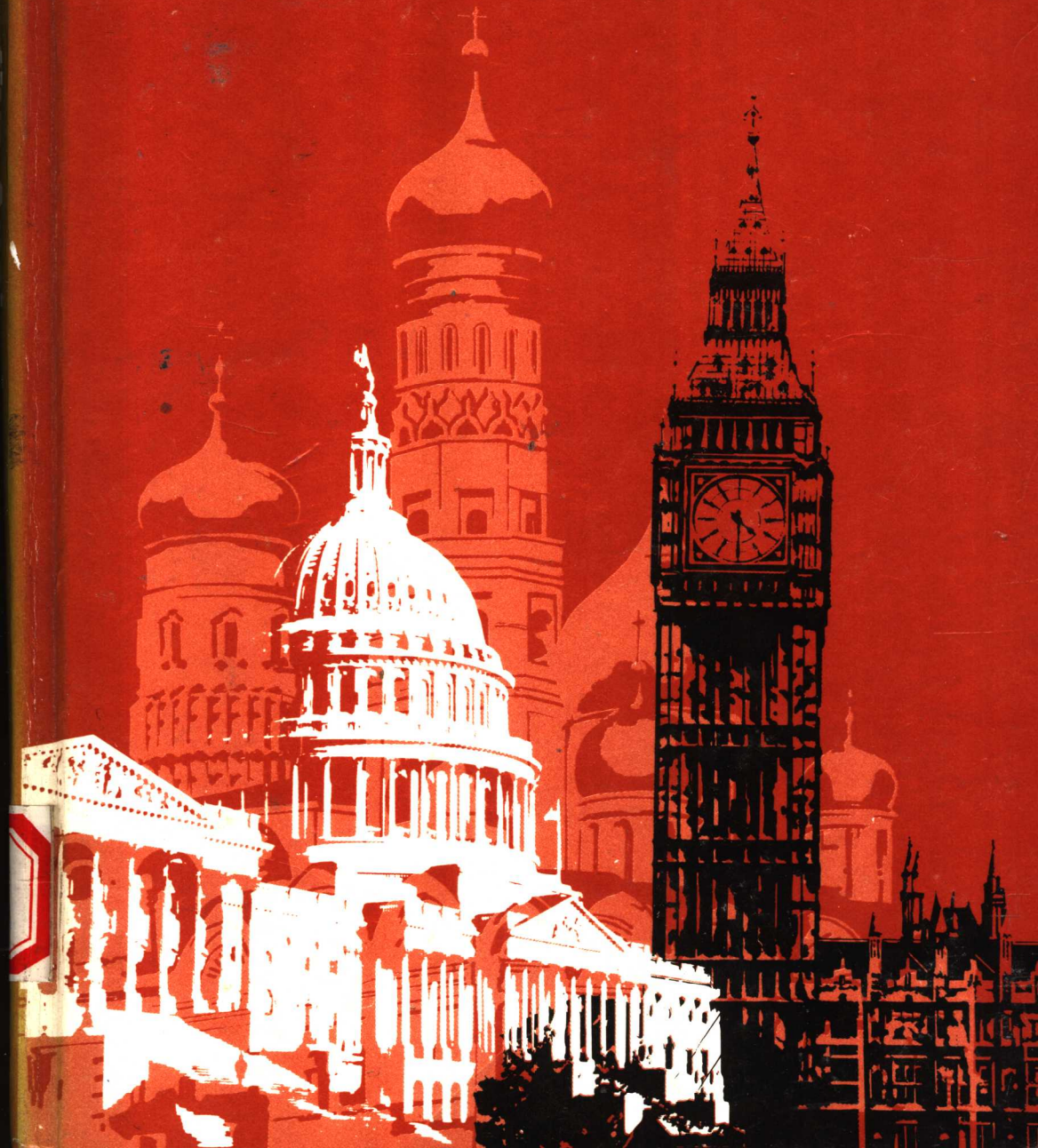
The Comparative Analysis of Politics

Monte Palmer and William Thompson



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Preface

In writing *The Comparative Analysis of Politics* we have attempted to delineate the major topics of comparative research and to provide a critique of the major approaches to comparative political analysis.

