

REGIERUNGEN DER EUROPÄISCHEN GROSSMÄCHTE  
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ЕВРОПЕЙСКИХ ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВ REGIERUNGEN DER  
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DRAGNICH  
AND  
RASMUSSEN

MAJOR  
EUROPEAN  
GOVERNMENTS  
FIFTH EDITION

# MAJOR EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS

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# Preface

This fifth edition continues the collaboration which began in the fourth edition. Alex Dragnich is responsible primarily for the section on the Soviet Union, while Jorgen Rasmussen is responsible for the other sections. Nonetheless, this edition continues to be a collaborative work which has developed out of and built upon the original single-author book. Those familiar with previous editions will find much that they are used to—particularly in the basic organization—but they also will note changes, based on some of the newer developments in the study of politics.

Four of the six main sections of the book deal with single major political systems. Although we do compare these systems to others, including the United States, basically we examine each system separately. These sections have been revised and updated. The amount of change has depended upon events in each country since the previous edition and the availability of new analyses of their politics. This edition contains more illustrative material and graphics where these help to clarify or emphasize a particular point being made in the text.

The Introduction discusses the study of comparative politics without detailed reference to a particular political system. This section seeks to provide a general guide to the study of political systems. It introduces topics that will be the main focal points in the sections dealing with a single country and seeks to explain why these particular themes deserve study. Thus it provides an outline that can be used to study countries not included in this book.

Part V is new to this edition. The first portion of this section, dealing with Eurocommunism, covers a subject not considered in any systematic

way in the previous edition. By the late 1970s this topic clearly had attained such importance to European politics that it merits consideration. Furthermore, this could adequately be done only in a comparative context and not as part of a section devoted to a single country. The latter portion of Part V combines topics previously covered in the final chapters of the British, French, and German sections. We decided we could assess the strengths and weaknesses of these political systems more effectively when they were compared and contrasted directly with each other rather than against some abstract standard. Evaluating these three democracies comparatively also enabled us to clarify the circumstances within which Eurocommunism has come to be a significant political development. Finally, the themes and organization of Part V provide the transition from European democracy to Soviet dictatorship. This was missing in the previous edition. Part V thus deals with recent significant political developments and also serves to integrate the book more effectively than in previous editions.

Studying a new subject usually requires learning a new vocabulary and becoming familiar with new concepts. We have tried to keep unfamiliar terms to a minimum and to avoid needless jargon. We seek to write clear, relatively untechnical prose. We introduce only those terms and concepts that aid fuller understanding of a subject and those that need to be known for further study in comparative politics.

We hope that students and faculty will find this edition to be useful and interesting. We are happy that some people appreciate our approach to the introductory study of comparative politics and we are happy to serve that clientele with this book.

In previous editions we have expressed our thanks to readers who have provided us with helpful comments. We are particularly pleased, in connection with this edition, to acknowledge the detailed and insightful observations of Peter B. Heller of Manhattan College and Robert C. Davey of Jackson Community College. Understandably, final responsibility for what is in this book must remain our own.

*January 1978*

ALEX N. DRAGNICH  
JORGEN RASMUSSEN

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# Introduction

## THE ESSENCE OF POLITICS

Politics is, as one eminent political scientist has said, about “who gets what, when, how.” In other words, politics is about conflict—its nature and the methods designed to cope with it. Some view the main function of organized government to be that of channeling conflict, that is, keeping it from erupting into violence. To be sure, politics is also concerned with wars, riots, and other disruptive acts, but in the main it deals with how society organizes to resolve conflicting and competing interests in ways that will not tear that society apart.

This book deals with the politics of four large, Western nations, each of which in the last century has known violent, as well as peaceful, political conflict. Britain has been the most stable, the least turbulent of the four. Domestic violence had been of little consequence in Britain during the 20th century until the late 1960s, when the dormant virus of religious discrimination and bigotry erupted anew in Northern Ireland. Thus in the 1970s snipings, fire bombings, and street fighting became common occurrences and a Catholic young lady even was tarred and feathered because she planned to marry a non-Catholic British soldier who was part of the peace-keeping force in Northern Ireland. In France the serious danger of an invasion of Paris by French paratroopers to seize control of the government brought one constitutional system to an end in 1958 and started the process for a new regime. Ten years later this regime found itself besieged by students and workers, who battled police in the streets and from behind barricades, events which contributed significantly to the process of driving the President from office the following year despite the fact

that he had served little more than half his term. Disruptive student demonstrations in the late 1960s in Germany made many wonder whether the country was returning to the street fighting and political assassinations that were rife during the Weimar Republic after World War I. That German experience with democracy ended when the Nazis came to power. Through their secret police and concentration camps they practiced terror and violence on a scale so vast as to be unbelievable. In Russia the autocratic rule of the Tsar was terminated at the time of World War I by a revolution and civil war, only to be replaced by an even more coercive and repressive regime. The Communists engaged in systematic execution of countless opponents and even purged hundreds of thousands of members of their own party. The millions of people sent to forced labor camps exceeded even the number confined by the Nazis. In the quarter of a century since the death of Stalin in 1953 the level of violence in Soviet politics has declined markedly, although dissidents and various minority groups are still subjected to persecution.

