1

WHAT IS COMPARATIVE POLITICS?

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Comparative politics is a very rich and dynamic field. It is especially rich because its range of inquiry, its laboratory—really a living, ever-changing laboratory—is all the world's political systems. As of this writing, this includes some 180 independent countries plus assorted territories, colonies, and other entities.

The majority of these countries are listed in the accompanying Table 1, "Basic Indicators for the World's Countries." This table provides basic information on the population of each country, its geographic size, its average per capita (per person) income in a given year (1997), as well as its *rate* of growth per year over the preceding ten years. The table is fascinating to study because it enables one to place one's own country in comparative context, to locate other favorite countries or those in which one is particularly interested, and to see the broad patterns of similarities and differences that exist between countries. (Table 2 shows the basic indicators for countries that do not report their basic data or have populations of less than one million.)

Note that the table is arranged starting with the poorest or least developed countries and ranging up to the richest or most developed countries. The table is derived from figures compiled by the World Bank, which means their accuracy is probably as good as any; roughly comparable figures are also available from the United Nations and other reliable sources. We have used the World Bank figures here because they go beyond just a straightforward listing to also place countries in various developmental categories.

The first category is *low-income* countries. This category includes fifty countries (plus some others for which no data are available), located mostly in Africa, Asia, Central Asia, and Latin America, which are among the poorest in the world. These are countries that are not only mired in poverty

but whose social and political institutions are often underdeveloped and unstable as well. A very high percentage of them are dictatorships.

The second category is *middle-income* countries, a group of fifty-six countries, which are further subdivided into lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income. The lower-middle-income category includes a number of countries from Latin America and the somewhat better-off countries of the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia. These are, generally, countries that are developing and becoming better off but are doing so slowly. The upper-middle-income countries include the more prosperous countries of Latin America, the Middle East, and East Asia—formerly underdeveloped countries that are now "making it" and becoming developed and modern nations. Note that this category also includes some of the poorest of the European countries, particularly those in Eastern Europe.

The next category is what the World Bank calls *high-income countries* and what we would call *developed countries*. The category includes Slovenia, South Korea, Portugal, Greece, and Spain (for which it was a great day—the equivalent of a national holiday—when it finally made it over the hump into this category) at the poorer end, and Japan and Switzerland at the richer end. Note that the countries in this category are mainly from Western Europe, North America, or the British Commonwealth (Australia and New Zealand). Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates are, so far, the only non-Western countries to have made it into this category. Note also that almost all of the countries located in this category are functioning democracies.

Now, if one thinks about these tables for a time and ponders their various categories and entries, then one is well on the way to being a student of comparative politics. Why are some countries poor and others wealthier? What enables some countries to "make it" in the modern world while others remain locked in poverty? Why are the poorer countries more inclined to be governed autocratically while the richer countries are democratic? What accounts for the regional, cultural, and geographic differences that exist? What are the politics of the transition from underdeveloped to developed, and what helps stimulate and sustain that process? What are the internal social and political conditions as well as the international situations of these various countries that explain the similarities as well as the differences? What are the patterns that help account for the emergence of democratic as distinct from Marxist-Leninist or authoritarian political systems? These are precisely the kinds of questions that lie at the heart of the field of comparative politics.

Comparative politics defined

Comparative politics involves the systematic study and comparison of the world's political systems. It seeks to explain differences between as well as similarities among countries. In contrast to journalistic reporting on a single

country, comparative politics is particularly interested in exploring patterns, processes, and regularities among political systems. It looks for trends, for changes in patterns; and it tries to develop general propositions or hypotheses that describe and explain these trends. It seeks to do such comparisons rigorously and systematically, without personal, partisan, or ideological axes to grind. It involves hard work, clear thinking, careful and thorough scholarship, and (hopefully) clear, consistent, and balanced writing.

