the central focus, with countries represented by various colors like purple, teal, orange, and yellow. The map is overlaid with a grid of latitude and longitude lines. Faint, cursive text labels for 'Atlantic Ocean', 'North Sea', 'Black Sea', and 'Mediterranean Sea' are visible in the background. The title is enclosed in a white rectangular box at the top.

Representative Government in Modern Europe

Second Edition

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REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN MODERN EUROPE

SECOND EDITION

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REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN MODERN EUROPE

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REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN MODERN EUROPE

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PREFACE

This book is the retitled second edition of *Representative Government in Western Europe*. The new edition has been made necessary by the relentless passage of time; the new title has been made necessary by the astonishing political changes that have taken place in Europe since the last edition was written. The most striking of these has been the economic and political progress of some former Eastern European states toward models provided by their Western European neighbors. With the end of the Cold War, the political categorization of Europe into East and West simply no longer makes sense. Hence, we now write about politics in Modern Europe and include a discussion of some former Eastern bloc countries.

The second edition follows the fundamental philosophy of the first. It deals with the full range of modern European countries, large and small, in terms of a set of themes that structure the study of representative government. We have been most encouraged, in getting reactions to the first edition, to find that many teachers of European politics share our strong sense of the need for such a book. In addition to a thorough revision and updating of the material included in the first edition, however, we have made some major additions to this edition, to a large extent in response to suggestions from those who have used it as a text.

The first major addition is the expansion of what was a single chapter on the “rules of the game” in the first edition into a set of four new chapters on the institutions of representative government in modern Europe. This reflects a shift in the discipline to a greater interest in the ways in which political institutions structure political behavior. It also reflects a natural concern with institutional design among those interested in the transition to democracy in the former Eastern Europe. The new chapters deal in turn with the major institutions of parliamentary government—with the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, and the system of local and national administration. Because the institutions of the European Union (EU) now loom so large in the domestic politics of member states, we have also moved our revised discussion of the EU into this section of the book.

The second major addition is a completely new chapter on representative government in four former Eastern bloc countries: Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and

Slovakia. Although, for reasons we discuss in Chapter 1, political scientists are not yet in a position to integrate these countries fully into their discussions of modern Europe, they are nonetheless fascinating new additions to the cast of characters in modern Europe. We hope progressively to integrate them into future editions, as their political systems settle down and systematic research gets done.

We have of course made a host of other minor changes, updating our discussions in all chapters to take account of political developments up until the time of writing and providing a more comprehensive road map section in Chapter 1. As is inevitably the case, when we submitted the final typescript to the publisher, we longed to wait just another month or two to take account of this important upcoming election or that intriguing crisis bubbling just under the surface. That way the book would never be finished, however. A point came at which we had to parcel up the typescript and post it to the publisher in the absolute certainty that at least something would be out of date as soon as the book was published. There is always the third edition, however! And there is a solid case to be made for the argument that political scientists should not be *too* quick on the draw, publishing interpretations of political developments before the dust has really settled. If events in the former Eastern bloc have taught us anything, it is that our interpretations of events will be very different two years down the line from those at the immediate scene of the crime. In this almost paradoxical way, the time it takes to turn a typescript into a published book, by forcing us to remember that what we write must stand the test of time, may impose a very useful analytical discipline.

Finally, we must express our gratitude to all of those who have given us invaluable feedback on the first edition. Many of them are listed in the acknowledgments, but many are not. They know who they are, and we hereby offer our sincere thanks for their help and our humble apologies for leaving their names off the list. Parts of the advice we received were contradictory, and thus some of it has had to be ignored, but every single piece of it was not only constructive and well-meaning but also helped in some way or another to shape this second edition.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

European politics is as fascinating and exciting in the 1990s as at any time over the past 1,000 years. With the breakup of the former Soviet Union, a huge empire has collapsed. The division of Europe into East and West, divided by an Iron Curtain, has ceased to have any meaning as formerly communist Central European states hold multiparty elections and dream of joining their Western neighbors as part of an integrated Europe. At the same time, the unique experiment of European integration seems to forge ahead, as European law supersedes national law in many areas and the introduction of a single currency is planned before the end of the decade. Then the experiment suffers huge setbacks as turmoil in international markets more or less breaks up the European monetary system and individual member states insist on exempting themselves from key aspects of the integration process.

What all of this shows us is that having a reliable feel for the national politics of European states is a vitally important matter. The transitions to democracy being attempted in Eastern Europe are informed crucially by the Western European experience. Western European states provide models that Eastern Europe aspires to but also lessons on what is to be avoided. And, despite all the ballyhoo about a future United States of Europe, the process of European integration is still essentially driven by political interests and demands that are shaped at the national level. Member states retain important veto powers—ultimately they can even opt out of the entire process, albeit at massive cost. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the process of European integration, although they are changing the face of modern Europe, emphasize the vital importance of having a solid understanding of the politics of European states.

