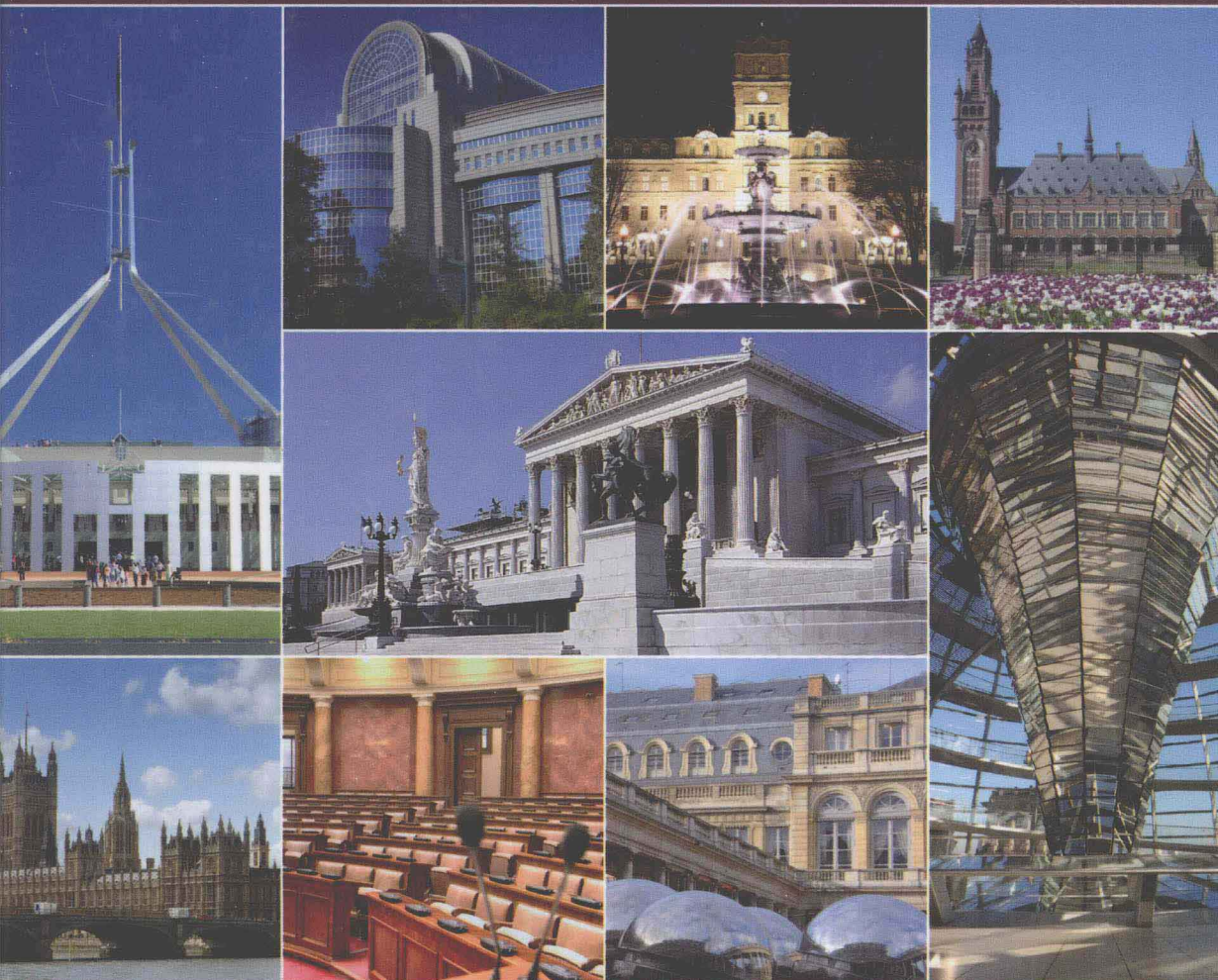


# Comparative Constitutional Law

Edited by

**Tom Ginsburg and Rosalind Dixon**



RESEARCH HANDBOOKS IN COMPARATIVE LAW

Series Editors: **Francesco Parisi** and **Tom Ginsburg**

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*Edited by*

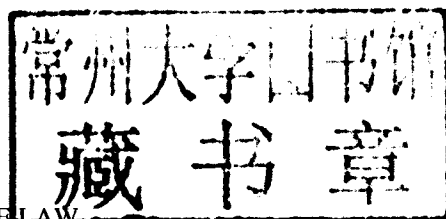
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RESEARCH HANDBOOKS IN COMPARATIVE LAW