Since the world is our laboratory, the types of studies that can be encompassed in comparative politics are (as would be expected) varied. Different scholars will have different preferences in these regards, but that should not worry us overly or cause concern that the field has no one single focus. Rather, it includes several different kinds of studies—and legitimately so, in my view. Among the types of studies that students of comparative politics actually do are the following:

1. *Studies of one country*—or a particular institution (political parties, militaries, parliaments, interest groups), political process (decision making), or public policy (for instance, labor or welfare policy) in that country. Such single-country studies are probably the easiest for young students in the field to do. But in focusing on only one country or institution, it will be necessary in an introductory statement or paragraph to put that study into a larger comparative framework. That means we should tell why the subject is important and where it fits in a larger context. For instance, if we're interested in military intervention in the politics of a country, then we should explore the general literature on interventions as well as study the politics of that particular country. We should also offer a set of comments, usually called a "model" or "conceptual framework," that explains the broader implications of the study and its possible relevance to the same or similar issues in other countries or to global trends. In other words, even though our study may concentrate on a single country, we are still interested in the "bigger picture" and in *comparison.* Such broader concerns, the effort to analyze patterns and general behavior, are what distinguish comparative politics from newspaper reporting or a historical survey of a single country.
2. *Studies of two or more countries.* Such genuinely comparative studies are harder to carry out, and they are usually more expensive in terms of travel and research costs. It is often difficult for the beginning student to understand and master one foreign country; two or more are even harder. Hence, often the student of comparative politics does a case study of one country first in the form of a paper, thesis, or doctoral dissertation; later he or she may move on to study a second (or third, fourth, and so on) country and to elaborate the comparisons between them. Such a step is very important intellectually because it is in knowing and writing about two or more countries that students can begin to make genuine comparisons.

3. *Regional or area studies.* These may include studies of Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Europe, or other subregions (Southern Europe or North Africa, for example). Such studies are useful because they involve *groups* of countries that may have several things in common—for example, similar histories, cultures, languages, geographic locations, legal systems, religions, colonial backgrounds, and so on. Such regional or area studies are often particularly interesting because they are almost like a science laboratory. That is, if a group of countries have many common features—let us say the colonial background or Catholicism in Latin America—the investigator can hold such factors constant while examining or "testing" for certain other features (for instance, the level or degree of authoritarianism in the society), almost as if he or she were carrying out a chemistry experiment. The investigator can then make statements about the area as a whole or make comparisons between countries within a given area. The danger lies in overgeneralizing, in making comments about the area as a whole without sufficient attention to the specific differences of individual countries even within a particular region.

   Among some scholars, area studies are controversial. The student may become so enamored of his or her own area that he or she loses objectivity. Or the student may become so engrossed in one particular culture that he or she forgets the larger goal of *comparison.* In addition, many issues today—human rights, democracy, the environment, drugs—are global; they are not limited to one country or area. Even with these potential problems, however, area studies have a very important role in comparative politics: they enable a student to study and immerse him- or herself in one particular area; they facilitate comparison among often similar or at least *comparable* countries, and it is out of such area studies, as we see later in the book, that some of the most exciting new approaches in the field—dependency theory, corporatism, bureaucraticstatism—have emerged.
4. *Studies across regions.* Such studies are becoming more prevalent, but at more advanced levels they are often expensive and difficult to carry out. One must know, master, and travel to not just one region but two or more. Such studies might involve comparisons of the role of the military in Africa and the Middle East or of the quite different paths to development of the East Asian countries and Latin America. (My own research, for example, has involved comparisons among Latin America, Southern Europe, and East Asia.) Such studies can be very interesting, although one must recognize that it is very difficult for a single scholar to stay well informed on so many countries and areas.
5. *Global comparisons.* With the improved statistical data collected by the World Bank, the UN, and other agencies, it is now possible to do comparisons on a global basis. For example, using the same kind of

data presented in Table 1.1 over, let us say, a thirty-year period might enable us to trace the relationship in *all* countries between economic development and the growth of democratization, or between the size of the middle class and democratization, or between greater affluence and the decline of authoritarianism and Marxism-Leninism. Such studies can best be done through the use of statistical correlations. But such correlations cannot be said to prove *causation*—that is, that economic growth causes democratization. There is a relationship between economic growth and democracy, but the first does not necessarily *cause* the second. In addition, students of such global comparisons often lack expertise in the specific areas or countries studied and thus may make egregious mistakes. For example, Nicaragua under the dictator Anastasio Somoza was sometimes listed as "overdemocratized" for its level of economic development because one of the indices used to measure democratization—the presence of opposition members in the congress—was consistently high in that country. What the global comparativists didn't know, what only an area or country specialist would know, was that in Somoza's emphatically nondemocratic regime the constitution *required* one-third of the legislature to come from opposition parties so that the dictator could portray his regime as more democratic than it really was.