In mapping the principal paths taken by comparative analysts, we have attempted to avoid any commitment to a single general approach such as structural-functionalism, economic determinism, communication theory, input-output analysis, or exchange theory. Rather, we attempt to show how different approaches yield different answers. In many cases, no consensus has yet emerged on which approach is best suited for robust explanations and prediction—an emphasis or bias upon which we do insist in our frequently critical evaluation of comparative analysis. In addition, we have attempted to introduce some methodological terms and procedures as we discuss questions of substance rather than relegate these types of problems to a separate chapter or appendix. Finally, we have tried to supply descriptive examples of more general analytical concerns whenever possible.

We assume full responsibility for all errors of fact and interpretation. We wish to thank Ms. Karen Rasler and Princess Ann Palmer for their assistance in typing and editing the manuscript, and Dr. Marianne Githens, Goucher College, Baltimore, for her thoughtful and helpful critique of the manuscript.

Monte Palmer
William R. Thompson

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chapter 1

Introduction

Consider the following information.

1. Since the end of World War II Great Britain has held ten national elections. On at least four occasions the opposition party was victorious. British elections have seldom been marred by political violence.[1] Britain possesses two major political parties. Similar records of political stability have been established by the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries. The Scandinavian countries each possess four or five major political parties. Their elections have been almost totally free of electoral violence.[2] The United States possesses two major political parties. Its elections have not been free of political violence.

2. During the same period the Republic of Italy has suffered through no less than thirty "governments," a technical term referring to the parliamentary selection of a prime minister and a cabinet. By the spring of 1978 the Italian Communist Party, one of nine Italian parties, controlled approximately 30 percent of the seats in the Italian Parliament.[3] It is soon expected to participate in a government. Virtually all Italian elections are marred by violence.

3. Until recently Chile also possessed a multitude of political parties, one of the most popular of which was the Communist Party. The popular and free election of a Marxist president was followed within a period of several months by a coup d'etat and the demise of Chile's democratic institutions.[4]

4. Since the end of World War II more than eighty-five former colonies have gained their independence. All inherited democratic political institutions. Many have become military dictatorships. Indeed, the military dictatorship may have become perhaps the most common type of political institution in the world today. During their relatively brief experiments with democracy most former colonies possessed a plethora of political parties. Indonesia's national elections, for example, were contested by some eighty-six political parties.[5] Lebanese elections were regularly contested by some nineteen political parties.[6] India, until recently one of the most successful democracies among the developing areas, possessed a single dominant party. India's democracy is currently in a state of crisis.

5. Within the past ten years the democratic institutions of Nigeria, Pakistan, and Lebanon dissolved into civil wars so violent that accurate body counts became virtually impossible. Estimates run in the hundreds of thousands.

6. During the past thirty years the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have held periodic elections. In each instance a single party, the Communist Party, scored an overwhelming victory. The elections, at least by Western standards, were not considered democratic. Since its inception the domestic stability of the Soviet Union has increased dramatically.[7] This has not been the case in the People's Republic of China.[8]

From the perspective of comparative political analysis, the information provided in the above paragraphs raises several questions. Indeed, it raises several different types of questions.

One set of questions involves efforts to explain and predict political events in specific countries. Why have the political systems of Britain and the Scandinavian countries proven to be both stable and relatively free of electoral violence? Are they likely to remain so in the future? Why has Italian politics proven to be so chaotic? Will the growing strength of the Italian Communist Party spell the end of democracy in Italy? Why has political violence decreased in the Soviet Union? Can India's democratic institutions survive their current period of crisis?

A second set of questions is comparative in nature. It was noted above, for example, that both the United States and England possess enviable records of political stability. It was also noted that both England and the United States possess a two-party system. Finally, it was noted that both Italy and Chile possessed a multitude of political parties and that each has manifested severe political instability. Can it be concluded, therefore, that all states possessing two-party systems will be politically stable, while all states possessing a multitude of political parties will be unstable and prone to violence?