**Edward Elgar**

Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA

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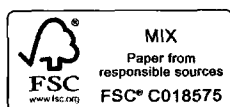
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Published by  
Edward Elgar Publishing Limited  
The Lypiatts  
15 Lansdown Road  
Cheltenham  
Glos GL50 2JA  
UK

Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.  
William Pratt House  
9 Dewey Court  
Northampton  
Massachusetts 01060  
USA

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010939197



ISBN 978 1 84844 539 0 (cased)

Typeset by Cambrian Typesetters, Camberley, Surrey  
Printed and bound by MPG Books Group, UK

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## Acknowledgements

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Our thanks to Dean Michael Schill and the Russell Baker Scholars Fund at the University of Chicago Law School for support for this project. We are also grateful to Chantelle Hougland, Youssef Kalad, Claudia Lai and Emily Winston for research assistance.

Some of the material in Chapter 13 first appeared as Ronald J. Krotoszynski, Jr., 'The Shot (Not) Heard 'Round the World: Reconsidering the Perplexing U.S. Preoccupation with the Separation of Legislative and Executive Powers', 51 *Boston College Law Review* 1 (2010). We gratefully acknowledge the permission of the *Boston College Law Review*.

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# 1. Introduction

*Rosalind Dixon and Tom Ginsburg*

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Comparative constitutional law is a newly energized field in the early 21st century. Never before has the field had such a broad range of interdisciplinary interest, with lawyers, political scientists, sociologists and even economists making contributions to our collective understanding of how constitutions are formed and how they operate. Never before has there been such demand from courts, lawyers and constitution-makers in a wide range of countries for comparative legal analysis. And never before has the field been so institutionalized, with new regional and international associations providing fora for the exchange of ideas and the organization of collaborative projects.

This *Handbook* is one such collaborative project, a small effort to provide an overview of the field. It is inherent that any such effort will be incomplete, and we surely recognize the limitations of any effort to distill such a rich field into a single volume. But we also believe that the time has come for some organization of the various issues and controversies that structure academic and legal debate. As the field matures, such efforts will help to advance scholarship to the next level, by focusing attention on outstanding questions as well as raising awareness of issues worth pursuing in under-analyzed jurisdictions.

This Introduction provides a brief history of the field, and wrestles with the definitional issues of the boundaries of the constitution. It then draws out the common themes that emerge from a reading of the chapters, particularly as they relate to patterns of constitutional similarity versus difference, or convergence versus divergence. The conclusion briefly speculates on future directions for the field.

## 1 COMPARATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL LAW: A THUMBNAIL HISTORY

The field of comparative constitutional studies can be traced back at least to Aristotle's *Politics*, which systematically evaluated the constitutions of the Greek city states to inform normative theorizing on optimal design. Classical thinkers in Imperial China, India and elsewhere also spent some time thinking about the fundamental principles of statecraft, arguing about matters that we would call constitutional. In the Western intellectual tradition, such analysis continued through many of the great political thinkers, from Machiavelli to Montesquieu to John Stuart Mill. In the 17th century, state-builders in the Netherlands undertook extensive study of ancient and contemporary models to resolve constitutional problems of the nascent Dutch republic, finding particular inspiration in the proto-federalism of the biblical Israelites (Boralevi 2002). In the 18th century, besides Montesquieu's foundational exploration, lesser known figures such as Gottfried Achenwall and Johann Heinrich Gottlieb von Justi undertook surveys of political forms (Marcos 2003: 313). Comparative constitutional study thus has a long and distinguished lineage.

## 2 Comparative constitutional law

It is the rise of the written constitutional form, conventionally understood to have emerged in full flower in the late 18th century, that spurred the field to develop more systematically and to become distinct from political theory *per se*. The enlightenment thinkers of the French, Polish and American projects saw written constitutions as acts of purposive institutional design, for which wide study was a desirable, even necessary, feature. They thus engaged in extensive examination and debate about the appropriateness of particular models. In turn, the models they produced, as channeled through the liberal 1812 Spanish Constitution of Cadiz, influenced the early constitutions of Latin America: the 1821 Constitution of Gran Colombia, the 1830 and 1832 Constitutions of New Granada, the 1830 Constitution of Venezuela, the 1823 and 1828 Constitutions of Peru, the Argentine Constitution of 1826, the Uruguayan Constitution of 1830, and the Chilean Constitution of 1828.