Violence is to be found in all societies, including the American. Sometimes it comes in cycles, alternating between adjustment or compromise and a lashing out in destructive acts. Also, the level of violence clearly differs from one society to another. Why should this be? Is it just that there are more bad people in the Soviet Union than in Britain? Is it because the Soviet leaders believe in "godless Communism" while the British are thought to believe in socialism, which, perhaps, is not quite so "godless?" And what about history? What difference does it make that France has had over a dozen different regimes in the last 200 years while Britain has had only one?

## THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD AND THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICS

These comments provide concrete examples of the fundamental problem of politics—how to maintain social order while processing conflict demands—and suggest why comparative study of politics is useful. As people begin to acquire some knowledge of government and politics in other countries, they are struck by the differences in political life. They investigate further to obtain additional information. Then they seek to account for the differences they have found: how can they explain the fact that things are one way in one country and another in another? Is life to remain a mystery—one surprise after another when things are pleasant and one frustration after another when they are not? Or can some pattern of events be discovered, an association or link among them which might suggest a causal relation? Such a necessary relation would explain the differences originally noted. But the explanation can be only a tentative

one until it is determined whether it is supported by the available evidence.

This is the process of making scientific discoveries, which are no more than new ways of thinking about familiar things. Such discoveries are desirable either for their practical utility or because their ability to explain why things happen as they do satisfies our curiosity. The familiar things explained are observed regularities—whenever it gets sufficiently cold outside, puddles of water freeze. These observed regularities are only descriptive reports, which do not explain anything. The mere fact that two things always have occurred together or in sequence is no guarantee that they will continue to do so. Thus the process of scientific discovery requires going beyond description to analysis.

The process of analysis separates an event into its component parts to help reveal relations, especially those which might not be readily apparent. This procedure helps to generate hypotheses—tentative solutions to problems, suggestions for interpreting data so that they make sense. The usefulness of these tentative solutions is tested through experimentation or observation. The experimental approach is preferable, since it tends to minimize the errors or distracting factors that are inherent in unplanned or unmanipulatable observations. By this process of verification, hypotheses are either rejected or transformed into laws.

A scientific law states the form and scope of a regularity. It tells how things known to be connected are related, whether, for example, they increase in size together or whether the one gets larger as the other gets smaller. It tells the circumstances in which the law applies, whether, for instance, it is true only when the temperature is above freezing. The significance of a law is that it implies that the stated relation is a necessary one, thus going beyond the mere report of an observed regularity.

When a number of laws whose scope has been established can be interrelated, the resulting system of knowledge is a theory. A theory's validity depends upon its ability to account for many diverse data simply and economically. The geocentric theory of the universe, for example, was abandoned not because it was disproven—it was not certain that the sun did not revolve around the earth—but because increasingly complex and elaborate explanations were required to make this theory conform with newly acquired information about the movement of heavenly bodies. As the explanations became more cumbersome the utility of continuing to cling to the theory decreased greatly and created pressures for a theory that could explain the available data more simply and would be more productive of useful subsidiary laws.

It is at this point that we come full circle in describing the process of scientific investigation. A theory helps to make a generalization into a law by providing reasons for the regularities observed. Furthermore, one can deduce from a theory what relations should prevail if the theory is correct

and thus search for regularities not previously discovered. Should these regularities then be found, they can be established as laws, further buttressing the theory's validity.

As we noted, experimentation is a key method in the process of scientific discovery. Unfortunately, it rarely is possible in political science; people, unlike laboratory rats, are not expendable and do not tolerate being manipulated. Therefore, political scientists usually have to settle for observation, for gaining their data from uncontrolled situations and events. In an effort to avoid being misled by the presence of extraneous factors in the research sites they are forced to use, political scientists endeavor to compare political phenomena across national boundaries. If they can discover the same regularity in more than one country, they feel more certain that there is some link between the associated objects and that the relation is not a spurious one. Thus cross-national generalizations are essential for an empirically grounded theory of politics.

The idea of comparing political systems is by no means new. Hundreds of years ago Aristotle made a good beginning when he attempted to classify the constitutions of several Greek city states. Some critics feel in fact that political scientists have not advanced much in their study of politics since that time. They believe that students of politics have been content merely to observe political phenomena superficially or impressionistically and to describe laws, constitutions, and formal governmental structures without attempting to investigate political practice and the significant forces that move a particular political system. The result is to settle for, at best, comparative description, rather than analysis. To improve this condition they advocate more systematic and rigorous research with as great precision as existing research techniques will permit.