Other problems involved in global comparisons include the frequent unreliability of the statistical data used and the problems of developing meaningful comparisons between countries and regions that are so different in their cultures and histories—such as Africa and Latin America or Asia and Europe—so that it's like trying to add apples and oranges. I think of such global comparisons as provocative, suggestive, and interesting even though treating them with a good dose of healthy skepticism, especially if one tries to draw too strong a conclusion out of them.

6. *Thematic studies.* Comparative politics focuses on themes as well as countries and regions. For example, some scholars may be interested in the changing role of the state in comparative perspective, in the process of military professionalization as seen comparatively, in the structure of class relations as analyzed comparatively, or in the process of political socialization (how we learn about politics, where our political ideas come from) from a comparative perspective. Others may be interested in such themes as dependency theory (the dependence of some countries on others), the processes by which emerging countries achieve national development, or the newer systems of interest group representation called "corporatism" (all of these terms and themes are examined in greater detail later in the book) viewed from a comparative viewpoint. Such studies are often complex, difficult, at the theoretical level, and usually carried out by more senior scholars in the field because they presume a great deal of knowledge about various areas and require the ability to see the "big picture" at a highly conceptual level.

Several interesting lessons emerge from this survey of the types of research that students of comparative politics do. First is the variety of approaches and perspectives used. Most of us find such diversity in the field healthy and stimulating. The important thing at this stage is not so much the *type* of study that one chooses to follow but to begin to *think comparatively*, in terms of the patterns and comparisons that exist between countries and regions.

A second admonition is to look at what students of comparative politics actually *do* in their studies rather than getting bogged down in the stale, often disruptive and inconclusive debates over approaches and methods that mar the field. There are rich country, area, global, and thematic studies "out there" that students should peruse in order to get a feel for the field; some suggestions along these lines are contained in the Suggested Readings at the end of the book.

Third, one should recognize degrees of difficulty. For the beginning student a single-country study or a two-country comparison may be appropriate, or an area study, or perhaps a topical study that cuts across regions; but remember that even these require an introduction and conclusion that places the topic in a broader comparative perspective.

Why study comparative politics?

There are a number of reasons for studying comparative politics. First, it's fun and interesting, and one learns a lot about other countries, regions, and the world.

Second, studying comparative politics will help a person overcome ethnocentrism, defined as the inability to understand other countries except through one's own rose-colored lenses. All peoples and countries are ethnocentric, but Americans seem to be particularly afflicted. Instead of studying and trying to understand other countries through *their own* eyes, in their own cultural and social context, and in their own language(s), Americans tend to look at the rest of the world from the perspective that our ways and institutions are best and these other countries should therefore learn from the United States. Americans seldom perceive that they could also learn from other nations' experiences or that they should study American as well as other countries' institutions *comparatively*, neutrally, without bias, from the pragmatic point of view of what works best rather than from a perspective of superiority and condescension.

Third, we study comparative politics to understand how nations change and the patterns that exist. What accounts for the fact that some nations have forged ahead while others remain poor and backward? What can we learn from the recent, very heartening transitions from authoritarianism to democracy in so many parts of the world? And how does one explain the unraveling of so many Marxist-Leninist regimes and their transactions to

more open politics and economies? Comparative politics may not have all the answers to such questions, but it does offer some, and it has an approach and methodology that enable us to get at quite a few others.

A fourth reason for studying comparative politics is that it is intellectually stimulating. Consider these questions: Why do some countries modernize and others not? Why are some countries democratic and others not? Why are interest groups and political parties structured one way in some countries and other ways in others? Why do some countries and their political systems fail while others succeed? These are among the most challenging questions that one can grapple with in today's world. Comparative politics helps us get at the answers by showing the change process in all its dimensions and wrestling with the problems posed by the complexity and multiple causes of these processes.

Fifth, comparative politics has a rigorous and effective methodology. The comparative method, really a way of thinking comparatively about the world and its individual political systems, is both a sophisticated tool of analysis and one that is always open to new approaches. (We have more to say about the comparative methodology in the next section.)