Throughout the 19th century, new state-builders, initially in Latin America and Western Europe but also in Japan, sought to adopt the new technology of the written constitution, and in doing so needed to engage in practical comparisons about which institutions were optimal. As a result, constitutional compilations became more popular, focusing on both European and Latin American countries (Marcos 2003: 314–16). The method involved a mix of normative and positive analysis, and in turn informed drafting exercises in new states and old (Takii 2007).

The 19th century also saw the rise of the academic discipline of comparative law, culminating in the International Congress of Comparative Law in 1900 (Riles 2001; Clark 2001). The zeitgeist was captured by the notion of legal science, an internal and autonomous study of law, using distinctively legal forms of reasoning to determine the answers to normative questions. Scholars sought to examine the scientific principles of law that provided a universal underlying structure to inform the drafting of civil codes. The comparative method was also used by those who sought to link legal science to social science, exemplified by Henry Sumner Maine's (1861) monumental efforts to discover the origins and development of legal institutions. Comparison, then, was a natural part of the milieu of 19th century jurisprudence, but the relative dearth of constitutional adjudication meant that there was little attention to that topic.

Perhaps as a legacy of this era, comparative law was to focus heavily on the private law core of Western legal systems for much of the next century. By and large, the great figures of Western comparative law did not place public law in their sights, preferring to ascribe to the public law a particularity and responsiveness to *local* values. In contrast, private law was seen as embodying common and universal features, derived ultimately from the Roman tradition. There was, to quote one such effort, a common core of private law (Bussani and Mattei 2002). The only comparable 'core' in the public law sphere was embodied in international human rights law, which formed a template of minimum content that constitutions were encouraged to adopt into local law. In the early 1950s, there was a burst of interest in the field in the United States, with many law schools offering a course in comparative constitutions, and such figures as Erwin Griswold and William Douglas writing on the topic (Fontana 2011). But for the bulk of the 20th century, comparative constitutional law was not a vigorous or prominent field for writing by academic lawyers.

Other disciplines, however, did focus on constitutional comparison. With the formation of political science as a modern discipline in the United States in the early 20th century, constitutional studies formed an important part of the core curriculum, with comparison being at least a part of the approach. The sub-discipline of public law spent a good deal of energy

examining constitutional texts and describing the various political institutions they created, both to inform potential borrowing and also to understand how systems operated (Shapiro 1993).

With the behavioral revolution in the 1940s and 1950s, however, social scientists turned away from formal texts as objects of study, and instead sought to examine the 'science' of government decision-making. Public law scholars turned to judicial behavior, examining the micro-foundations of legal decisions rather than the broader structures within which judges were embedded. This necessarily involved a turn away from formal institutions and toward individual agents. Formal institutions such as law were seen to some degree as façades masking interests and 'real' politics.

Two developments in the late 20th century – one academic and one in the world – coalesced to provide a fruitful environment for the growth of comparative constitutional studies. The academic development was the revival of various institutionalisms in the social sciences (March and Olsen 1989; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Clayton and Gilman 1998). Sociologists and some political scientists began to emphasize that individual agents were embedded in broader institutional structures, and that these structures helped to determine outcomes. From another angle, economists moving away from neoclassical models began to understand that rules were important (Buchanan and Tullock 1961; North 1991). Institutions were defined as the rules of the game that structured behavior. Constitutions, as the social devices that structure the creation of rules, were the ultimate institutions worthy of analysis. Hence there was a turn in economics to understanding constitutional structures. With some exceptions (Brennan and Pardo 1991; Voigt 1999), the literature in constitutional political economy focused more on theory than empirics, but it did provide a set of working assumptions and hypotheses for analyzing constitutions.

The late 20th century also saw epochal changes in the real world that made it hard for academics to ignore constitutions. The third wave of democracy beginning in the mid-1970s brought new attention to constitutions as instruments of democratization, and the emergence of new states following the end of the Cold War prompted a new round of efforts to theorize and analyze institutional design (Elster et al. 1998; Sunstein 2001; Holmes 1995). In particular, constitutional design became a central focus for ethnically diverse states in the hope that proper institutions could ameliorate conflict (Choudhry 2008; Ghai 2001; Horowitz 1991). There was a revival of interest in federalism and other design techniques (Le Roy and Saunders 2006).