If one had an encyclopedic mind and a computer's ability to manipulate data, it would be possible to compare all of the world's nations, both past and present, at the same time. Lacking these capacities, one must restrict one's focus and select from among available alternatives. In this book we have chosen to discuss four countries that have some characteristics in common but which also exhibit many interesting contrasts—for example, levels of political violence. All four of these nations are major international powers. (Perhaps one should be called a superpower to distinguish its much greater strength internationally.) And three of them are European nations, while the Soviet Union is both European and Asian. Thus although these nations differ from the United States in many ways, Americans should find them more familiar than they would African, Asian, or, perhaps, even Latin-American countries. Study of them should be most useful in gaining perspective on American political practices. It also means that the three European ones are more likely to have some elements in their history and heritage in common than they would if we selected a country from each of the corners of the world. This should aid

comparison, as should the fact that the Soviet Union's location and history have partially Westernized it.

The purpose of this book is to synthesize and report the results of previous investigation, thereby giving the reader a fuller knowledge of four important countries' political processes. This will be done from a comparative perspective so that the similarities and differences in these processes are emphasized. We will discuss some of the hypotheses and tentative explanations that seek to account for these differences and similarities. Our purpose is not so much to provide answers, however, as it is to raise questions and stimulate discussion, thereby encouraging further investigation. We hope that students will enter into a dialogue with the book. We wish to provide sufficient basic information to permit some generalization and to offer a few examples of useful generalizations based on this information. Thus it will be possible to move somewhat beyond the factual level toward abstraction and theoretical insight. This procedure should yield a fuller understanding of the process of governing.

## **DEMOCRATIC AND AUTOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEMS**

We have observed that social conflict is common and the attempt to deal with it nonviolently a constantly pressing concern. Why should this be true? An ultimate answer would turn on one's conception of the nature of humans. Are people fundamentally good and simply corrupted by malignant social structures, as Communists assert? Or are they essentially and incorrigibly sinful, as Christians believe? We need not go this far, however, in answering the question. It is sufficient to observe that even in a prosperous country like the United States resources are scarce and, therefore, some people will not be satisfied with their allotment. If it is not to be everyone for themselves on the basis of whatever modes of conduct they choose to follow, if there is to be any kind of community, then there must be some rules, behavioral boundaries, accepted practices or procedures to structure action. Only if individual and group power is restrained can there be any kind of social order. Someone has to make the rules; someone has to assign the benefits; someone has to be able to apply any sanctions necessary to implement these decisions. A society's government is composed of whatever structures in that society are widely recognized as being properly engaged in these activities and as possessing as well the exclusive authority to set the limits within which force may be used legitimately. Political struggle between various segments of society involves their utilizing whatever power they may possess to try to control the government. Those segments that succeed will be able to make au-



thoritative decisions—those that are binding throughout the society—or alter the procedures for making them.

Thus there are two basic political problems. First, given conflicting individual goals, wants, and needs, how is it possible to maintain social order? How is it possible to get people to obey authoritative decisions that they do not like? Especially, how is it possible to get them to do so voluntarily, assuming an ethical preference for a minimum of coercion? Second, how can the exercise of authoritative power be controlled to prevent the loss of freedom? In ancient Rome the question was put: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* “Who will guard against those who themselves are guards?” How can we insure that those to whom we entrust the power to settle conflicts nonviolently do not abuse their power to tyrannize everyone? By what means can we call the wielders of political power to account to ensure that the use of authoritative power is responsible?

Whether political decision makers are accountable, whether political power is responsible—on such considerations turn one of the fundamental distinctions between types of political systems. Systems where these conditions prevail are democracies; those where on balance they do not are autocracies. Democracy is government by the people. But, since a nation obviously cannot be run by a mass town meeting, the ultimate test of democracy lies in whether those who govern can be removed peacefully when they no longer represent the majority will.

A democratic political system is built upon certain basic beliefs and principles. Although there is widespread agreement in non-Communist countries on these, the actual institutional arrangements of particular democracies vary considerably. At the center of the democratic faith is the belief that the individuals are important, that political institutions exist to serve them rather than the reverse, and that the government, therefore, exists by virtue of their consent. Closely related is the belief that individuals can manage their own affairs better than someone else can do it for them. This does not require assuming that people make no mistakes, that they do not at times misconceive their own best interests. It assumes only that in the long run people usually are good judges and can distinguish wise from unwise policies and capable from incompetent leaders. And it asserts that those mistakes which occur are preferable to paternalistic government, however efficient it might be, for without the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them, human growth would be impossible. People who were not permitted to think and decide for themselves but were allowed to act only on command would no longer be human beings, but animals or robots.

Nevertheless, there must be some limits on individual behavior. In seeking to develop themselves, individuals cannot be permitted to infringe on the rights of others to attempt to realize their potential. This is why democratic government always is in a state of dynamic tension. The im-