Finally, comparative politics is necessary for a proper understanding of both international relations and foreign policy. Without knowing thoroughly, from the inside, empathetically (the opposite of ethnocentrically) the other countries with whom we conduct our foreign relations, we cannot have an informed, successful foreign policy. Hence, there is an intimate connection among international relations, foreign policy, and comparative politics; in my view, these are distinct fields of study, but in the real world they are also inseparable, complementary, and mutually necessary for an understanding of today's world.

The comparative method

Comparative politics provides a means by which we can learn about other societies, how they work and how they change. Through comparison, we can learn that what works in one society may not work in another, and why. Comparative politics also provides an antidote to ethnocentrism—a method by which to understand other societies on their own terms and in their own context.

The comparative method is usually thought of as involving two distinct levels of comparison. One is the snapshot approach: it is the easiest to comprehend and operationalize since it involves a comparison, a snapshot, of two or more countries or specific institutions within them *at a certain, given point in time*—usually the present. The second approach, trickier and more complex, involves a comparison of the same aspect or issue in two or more countries but *at different points in historical time*. For example, if we are interested in the comparative development of democracy or of political

parties, can we perhaps compare Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century when parties and democracy first emerged, with late-twentieth-century development of democracy and political parties in many developing countries? In other words, to what extent do the already developed or industrialized nations of today present a picture of what the developing nations will be like in the future? Do the developed nations at every stage of their development provide us with a picture, a mirror, of what all nations must go through eventually on their road to development? Comparison, in other words, can be across nations at a single point in time, or it can involve comparisons across time periods to test whether the same processes (economic development and greater social change, for example, giving rise to greater demands for democracy) are operating at different historical periods.

The comparative method has often been compared, somewhat pretentiously, to the scientific method in physics or biology. Like the natural sciences, comparative politics has its "laboratory": the world's political systems. And with this image of a laboratory in mind, it sometimes appears that we can carry out scientific measurements involving those systems. For example, in comparative politics we can sometimes hold one or more variables constant—religion or culture or social structure or a particular political institution—while we look comparatively at policy outcomes. In other words, if we're interested in studying comparative welfare policy, we can pretty much control for some variables while we test for others. In this case welfare policy outcomes are viewed as the *dependent* variable, while religion, culture, socioeconomic factors, and so on, are the *independent* variables.

One can see why this method is sometimes compared to the laboratory methodology of the hard sciences. In this case the globe is our comparative politics experiment station, and we have 180 nations (plus other kinds of units) to consider. We also know how to test for certain variables and to control for others. In comparative politics, as in the laboratory sciences, we use hypotheses, tests, and "proofs." One can understand why it would be tempting to equate comparative politics' methodology with that of natural sciences.

Although the analogy with the hard sciences is attractive, it should not be taken literally: Comparative politics is *not*, in most respects, a hard science. The field and its concepts—political culture, political socialization, interest group activity, decision making, policy implementation—are often vague and imprecise, not amenable to empirical scientific experimentation. In addition, the exact meaning and measure of these concepts may vary from country to country. There are, furthermore, too many variables in human affairs that may intervene in unlikely or unanticipated ways, so that it is very difficult to be quantitatively precise about our findings. Nor, in the social sciences, can one readily isolate these variables and thus replicate the test and get the same results as in a science laboratory. Because the concepts

often carry diverse meanings to different researchers and the tests are difficult to replicate, one cannot speak of comparative politics as a precise, empirical science as one would of physics or biology.

A mistake often made by beginning students in comparative politics, however, involves the confusion of "science" with the experimental method. Not all sciences need to use the experimental method of the physics or chemistry laboratory. Those are more precise, to be sure, but other methods may also be used. For example, if science is defined as an "orderly body of knowledge," then surely comparative politics qualifies. It *may* use the experimental method, but it may use other, more interpretive methods as well—such as library research, interviewing, or participant observation in the country studied—that carry their own specific rules of data collection, logical argumentation, and interpretation. Here we emphasize comparison as a mode of inquiry or way of knowledge. To achieve the desired results, the experimental method *may* be employed, but the traditional approaches are also valid methods of research.