A related development was the secular increase in the role of courts in many societies, a phenomenon known as judicialization (Tate and Vallinder 1995). Designated constitutional courts were prime locations for judicialization in many countries, and the phenomenon was examined by lawyers and political scientists interested in particular countries (Kommers 2002; Stone 1992; Volcansek 1990). The spread of judicialization and constitutionalization meant that there were both many more contexts in which the operation of the constitutional system 'mattered' as well as much more demand for comparative analysis. Some of this work was implicitly comparative, but most of the work in the 1990s considered a single jurisdiction (but see Baun and Franklin 1995).

With the rising prominence of constitutional courts as loci of major social and political decision-making, it became apparent that some of the problems courts were confronting were recurring in different countries. Many new democracies, for example, had to deal with lustration and other issues of transition (Teitel 2002), economic transformation, and electoral

issues. These courts quite naturally began to pay attention to how the issues were resolved in other countries, especially the established democracies with well-developed jurisprudence on similar questions. Courts were also in dialogue about the interpretation of international human rights instruments, and what limitations might be acceptable within a free and democratic society. This phenomenon of transnational judicial dialogue was in fact quite old, but received renewed attention and was heavily criticized by judicial conservatives in the United States. The critique prompted a spate of work on the appropriate role for judicial borrowing across jurisdictions (see Chapter 31 by Saunders in this volume). Indeed, in part for this reason, the early 21st century has seen a veritable explosion of interest in the field.

## 2 COMPARATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL LAW: BOUNDARIES OF THE FIELD

An important question raised by the growth of the field of comparative constitutional law is how to define the outer boundaries of the phenomenon to be studied. The study of comparative constitutional law, most scholars agree, is something distinct from the study of comparative private law or non-constitutional law, but scholars also differ significantly in how they draw this distinction. Furthermore, the increasingly global context of constitution-making, in which norms are developed across borders, requires some attention to the relationship between constitutions and international law.

Perhaps the most straightforward way in which to define the constitutional domain is by reference to the text of legal instruments that are expressly labeled by their drafters as ‘constitutional’. This is the approach taken, almost by necessity, by those scholars in the field who do large-scale empirical work: a good example in the *Handbook* is Chapter 7 by Tom Ginsburg on constitutional endurance. It is also an approach frequently adopted by scholars engaged in more qualitative research: the clearest examples of this are found in Part I of the *Handbook*, in those chapters dealing with questions relating to constitutional design and redesign, but such an approach is also an important definitional starting point for several later chapters, such as those by Sujit Choudhry and Nathan Hume, Dennis Davis, Donald Kommers, Ron Krotozynski, Vicki C. Jackson and Jamal Greene, and Kim Rubenstein and Niamh Lenagh-Maguire.

A second approach focuses on the idea of entrenchment, or the degree to which certain legal rules are immune from change by ordinary as opposed to super-majority legislative processes, either as a matter of legal form or political convention. While formal entrenchment may often coincide with a text-based approach (i.e. whether a norm is included in a written document labeled constitutional), other norms can be informally entrenched as a practical matter, and hence might be considered constitutional in some sense. A focus on the entrenchment criterion may offer quite distinctive answers as to the scope of the comparative constitutional field. Few contributions to the *Handbook* in fact adopt this approach, however, likely because it is difficult in the space of a short chapter to give detailed consideration to the degree to which such informal conventions exist.

A third approach, which is more common among contributors to the *Handbook*, is more functional, and defines the constitutional domain by reference to the role of constitutions in both ‘checking’ and ‘creating’ government power. This understanding is most explicit in Rick Pildes’ contribution to the *Handbook*, but also runs through a number of other chapters,