The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have ruthlessly suppressed all political groups standing in opposition to the Communist Party. Can it be assumed, therefore, that the Marxist president of Chile would also have schemed to suppress all opposition groups in Chile? Or can it be assumed that the participation of the Communist Party in an Italian cabinet (Communists already control several major Italian cities) would signal the eventual transformation of Italy into a Communist republic? Can it be assumed that all Communists share the same fundamental values and that all Communists, regardless of national differences, will inevitably strive toward the creation of a Communist dictatorship? Just how important is ideology in predicting and explaining political events?

Yet a third set of questions relates to what might be termed theory building. Specifically, is it possible to develop a grand, overarching theory of politics that could weave together explanations for all of the above illustrations? Could a single theory explain both the stability and order of the English and the inconceivably destructive civil wars that have recently scarred Nigeria, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Northern Ireland? Could this theory explain why the same democratic institutions that have served so well in Western Europe should fail so dismally in the developing areas? Could it specify the conditions necessary for a revival of democratic institutions in the developing areas? Could it accurately delineate the uniformities and differences within communist political systems? Could it offer some basis for predicting whether communist systems will grow increasingly diverse in their characteristics and policies or whether, given their common origins in Marxist philosophy, they will move inexorably toward the formation of a communist monolith?

Comparative politics, then, tends to be concerned with three levels of analysis: (1) the explanations and prediction of political events in specific areas; (2) charting, explaining, and predicting uniformities in political behavior and events across national boundaries; and (3) the eventual integration of single-country studies and cross-national studies into a grand, overarching theory of politics that would provide social scientists and policy makers alike with a basis for explaining and predicting political trends on a global basis.[9]

As one might anticipate, comparative specialists have made far greater progress in their analysis of specific countries than in their efforts to compare, explain, and predict political events and processes cross-nationally. Progress toward the development of an empirically based, grand theory of politics has been minimal.

The three levels of analysis mentioned above, although different in their focus, should be thought of as three interrelated steps rather than three diverse approaches to comparative government. Single-country studies, in addition to providing useful information about a specific state or region, should also provide the basis for comparing elements of the political process cross-nationally. Both specific-country studies and cross-national comparisons of specific elements of the political process should, in turn, provide the building blocks for a grand theory of politics.

SOME PREREQUISITES OF COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Comparative political research at all levels, whether the analysis of single nations, the charting of cross-national comparisons, or the nascent attempts at grand theorizing, requires certain fundamental prerequisites.

Three such fundamental requirements come readily to mind. First, we need to reach agreement on just what it is we mean by politics and the political process. Second, we need to reach agreement regarding the major components of the political process. Third, we need to reach agreement that the comparative study of the political process and its components should be pursued in the most scientific and rigorous manner possible. These requirements should seem quite logical. The more that comparative scholars share common definitions and units of measurement, the easier their results can be compared and contrasted cross-nationally and the more readily their findings can be woven into broader theories of politics.

Politics: Some Assumptions

Politics, in one of its more lucid definitions, is the study of "who gets what, when and how." A related definition suggests that politics is the authoritative allocation of scarce resources.

While definitions of politics often vary from author to author, most definitions of politics generally presuppose a series of underlying assumptions. The first assumption is that all human societies are faced with the problem of scarce resources. Whether the primary resource is wealth, status, or power, demand always exceeds supply. This point is well illustrated by Edward Bellamy's classic analogy of society to a grand stage coach:

> I . . . cannot do better than to compare society . . . to a prodigious coach which the masses of humanity were harnessed to and dragged toilsomely along a very hilly and sandy road. The driver was hungry, and permitted no lagging, though the pace was necessarily very slow. Despite the difficulty of drawing the coach at all along so hard a road, the top was covered with passengers who never got down, even at the steepest ascents. These seats on top were very breezy and comfortable. Well up out of the dust, their occupants could enjoy the scenery at their leisure, or critically discuss the merits of the straining team. Naturally such places were in great demand and the competition for them was keen, everyone seeking as the first end in life to secure a seat on the coach for himself and to leave it to his child after him. . . . For all that they were so easy, the seats were very insecure, and at every sudden jolt of the coach persons were slipping out of them and falling to the ground, where they were instantly compelled to take hold of the rope and help to drag the coach on which they had before ridden so pleasantly. It was naturally regarded as a terrible misfortune to lose one's seat, and the apprehension that this might happen to them or their friends was a constant cloud upon the happiness of those who rode. . . .
>
> It must in truth be admitted that the main effect of the spectacle of the misery of the toilers at the rope was to enhance the passengers' sense of the value of their seats upon the coach, and to cause them to hold on to them more desperately than before.[10]