For some students, the fact that comparative politics is not a strict science in the sense that the natural sciences are is a cause for despair and even the abandonment of the field. That feeling is shared by some scholars in comparative politics, who have embarked on a sometimes frustrating quest to quantify and mathematicize, or to find universal rules for, the entire field. But the conclusions of most scholars of comparative politics lie in between these two extremes. That is, just because comparative politics is not always as quantifiable as, say, chemistry is not a reason for us to throw up our arms in despair and abandon the field. At the same time, while recognizing that comparative politics is not and probably never will be a strict or hard science, that does not absolve us from trying to be as precise and careful in our research as we can possibly be.

Where, then, does that leave us—or the field of comparative politics? The following injunctions may be helpful:

1. Let us recognize realistically that for most questions comparative politics is not a science in the same sense that, say, physics or biology is. It has its "orderly body of knowledge" as other sciences do, but it cannot often replicate the experimental method of laboratory science.
2. Nevertheless, we need to be as careful and as rigorous as possible in setting forth our hypotheses and research plans, in testing our hypotheses, and in carrying out and reporting on our research.
3. Some of the methods used in comparative politics, such as interviewing and library research, are often not as exact as we would like them to be; they are useful methods but by their very nature may be open to different interpretations.
4. Nevertheless, the goal must remain a study that is as systematic and precise as possible.

5. We must also recognize that some of the new approaches in the field, employing statistics, mathematical modeling, regression analysis, and computers, enable us to use sophisticated and quantifiable measures that were previously unheard of. Every student of comparative politics now must master these techniques. Furthermore, while the field is unlikely to achieve the precision of an exact science in answering the most important questions that we are interested in, its scientific measures are expanding, and in the future it is likely that such mathematical and computer-based measures will be used even more frequently.
6. At this stage what comparative politics can mainly do is produce tendency statements rather than scientific proofs. For example, we can say that countries with high income levels *tend* to be more likely to have democratic political systems than do very poor countries; Table 1.1 clearly illustrates that relationship. Note that this is not an absolute statement, nor is it a scientific law of behavior, because there are numerous variations and exceptions; for instance, Costa Rica is a relatively poor country but is also a well-established democracy; in contrast, Saudi Arabia is a rich country but is not a democracy. There is, however, undoubtedly a relationship, and a rather close one, between economic development and democracy, a relationship that is best described by what we here call "tendency statements" rather than absolute laws. In most areas of comparative politics, such tendency statements are at present about as much as we can hope for—although more rigorous "proofs" of hypotheses such as the one provided earlier are what one should strive for.
7. Above all, we need to avoid bias and special pleading in the field. Some people use the "soft science" underpinnings of comparative politics as an excuse to advance their own biases or ideologies or to grind their own pet political axes. Because the field is inherently biased, they say, our bias is as good as any, and bias itself should be advanced and celebrated. Most scholars in the field deplore that approach. There may be biases in the field or in some parts of it, but that should not lead to an equally biased view on the other side. The goal should be not the celebration of one bias or another but rather a comparative politics approach that is as unbiased, unprejudiced, fair, and balanced as possible.

Models and paradigms in comparative politics

Frequently, the field of comparative politics employs various models, frameworks, or paradigms as a way of simplifying and thus explaining various political phenomena more easily. In fact, the tracing, history, and analysis of these several approaches in the field lie at the heart of the presentation later in Chapters 3 to 5. Although each of them is defined and explained in subsequent chapters, examples of such models include the developmentalist

approach, corporatism, and dependency theory. A model of this sort is a simplification of reality and should not be confused with the real thing.

For example, if we say that the developmentalist approach helps us explain the modernization processes of various Third World countries or that corporatism helps us understand the relations between interest groups and the state or government, then we are using developmentalism or corporatism as models or paradigms that signify some aspects of the political process. A model is a shorthand way of referring to a larger and more complex phenomenon or process. Again, such models as corporatism, developmentalism, or dependency represent simplifications of reality, not reality itself—they are metaphors for or abstractions of reality, not the genuine product. But such models are very useful in political analysis—indeed they are used all the time—enabling us to simplify for discussion purposes what are often very complex processes.