including those by Tom Allen, Nicholas Bamforth, Claire Charters, Oren Gross, Janet Hiebert, Kate O'Regan and Nick Friedman, Kent Roach, and Mark Tushnet. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this approach by these authors is their attention to statutes such as the UK Human Rights Act 1998, New Zealand Bill of Rights 1990 and the 1992 Israeli *Basic Law on Human Dignity and Liberty*, without detailed inquiry as to the informal entrenchment of such instruments. Another indication is the treatment of constitutions, or constitutionalism, as having an inherently 'pro-rights' orientation: this is implicit, for example, in Kent Roach's suggestion (following Kim Lane Scheppele 2006) that international law may have an 'anti-constitutional' dimension in the anti-terrorism context (see Chapter 29), and Tom Allen's suggestion that constitutional instruments tend to exhibit an intrinsic – as opposed to purely instrumental – commitment to individual rights (see Chapter 27). David Schneiderman, for his part, criticizes this kind of teleological approach to the definition of the field – which he labels 'global constitutionalism "as project"' – but in doing so ultimately goes on to propose a functional definition of the 'constitutional' domain, whereby constitutional norms are defined by reference to their role in allocating political power.

A fourth approach is more sociological and open-textured, and linked to the way in which national actors understand domestic legal norms as constitutional. This approach is implicit in Gary Jacobsohn's chapter on constitutional identity; Victor Ferreres Comella's chapter on constitutional courts; Frank Michelman's chapter on the interplay between constitutional and ordinary jurisdiction; Stephen Gardbaum's chapter on the structure and scope of constitutional rights; Adrienne Stone's chapter on freedom of expression; Cheryl Saunders' chapter on comparative engagement by courts; and David Fontana's chapter on the way in which courts do (and ought to) control their docket.

Each of these approaches involves a somewhat different trade-off between objectivity and clarity, on the one hand, and the potential for under- and over-inclusiveness, on the other (compare Dixon and Posner (forthcoming)). The lack of agreement, even at this preliminary definitional level, illustrates both the methodological pluralism of the field, but also our contention that significant work still remains to be done by scholars in the field.

### 3 COMPARATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL LAW: A STUDY IN DIFFERENCE OR SIMILARITY?

A central question almost all of the contributors to the *Handbook* take up is the degree to which, in various constitutional sub-fields, one observes patterns of constitutional similarity or even convergence over time.

For some authors, this is largely a question of identifying patterns of constitutional similarity, or difference, within a particular sub-group of countries. These authors' very careful and detailed consideration of the constitutional position in a number of countries makes it challenging to address the issue of convergence on a truly global scale (see e.g. the chapters by Jackson and Greene, and Rubenstein and Lenagh-Maguire). However, even for these authors, the different constitutional models or archetypes they identify may suggest at least some tentative conclusions about global constitutional patterns. Other authors explicitly aim to consider the degree to which there is general constitutional similarity or convergence, in a particular area, across the globe.

The most common pattern that authors in the *Handbook* identify is one of broad similarity at an abstract constitutional level, together with significant heterogeneity or polarization (i.e. similarity only among countries in a particular constitutional sub-group, and not across different sub-groups of countries) at a more concrete or specific level of constitutional comparison. For example, in Part I, Dixon notes that while almost all countries worldwide now include formal provision for constitutional amendment (Chapter 6), the frequency and function of formal constitutional amendment varies significantly across countries, as does the way in which countries' constitutions make it more difficult for legislatures to pass constitutional amendments as opposed to ordinary legislation. Ginsburg notes both a pattern of broad similarity across countries when it comes to the life-span or endurance of constitutions – most constitutions for most countries die quite young, but there is significant regional and other variation in both the observed and predicted rate of endurance (Chapter 7).

In Part II, in exploring questions of constitutional identity and membership, Gary Jacobsohn suggests important commonalities across countries in how they have forged a 'constitutional identity' over time, by confronting various sources of disharmony within their own constitutional system or traditions, but also notes important differences among countries in the role played by constitutional text, history, and different institutions and understandings of constitutionalism. Claire Charters identifies a similar pattern in constitutional responses to indigenous peoples: she notes the way in which, in all three countries she studies, there has been a period of 'official respect for indigenous peoples' sovereignty and control over their land' followed by a period of retreat in the state's willingness to recognize enforceable obligations towards indigenous people; a later period of expanded rights-based recognition, followed by political backlash; and the persistence of major differences on more specific constitutional questions, such as the status of treaties with indigenous peoples, issues of sovereignty and jurisdictional control. And Kim Rubenstein and Niamh Lenagh-Maguire again identify a pattern of only very abstract similarity among countries in their definition of citizenship and the boundaries of the constitution: they show that Australia, Canada and Israel all share a quasi-constitutional approach to the regulation of citizenship, as compared to the explicitly constitutional approach taken in the United States, but they also show that the jurisdictions vary greatly in how they see the relationship between statutory definitions of citizenship and constitutional norms.