The second assumption is that in order to prevent conflict resulting from distribution of scarce resources from destroying the fabric of society, the dominant groups in all societies evolve mechanisms for allocating resources for enforcing those decisions. These mechanisms, generally referred to as governments, may range from the massive governmental apparatus of modern industrialized states such as the United States, the Soviet Union, or Japan through the simple headship of a primitive tribe. Nevertheless, every society is assumed to possess some form of government.

The third assumption is that governments allocate scarce resources to some individuals while depriving others. Accordingly, policies pursued by governments are inherently unequal. This is true in both authoritarian and democratic states. It is true of states possessing socialist economies as well as of states possessing capitalist economies.

The fourth assumption is that constant pressure exists for the reallocation of scarce resources. Whether it takes the form of civil war, riots, voting, or diffuse grumbling, pressure by the "have nots" for the reallocation of resources is pervasive in all societies.

The fifth assumption is that because of the pervasive pressure by the "have nots" for the reallocation of resources, those individuals who benefit from the existing distribution of resources in a society, the "haves," actively engage in a pervasive effort to maintain the status quo.

The sixth assumption is that the more that the rulers of a society can persuade the mass that the established system of government is legitimate—that it is just and really serves the best interest of the masses—the more secure the position of the rulers, or "haves," will be in their pervasive struggle with the "have nots." The rulers of all societies thus attempt to secure their privileged positions by justifying their right to rule in terms of a grand religious or national myth.

Lest this last assumption seems to reflect the cynicism of the present era, one might ponder the following excerpt from Plato in which Socrates discusses the utility of the "grand lie":

> Now, said I, can we devise something in the way of those convenient fictions we spoke of earlier, a single bold flight of invention, which we may induce the community in general, and if possible the Rulers themselves, to accept?
>
> You seem rather shy of telling this story of yours.
>
> With good reason, as you shall see when I have told it.
>
> Out with it; don't be afraid.
>
> Well, here it is; though I hardly know how to find the courage or the words to express it. I shall try to convince, first the Rulers and the soldiers, and then the whole community, that all that nurture and education we gave them was only something they seemed to experience as it were in

> a dream. In reality they were the whole time down inside the earth, being molded and fostered while their arms and all their equipment were being fashioned also; and at least, when they were complete, the earth sent them up from her womb into the light of day. So now they must think of the land they dwell in as a mother and a nurse, whom they must take thought for and defend against any attack, and of their fellow citizens as brothers born of the same soil.
>
> You might well be bashful about coming out with your fiction.
>
> No doubt; but still you must hear the rest of the story. It is true, we shall tell our people in this fable, that all of you in this land are brothers; but the god who fashioned you mixed gold in the composition of those among you who are fit to rule, so that they are of the most precious quality; and he put silver in the auxiliaries, and iron and brass in the farmers and craftsmen . . . that ruin will come upon the state when it passes into the keeping of a man of iron or brass. Such is the story; can you think of any device to make them believe it?[11]

Taken collectively, the above assumptions stress the *dynamic* nature of the political process. Politics is the constant interplay between the rulers (elite) and the ruled. It is also pervasive conflict among competing elites for the right to rule. Formal political institutions, such as parliaments, politbureaus, and tribal leaderships, are the institutionalized focal point of this struggle. For the elite, formal institutions are one means of controlling the masses and of securing their position against competitive elites. For the masses, formal institutions symbolize the status quo and are the primary target of change.

Because formal political institutions are the focal point of political conflict, they, too, are in a constant state of change. Such change may be orderly, as in the recent evolution of American and British political institutions, or abrupt and violent, as in the case of Lebanon and Nigeria. Similarly, such change may lead to the strengthening of established political institutions, or it may lead to their decay.