A model is a heuristic device—a kind of teaching aid—used to sort out, organize, and simplify more complex processes. An effective model simplifies reality by breaking it up into clear and manageable components to enable us better to understand it. But reality is always more complex than any single model or even several models can capture. A model is a very helpful tool in social science and comparative politics analysis, but it should not be confused with the even more complicated kaleidoscope that is reality itself. A model helps us understand and come to grips with events and processes that otherwise would be so disorganized, complex, and random that they would not make sense. At the same time, we should understand that the term *model* is a neutral one; when we use that word, we are not making a value judgment. A model is simply an intellectual device; in contrast to the term's popular usage, it implies neither approval nor disapproval.

What, then, is the utility of our employing such models in our analysis of comparative political systems? To recap:

1. Models help us organize, highlight, and give coherence to otherwise diverse events, processes, and institutions.
2. Models help put many seemingly unrelated events in a larger context, enabling us to see the "big picture," to provide perspective.
3. Models enable us to think more clearly about complicated events.
4. Models are heuristic devices; that is, they *teach* us things and enable us to see patterns.
5. Models help simplify complex events, enabling us to understand them more clearly.

Models should also be seen as pragmatic instruments. To the extent they are useful and helpful in terms of the purposes outlined here, we can use them to help order our thinking. But such models as used in comparative

politics should not be worshiped or reified. They are not forever. They are not sacrosanct. New events or facts—the unraveling of the communist world, for example, or the emergence of democracy as a nearly universal political system—often force us to alter our interpretations, obliging us to change or revise our models, or to scrap them altogether. Often students of comparative politics become so attached to their particular model (as happened with developmentalism in the 1960s) that they fail to recognize that it must be reformulated or that it has outlived its usefulness. Models are devices to be used as long as they are useful and help us shed light on events, but we should not hesitate to rethink or replace them when they have outlived their utility. In either case, the overall usefulness—and limits—of such models should be recognized.

Approaching the subject

Studies of *all* the world's political systems using a global model and statistical correlations are useful in some respects in suggesting relationships and patterns that otherwise we might not be aware of. However, such studies ignore regional and cultural differences and, as noted, too frequently involve the inappropriate mixing of apples and oranges. In any case, they are not for the beginning student. Beginning students should probably start off studying a single country, perhaps a pair of countries, or perhaps a group of countries in a single region or with other comparable features.

How, then, should we proceed? I have found it useful in my own studies to use the following outline, which can also be thought of as a potential table of contents for a book or thesis. The outline also suggests numerous topics for a smaller, narrower term paper or thesis and shows where they might fit in the broader scheme of things. Someone doing a complete country study should probably have chapters on each of the following subject areas; someone writing a research paper would probably be advised to narrow the focus and try to cover only one aspect within this larger outline.

I. *Introduction.* The introduction should try to interest, stimulate, or "grab" the reader, tell him or her why the particular country or subject matter is important and why someone should spend time researching or reading about it. The introduction should also "introduce" the subject and the author's preliminary ideas or hypotheses about it, explore the previous literature on the subject, and tell precisely what it is the author intends to do in his or her study. A good introduction should also explain the methodology of the study and present a plan of it so readers have a "road map" of where they are going.

II. *Political history.* History is so important in so many countries, where the shadow of the past still lingers, that it is useful to have a chapter on the historical background. One need not necessarily do original

research for this information, but one ought to review all the secondary literature in order to trace the historical pattern of the country's formative development, to place the study in historical context, to bring the history right up to the present, and thus to provide a setting for the author's own study. One can also, if one wishes, do a comparative political history of two or several countries.

III. *Political culture.* Political culture refers to the values, ideas, norms, belief systems, and patterns of behavior of a particular people or country. History obviously helps shape the political culture, but other factors are also involved. An assessment of the political culture can derive from the art, literature, religious beliefs, modes of expression, and ways of behaving of the society—particularly as these affect politics and give it a certain style. To be more accurate and quantitative, however, assessments of political culture should be based on public opinion surveys. In studying political culture, in addition, one should avoid national stereotyping (Germans are this, Italians are that), but by careful research one can get a picture of what political-cultural patterns exist and how they influence countries.