OUR APPROACH

We set out in this book to discuss modern European politics. We do so from a distinctive point of view. First, we concentrate on the politics of representation, focusing especially on parties, elections, and governments. Second, our approach is wholeheartedly comparative. We organize our discussions around particular important themes in the politics of representation, not around particular important countries.

We are convinced that the benefits of our approach far exceed the costs. By restricting ourselves to the politics of representation, we give ourselves the space to take seriously the large body of comparative research and writing on this that can be found in the recent literature. By insisting on a comparative rather than a country-by-country approach, we give ourselves the opportunity to bring a much larger amount of evidence to bear on the problem at hand.

We feel strongly that many of the most important features of the politics of representation in modern Europe are overlooked by those who concentrate only on a few “important” countries. The smaller European democracies are often the sources of the most suggestive evidence on matters as diverse as the social bases of voting, electoral law, and coalition bargaining. If we want to find out about differences between urban and rural voters, for example, Scandinavia is one of the first places where we should start looking. If we want to find out how proportional representation electoral systems work, we do well to begin with the Netherlands. Comparing Ireland and Denmark is a good way to begin to understand what makes some minority governments stable and others not. The list could be extended indefinitely. Confining ourselves to a few big countries is not the way to come to grips with some of the most important and exciting features of the politics of representation in modern Europe.

Our way of doing things does have costs, of course, and it is as well to be aware of them. The most obvious has to do with depth. In a book of a certain size, if we broaden our coverage to look at a wider range of countries, then our treatment of each is inevitably bound to be less detailed. In our view, the benefits of adding more countries to the frame of reference are greater than the benefits of adding more detail on a small number of countries, but others may come to the opposite conclusion about this inevitable trade-off. There are plenty of other books for these people to read, so we need not feel too sorry for them, but we should remember that they do have a point. In taking several steps back to expand our field of view, we may lose sight of important detail—but we may also gain a better sense of perspective.

Another potential cost has to do with consistency. We cannot, obviously, discuss every European country in relation to every theme that we select. But, if we pick and choose those countries to illustrate particular points, the reader may not get a clear sense of what is going on in *any* particular European country. We adopt a three-pronged approach to this problem, which we hope allows us to get the best of both worlds. First, we do tend to concentrate in the text on those examples best suited to help us explore particular themes. We do this to maximize the benefits of our broadly based approach. Second, although some of our information comes from authors who studied only a limited subset of European countries, we do our best in tables summarizing particular themes to include entries for *every* European country with which we

are concerned. We do this to ensure consistency and completeness at least at the level of basic information.

Finally, we have selected a group of seven countries on which we lavish somewhat greater attention. These are Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden. We selected these countries because between them they provide considerable variation on most of the important dimensions of politics that we wish to consider. They give us a wide geographic spread, from far north to deep south. They include large and small countries; rural and urban countries; Protestant, Catholic, and “mixed-religion” countries; richer and poorer countries; countries with stable and with unstable governments; new and old democracies; the countries with the most and the least proportional electoral systems; and so on. No matter which examples we have used in the main text, we pause in our discussion at key points to present a short box that summarizes key information for each of the seven countries in our core group. In this way we allow interested readers to follow this core group through our entire discussion, reaping many of the benefits of the more restricted country-based approach while paying none of its costs.

MODERN EUROPE

We have had a difficult decision to make about how to deal with the rapidly unfolding developments in Eastern Europe. In the first edition we agonized over the matter but ultimately decided to exclude Eastern Europe entirely, on the grounds that the common postwar experience of Eastern European states had left a legacy that marked them off as quite distinct from Western European countries. That distinctive legacy is still there, but, a few years down the line, we can now see a striking divergence in the political and economic development of members of the former Eastern bloc. Four countries in particular, Hungary, Poland, and the two component parts of the former Czechoslovakia—the Czech Republic and Slovakia—appear to be moving politically and economically toward their Western European neighbors, with which they also share a considerable cultural heritage. We feel that it does now make sense to see these four countries as part of what we might think of as “modern” Europe. Accordingly, we have retitled the book in this second edition and included them, at least in a limited way, in our discussion.

We still face a problem, however, which is that the four former Eastern European countries we consider are still changing very rapidly and are still massively under-researched. For these reasons, we feel that we still cannot integrate them fully in our analysis. Lack of a detailed body of research accumulated over time means that there is simply no information available on many of the topics that we discuss in relation to the other European states. Rapid change means that much of the factual information we might gather would be correct at the time of writing but quickly go out of date and thereby become misleading. Our solution to this problem has been to prepare a stand-alone chapter on the four former Communist states we consider. This treats many of the themes covered in the rest of the book while providing some general historical background on their ongoing transitions to democracy. We will keep the possibility of integrating these countries fully into every chapter in the book firmly on the agenda for future editions.