Finally, the initial assumptions stress the vital role of human behavior in the political process. The conflict over scarce resources that lies at the heart of the political process is a conflict between human beings. It is human beings who utilize the formal political institutions of society to manipulate and control, and it is human beings who are both the object of elite control and the pervasive threat to its existence. The removal of the human element from the political equation would render political analysis a sterile and lifeless endeavor.

The Major Components and Themes of Comparative Political Analysis

If studies of the politics of specific areas are to be useful for purposes of comparative analysis, at least minimal agreement must exist among comparative specialists concerning the basic elements and themes of po-

litical analysis. Such a checklist of the main elements and themes most commonly studied by comparative specialists can, in large measure, be derived from the above discussion of politics and the political process.

Political institutions

Perhaps the most visible elements of the political process are the formal institutions of government. Such institutions—the constitutions, parliaments, courts, bureaucracies, and executive structures—provide the focal point for deciding "who gets what, when and how."

As the focal point or arena of the political process, the structure of a nation's political system undoubtedly influences and shapes its policy-making processes. The question that besets comparative analysts is "how much." To what extent can the political stability and relative tranquility of England and the Scandinavian states, to return to our earlier examples, be attributed to the specific structure of their political institutions? Could the political instability that has beset Italy be somehow remedied by changing its political system to make it more like that of the English? Could the developing areas overcome their awesome problems of political and economic development by borrowing more heavily on the "tested" institutions of the West, or are military regimes better suited to grapple with the problems of political development and change? A more elaborate discussion of these and related questions as well as a description of the main types of formal political institutions found in the world today, including a discussion of the military as a political institution, are provided in Chapter 3.

Elites

If the formal structures of government are central to explaining "who gets what, when and how," the study of elites must be at least as important. Elites dominate the formal institutions of government; they get most of what there is to have. Indeed, there is a significant school of political scientists who suggest that elites, defined as decision makers, are perhaps the single most important element in the political process. In their view, virtually all of the political events introduced at the beginning of this chapter might be explained in terms of elite analysis. The British and Scandinavian political systems are stable, in their view, because of the high-level consensus among British and Scandinavian elites as to the rules of the game. The dominant elites stick together. The same phenomena would explain the stability of the Soviet Union. The chaos of Italian politics and the mounting levels of political violence in China they would similarly attribute to the lack of consensus among competing Italian and Chinese elites. In much the same manner, the growing presence of military dictatorships in the developing areas might plausibly be explained by two facts. First, the competing elites in most of the developing areas were

hopelessly divided among themselves. Second, the military elites, having by far the most clout, used their superior force to crush their competitors.

The concept of elites, however, as we shall examine in Chapter 4, is deceptively complex.

The masses, political culture, and political socialization

Yet a third crucial element of comparative political analysis, if for no other reason than its magnitude, is the masses. Defining precisely what the masses are or exactly what influences the masses exert on the political process, however, has always remained somewhat of a puzzle to political analysts. Unlike formal institutions or elites, the influence of the masses upon policy is usually indirect and difficult to measure. Rather than the movers and shakers of society, the masses tend to be the moved and the shaken. The masses do influence policy, nevertheless, for it is the masses whom the elites must control if they are to remain in power, and it is the masses who must be mobilized if the elites are to achieve their goals. This relationship between the elites and masses can be illustrated by the simple observation that although elites make the formal decision to declare wars, it is the masses who must fight them. The motivation and skill of the masses do make a difference in the outcome of wars. Returning to our opening examples, the profound willingness of the masses in England and the Scandinavian countries to play by the rules and support their respective systems offers at least a partial explanation of their stability. Similarly, the profound unwillingness of large segments of the Italian masses to support their political system is at least one reason for the chronic instability of the latter.

How readily the masses can be mobilized to support elite goals, then, depends in large measure upon their perceptions and evaluation of their political system. The more that the masses are deeply committed to the political system, the more stable a regime is likely to be. The less committed the masses, the less stable the political system is likely to be. The overall assessment of the manner in which the masses perceive and evaluate the political system is often referred to as *political culture*. The process by which individuals learn or otherwise acquire their political culture is often referred to as the process of *political socialization*. In the previously cited quotation from Plato, for example, Socrates proposed to shape the political culture of the masses by socializing them with what he termed his "grand lie." The masses, political culture, and political socialization form the subject of Chapter 5.