IV. *Socioeconomic background.* This chapter or section should present information on the country's level of economic development and how it compares with other countries, as in Table 1.1. What is the nature of its economy? What does it produce? What is its relationship to outside markets and economic forces? This chapter or section should also contain data on the country's level of social modernization, its class structure and social relations, and how these are changing. Is it an agricultural or an industrial country? Does it have two traditional social classes (elites and masses), or is it more pluralist? What are its ethnic, caste, tribal, and other divisions? In short, the writer needs to outline the social and economic basis of politics. And here, most often, political scientists will have to do their own research because economists and sociologists frequently do it badly, not at all, or in a form that political scientists cannot use.

V. *Interest groups.* It is often a short step from socioeconomic data and class structure to interest groups. Many interest groups—businesses, farmers, middle-class associations, labor, peasants—are economic. However, others that are important—the armed forces, religious bodies, ethnic associations, student groups, professional associations—are not. In addition, many countries have other outside actors—the U.S. embassy, multinational corporations, the International Monetary Fund, the Vatican, the German, Japanese, or Russian embassies—that are so powerful that they function like domestic interest groups. One can study any one of these interest groups in a particular country or group of countries, or one can try to gauge the overall structure of interest group power in a particular country. One should also try to

determine whether the interest group system is based on an authoritarian, democratic, corporatist, or totalitarian pattern.

VI. *Political parties.* Almost all countries now have political parties, or, if not, they frequently have socioeconomic, class, clan, caste, or tribal groups that function like political parties. That is, they educate their people in a certain belief or interest system (called *political socialization*), and they bring people together as an effective political movement (called *interest aggregation*). One can study a particular political party, a group of similar parties (Socialist, conservative, Communist, Christian-Democrat) in different political systems, various functions (leadership recruitment, electioneering) of the parties, or the entire political party spectrum, left to right, or structure (one-party, two-party, multiparty) of a particular country.

VII. *Political communications.* This topic involves how ideas and interests are communicated to government officials. In a less developed country, political communication may take place mainly via interpersonal communications, family networks, or gossip; in more developed countries, the mass media (radios, newspapers, television, the Internet) tends to be more important. Political communication is thus related to levels of literacy, newspaper circulation, and per capita radio or television ownership. It is also important to know who owns the media, what are its biases, and how the media both manipulates and is manipulated by political leaders. Another important issue is the new trend toward globalization of news and culture, what some have called, as distinct from purely national values and ideas, the "world culture" of rock music, blue jeans, television (*Friends*, *Ally McBeal*), Coca-Cola, and—not least, demands for democracy and freedom.

VIII. *Institutions of government.* We now move from what are called the "inputs" of politics, or what goes "into" the political system (history, political culture, socioeconomic data, interest groups, political parties, political communications), to the actual institutions and decision-making processes of government. This topic may either be subdivided into three separate chapters or sections or be combined in a more abbreviated form into a single unit. The first of these subdivisions looks at the institutions of government: the legal system, the constitutional structure, president/prime minister, congress/parliament, justice and the court system, local government, and so on. There are many topics to study in this category (comparative federalism, presidentialism versus parliamentarism, executive-legislative relations, decentralization, and so on), which, since it focuses on the institutions of government, is what many beginning students think of as the proper realm of political science or governmental research.

IX. *Bureaucracy and the state.* Because the state system and bureaucracy in the United States are comparatively small, most Americans do not

spend much time thinking about these subject areas. In some other countries, however, the state plays a far larger role than in the United States, either in directing the economy or in providing a fuller range of social programs. Thus, in this second subdivision of government institutions, one would want to show how the state system and the bureaucracy are organized, who controls them, what their role in social welfare and directing the economy is, and so on. Or, in this new era, how does the state handle downsizing, privatization, and reform campaigns?

X. *Decision making.* This is the third subdivision in our analysis of government institutions. It focuses on who makes decisions, how they are arrived at. What influences are felt? For example, I once had the president of a Latin American country tell me that when he made important decisions, he checked first with his armed forces chiefs, then with his country's economic elites, and third with the American embassy—but not necessarily in that order! If he had time, he might check with other groups, but such was rarely the case. That rank-ordering certainly tells us a lot about the structure of power and decision making in his country. Comparable information on decision making in other countries would likely reveal parallel or divergent, but perhaps equally striking, patterns.