We should also say a word about our coverage of western Europe's largest state, known for most of the postwar era as the Federal Republic of Germany. Before 1990, this state was familiarly referred to as West Germany, but after the absorption of the former communist-run East German state (the German Democratic Republic) this name ceased to be appropriate. In the following chapters, therefore, we have referred to "Germany" when discussing features of the current German state, but we also occasionally use the term "West Germany" when referring to events or patterns that applied to the reunification state.

Another country for which terminology is in some sense ambiguous is the United Kingdom. Formally, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland includes England, Wales, and Scotland (that is, Great Britain), as well as Northern Ireland. In the tables and displays that follow, we always use the term *United Kingdom*, or *UK*, for the sake of consistency. In the text, for stylistic reasons, we refer sometimes to Britain and sometimes to the United Kingdom.

PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

In this book we describe representative government in modern Europe in terms of an arena in which the hopes and fears of citizens are transformed by complex political interactions into the public policies that affect their everyday lives. At the end of this chapter we provide some basic information about modern European countries that should help set our subsequent discussions in context. In the remainder of the book, we concentrate on two basic aspects of representative government. The first concerns the institutions and "rules of the game" that create the arena for politics in modern Europe. The second concerns the political behavior that actually takes place in that arena.

Although every European country is obviously different, the institutions of politics in most modern European states share some fundamental similarities and are collectively quite distinct from those to be found in the United States, for example, something that makes politics in Washington a different business from politics in London, say, or in Paris, Brussels, Stockholm, Rome, or Madrid. This is because modern European states are almost all run according to the principles of "parliamentary government," a set of institutions that gives a particularly important role to political parties and parliamentary elections. Constitutionally, these rules have to do with the relationship between legislature, executive, and judiciary—that is, between parliament, government, and the courts—and with the role of the head of state.

In the next five chapters, therefore, we look at five different features of the institutions of representative government in modern Europe. We look in Chapter 2 at the role of the executive, and specifically at the head of state, the prime minister, and the cabinet—in a constitutional setting where the head of state is typically far less important than in the United States of America. In Chapter 3 we examine the role of the legislature, which is typically responsible not only for legislating but also for generating and maintaining a government. In Chapter 4 we explore the role of the courts in interpreting the constitution, at two quite different legal traditions that can be found in modern Europe, and at the way in which the judiciary can have an important political role, despite popular notions that it is "above" politics. In Chapters 5 and 6 we present the

more general context of national politics in modern Europe. In Chapter 5 we look at supranational politics and in particular at the European Union (EU), now such an important feature of the political landscape of modern Europe and such an integral part of the domestic politics of most member states. In Chapter 6 we consider both the civil service and subnational systems of local and regional administration.

Every one of the institutional features discussed in Chapters 2–6 has a fundamental impact on the context of representative government in modern Europe, shaping the political behavior that is the focus of the rest of the book. In Chapters 7–14 we move on to trace the behavior that transforms individual interests into public policies through a number of stages. We begin in Chapter 7 by looking at the “party systems” that determine the choices offered to voters at election time. Here we introduce the party systems in the seven countries to which we pay special attention. In Chapter 8 we present the “families” of parties that make up the cast of characters in most European elections; that is, at communist parties, social democratic parties, liberal parties, Christian democratic parties, the far right, and so on. In Chapter 9, we consider the social and economic patterns, or “cleavages,” that underpin party choice, at how these patterns might be changing, and at whether party systems themselves are in a state of flux. In Chapter 10, we step inside parties to examine some of their workings—how they choose leaders and candidates and how they raise money.

Chapters 7–10 thus take into consideration the politics of representation from the bottom up, from the perspective of voters and elections. Chapters 12 and 13 look at politics from the top down, from the perspective of legislatures and governments. Chapter 11 examines the institution linking the two levels, the electoral system that turns votes cast by the electorate into seats won by legislators. Many different electoral systems are used throughout Europe, which is the world’s premier laboratory for all who are interested in the workings of electoral law. Having examined how European legislatures are produced, we move on in Chapter 12 to look at what they do. The most important thing that they do, as we will have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, is to produce and support a government. Because few European parties win a majority of seats in the legislature, forming a government typically involves forming a coalition. In Chapter 13 we explore whether the formation of different governments with different party memberships actually makes a difference in the policies that eventually emerge. If governments do not make a difference, after all, it is difficult to see why we should take an interest in the parties, the elections, the coalition bargaining, and all of the other steps in the political process by which European governments are selected.

In Chapter 14 we acknowledge that the formal institutions of representative government are not the be all and end all of politics in modern Europe, and we look at politics outside the party system. Many political decisions—most of those to do with the vital area of economic policy, for example—are taken by governments without recourse to the legislature. These decisions may well be strongly influenced by those who set out to apply pressure to the government, whether as part of the political establishment in an alternative institutional setting or as political outsiders using the tried-and-tested techniques of pressure politics.

Finally, in Chapter 15 we present politics in four former members of the former Eastern bloc, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. We try as far as possible