Political linkage

The ability of elites to control and mobilize the masses, including their ability to socialize the masses to believe in the political system, depends

in large measure upon the linkage mechanism that binds the masses to their political institutions and to the elites who dominate those institutions. The more that the political system penetrates the masses, the more effectively it can educate (socialize) them to believe in the system and in the ideologies which justify the dominance of a particular set of elites. The more that the political system penetrates the masses, the more readily the elite can communicate its wishes and coordinate the mobilization of the masses in fulfillment of those wishes. The more that the political system can penetrate the masses, the more readily the elite can assess mass demands and either take steps to meet them, thereby building support for the system, or take defensive action. The more that the political system penetrates the masses, the more difficult it is for opposition to the system to develop unnoticed by the dominant elite.

What, then, are the linkage mechanisms that link the masses and elite? The most familiar are political parties. Other mechanisms include pressure groups, such as labor unions and professional organizations. In less developed societies the linkage process often relies on kinship and religious networks. All will be examined at some length in Chapter 6.

Total systems

Political scientists have attempted to predict and explain political events by analyzing and comparing the components of political analysis, such as institutions, elites, and masses. They have also attempted to predict and explain political events through the classification of different types of political systems. By classifying states into democracies or dictatorships, for example, comparative analysis *might* be able to better study the differences between democratic and authoritarian regimes. Such classifications might also help analysts determine what makes democracies tick and what, if anything, might be done to make states more democratic. Such studies might attempt to analyze, for example, why so many former colonies have forsaken the democratic institutions inherited from Western Europe or the United States and slipped into the ranks of the military dictatorship.

In addition to comparing states on the basis of how democratic or totalitarian they might be, comparative analysts have also sought to classify states by the level of their political and economic development. By tracing the development patterns of modern states, they suggest, one might possibly find patterns that will facilitate the economic and political modernization of the world's less developed states. Such comparisons would also facilitate the study of social and political change. How does political change occur? Are there prerequisites for change? Under what cirmumstances is change orderly or violent?

The difficulty of attempting to classify states on the basis of the

democratic or totalitarian attributes of their political systems is the subject of Chapter 2, as are efforts to classify states on the basis of their levels of political development.

Violence and stability

In discussing the major components of political analysis, we have emphasized two consistently recurring themes: political integration and political disintegration. The first has stressed the forces of political stability. What holds the political system together? How can control of the masses be strengthened? The second theme has stressed turmoil and change. Why is political stability such a rare commodity in the world today?

Whether by accident or design, a preponderance of comparative research has focused upon the process of integration and stability. Perhaps this bias reflects an inherent human tendency to promote and develop the causes of order and stability in a world beset with conflict. Reflecting this tendency, the discussion in the chapters which follow also tends to stress this search for order and stability. To compensate for this bias and to recognize a growing but underrepresented area of comparative research, we have included a separate chapter, Chapter 7, devoted to the analysis of political violence and its myriad causes.

Some Minimal Scientific Requirements of Comparative Political Analysis

Describing the subject matter of comparative political analysis is a relatively easy task, for more or less general agreement does exist about the basic components and topics of comparative analysis. A more formidable and unresolved problem lies in transcending broad general discussion of subjects such as democracy, elites, legitimacy, and violence and getting down to the nitty-gritty of specifying precisely what we mean when we use these terms and how we might measure them in a *valid* and *uniform* manner across national and cultural boundaries.

The most fundamental step in any form of scientific investigation is defining terms so they can be measured and classified.[12] Before one can classify states as democratic or authoritarian or traditional or modern, one must have a clear, measurable definition of what constitutes a democratic or a modern society. In much the same manner, each component of political analysis, whether studied in a single state or cross-nationally, must invariably be subject to rigorous definition. It is relatively easy to speak of the impact of elites in the political process, for example, but what precisely is an elite? Where does it start? Where does it end? How does one distinguish an elite from nonelites in one country—in the United States, for example? Can the same definitions be used to compare elites cross-nationally? Similar questions can be asked of all of the com-

ponents of political analysis described above. Indeed, discussing ways in which comparative analysts have attempted to grapple with the problem of defining the elements of the political process in empirically measurable terms forms an integral part of each of the chapters which follow.