In Part III, a number of authors reach similar conclusions in the context of questions of constitutional structure. In the context of legislative-executive relations, Ronald Krotoszynski suggests that 'even though concerns over the constitutional separation of powers are widely shared in other democratic republics, the specific US concern with the conflation of legislative [and executive] power, and the concomitant commitment of enforcement of this separation of powers by the federal judiciary, has failed to gain much traction' (Chapter 13). In the context of constitutional emergency regimes, Oren Gross likewise suggests that the pattern in democratic societies 'has almost invariably been [one based on] "models of accommodation"' (Chapter 19), and that, in most democracies, there is 'explicit constitutional reference to emergencies', but that there are also both clear exceptions to this pattern of explicit constitutional regulation (such as in the US, Japan and Belgium) and also significant differences among countries in their approach to questions such as which institutions are authorized to declare an emergency, and by what means; whether to adopt a unitary or multi-level approach to the definition of emergencies; and the effects of declaring an emergency, particularly on the enjoyment of individual rights.

In Part IV, in exploring constitutional rights protections, many authors identify a similar pattern. Donald Kommers, for example, in writing about abortion rights suggests that there is a seeming ‘transnational consensus that unborn life (at some stage) and personal self-determination are both worthy of constitutional protection’, and also increasing convergence among countries such as the US and Germany in exactly how they balance these competing commitments. But he also finds significant differences between Germany, the US, and Ireland in how they treat the constitutional status of the fetus and the nature of the right at stake for women: in Ireland, both the fetus and women are understood to enjoy a ‘subjective’ right to life; in Germany, women are understood to have a right to dignity or development of the person, whereas the fetus is protected by the state’s duty to affirm the value of fetal life, as an objective constitutional value; and in the US, women’s rights are understood largely in terms of liberty, rather than dignity, and the protection of fetal life as a compelling state interest – rather than constitutional duty. In the context of constitutional protections of human dignity, Paolo Carozza, in turn, notes a high degree of global consensus on the importance of respect for such a right, but also enormous variation among countries in how they understand the concept and its relationship to different sides of various rights debates.

Similarly, in writing about constitutional equality rights, while (former Justice) Kate O’Regan and Nick Friedman note that ‘the right to equality is found in nearly all modern democratic constitutions’ (Chapter 26), they also suggest that there is significant heterogeneity among countries in the way in which this right is implemented. They identify four distinct approaches in four different countries (i.e. the US, Canada, the UK and South Africa): in the US, at least under the 14th Amendment as opposed to statutory anti-discrimination provisions such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act 1964, they note ‘an equal treatment approach’; in Canada, a ‘disparate impact’ approach; in the UK a disparate impact plus ‘ambit’ test; and in South Africa, what they label a ‘substantive equality’ approach. In writing about constitutional responses to terrorism, post 9/11, Kent Roach likewise argues that there has been quite significant constitutional similarity – though in a quite different form to what many commentators suggest: rather than being generally deferential, courts have in fact, he suggests, not been particularly deferential in this area (Chapter 29). However, the precise way in which this has played out has also varied significantly by country with the use by various courts of administrative law and statutory interpretation tools, as well as more conventional forms of constitutional review. And in the context of gay rights, while Nicholas Bamforth devotes much of his attention to identifying institutional and substantive parallels between countries, he also stresses that ‘the levels of moral controversy and social disagreement surrounding the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships var[ies] between jurisdictions’ (Chapter 30).

In Part V, in writing about the way in which constitutional courts control access to their docket, David Fontana suggests the existence of broad – albeit hitherto under-appreciated – similarities among courts in their ability to control access to their docket, while also noting a range of more concrete differences among courts in the mechanisms they have for exercising such control.

Some authors put more emphasis on constitutional similarity across countries, arguing that there is in fact far greater similarity, in their particular field, than is generally thought to be the case. Helen Irving, for example, argues in Part I that when it comes to women’s participation in constitution-making, there is a much longer history, and thus broader pattern of similarity, concerning such participation than many constitutional commentators appreciate: while (unlike modern constitutions) many older constitutions were drafted without direct