A second step in attempts to scientifically predict and explain phenomena, political or otherwise, is to cast one's inquiry in the form of hypothetical causal statements: if A, then B. Consider, for example, the steps involved in testing the suggestion that the presence of multiple political parties in a political system leads to political instability: *if* multiple political parties, *then* political instability.

The first step in testing our hypothesis would be to operationalize our terms in a manner that would enable one to measure them with precision. In this case it would be necessary to specify precisely what we meant by a political party, by multiple political parties (how many are several), and by political instability. We could then proceed to test this hypothesis in a single state by collecting data sufficient to measure whether or not a connection did, indeed, exist. On the basis of our data the hypothesis would either be accepted, rejected, or modified to fit the data. A much better test of our hypothesis would be to gather data on the relationship between the existence of multiple parties and political instability in several countries, using identical definitions of political parties and violence in each. The cross-national comparison would be a better test of the hypothesis because it would give us greater confidence in our conclusions. The comparisons would provide greater information as to the specific conditions under which the number of political parties was or was not related to instability.

A third minimal requirement of the scientific method is that our hypothesis be accepted, rejected, or modified on the basis of empirical data.[13] Empirical data, simply stated, are data that can be observed either directly or indirectly by the human senses. As opposed to opinions or faith, they are data that are capable of measurement. The less that comparative analysis relies on opinion or belief and the more it relies on hard facts, the more reliable our observations will be.

As comparative analysts test the same hypothesis under the same definitions and research techniques in an ever larger sample of states, our ability to precisely relate the number of political parties to political violence will be improved. Eventually we might possibly be able to speak of an empirical theory of political violence. Our broadly based empirical theory of political violence might then be related to other empirically tested theories concerning the other components of politics until we approached the wonderful world of grand theory described earlier.

In stark reality, however, comparative politics has only begun its long road to theory.[14] We are groping toward the development of uniform

empirical definitions of the various components of the political process described above. Cross-national comparisons, while growing in number, tend to be limited to a few states. Accordingly, comparative analysis currently lacks a sufficient empirical base from which to embark upon a grand, empirically tested theory of politics. In this regard one might heed the wisdom of Sherlock Holmes:

> "This is indeed a mystery," I remarked. "What do you imagine that it means?"
>
> "I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist the facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. . . ."[15]

CONCEPTUALIZATION IN COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ANALYSIS

In place of an empirical theory of politics and to partially compensate for the lack of an overarching theory of politics, comparative analysts have attempted to develop conceptual frameworks. They have used these frameworks to view the political process as a whole and to suggest ways in which the empirical data we do possess might be fruitfully integrated.

Perhaps the most popular of the conceptual frameworks utilized by comparative specialists is systems analysis, an approach that has found its foremost elaboration in the works of David Easton.[16] Taking a relatively simple concept that found its origins in the biological sciences, Easton suggests that the process of authoritatively allocating scarce resources, i.e., politics, follows a uniform and systemic pattern in all societies. The political system per se is composed of the institutions established for making and enforcing decisions (the government) and the authorities that operate those political institutions (see Figure 1–1). In making their decisions, the authorities use the formal political institutions of a society to convert *inputs* (*demands and supports*) into *outputs* (*decisions or policies*).

Demands, as the term implies, are claims made by members of a society for a greater share of societal values, be they wealth, security, or status. The nature of demands may vary from a diffuse sense that "the natives are restless" to formal procedures, such as voting, to riots and open rebellion.

Supports are defined by Easton as "trust, confidence and affection toward the political system."[17] Supports may range from diffuse nonresistance to the system to the zealous taking of arms in its defense.

Feedback is the fluctuation in demand and support levels that result from the policies pursued by the ruling elite. Policies that decrease the distribution of values, such as high unemployment or increased taxes, are