XI. *Public policy.* Moving now from governmental structures and decision making to the actual decisions that come out of the political system, we arrive at the subject area of public policy. Comparative public policy is one of the fastest-growing subjects in the field. There are a great variety of public policies that can be studied comparatively: housing policy, economic policy, industrial policy, social policy, agrarian reform, education, population policy, environmental policy, and so on. One can also compare the foreign policies of different countries. In some country and comparative studies, domestic policy and foreign policy will be combined within a single chapter or section; in others the two subjects will be divided into two discussions.

XII. *Conclusion.* In this chapter or section we will want to sum up our findings, examine the patterns that emerge, look back at our original hypotheses to see whether they can be confirmed or denied, and draw out the assessments of our research. What makes this country or political system unique? In what ways is it comparable to others? What lessons can be learned from this? Does the system work? Is it functional? How do its parts fit together? What are its weak or missing links? A good conclusion should not only sum things up in this fashion but might also indicate what gaps still exist, and thus point in the direction of another, future research project.

A number of things should be reemphasized about this chapter or paper outline and organizational scheme. First, and most obviously, it offers a

practical guide to both the range of subject areas encompassed within comparative politics and a plan for organizing them in book or thesis form. Second, it is quite appropriate for students to focus on only one or a few aspects within this outline, not on the "big picture" as one would do in a complete, sophisticated comparative country study. Third, this outline can easily be expanded or contracted like an accordion; depending on our time frame, motives, or particular research focus, chapters or sections can be either combined or further subdivided.

In addition, as perceptive students will note, there is a logic, coherence, and sequence to the way these materials are presented. We proceed from the most general (history, political culture, socioeconomic background) to the more specific (interest groups, parties, political communications, government institutions, decision making, public policy). Finally, the outline follows a systems or process model of the polity (see Figure 1): That is, it has "inputs" that go into the political system in the form of values, history, interests, and so on; it has a government or decision-making system that processes these demands; it has "outputs" in the form of government decisions and policies; and it has "feedback," by which those decisions and policies in turn have an effect on values, interests, and behavior, as well as what again goes "into" the political system.

I hasten to add, however, that I think of such a systems plan as purely a heuristic device, a teaching aid, a picture that helps us envisage the interrelated parts of the system, an outline that seems to make some logical sense but that can be modified to fit new facts and particular circumstances. For example, this schema, with its focus on interest groups and political parties, may be more appropriate for a liberal-pluralist polity than it would be for an authoritarian or totalitarian regime, where some modifications in the outline might have to be introduced. None of us should be married now or forever to the organizational plan presented here: Where it is useful and helpful, let us use it; where it is not, let us feel free to modify it.

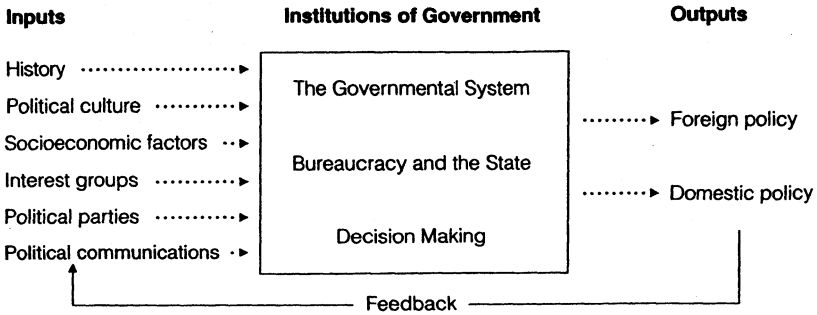

Figure 1 A Systems Framework of the Political Process

Aspects of change

Change within the system presented in Figure 1 can take a variety of forms and stem from a variety of sources. Change may take peaceful evolutionary or violent revolutionary directions, or it may stem from the use of limited structured violence to achieve limited goals. Change may come under authoritarian, totalitarian, or democratic auspices, and it may come gradually or rapidly. Change is ubiquitous, but it takes many forms, and the processes of change have themselves often been the subject of comparative study.

What are the causes of change? Over the past thirty years students of comparative politics have gotten into some terrible arguments over this question. Is it historical, political-cultural, value-based, or ideological forces that drive change? Or is it socioeconomic forces, foreign investment, the class system, the ownership of the means of production and of distribution (mainly a Marxist interpretation) that initiate change? Or is it political-structural factors: the organization of the state system, the strength of political parties, the coordination of business and labor to achieve national development? Or could it be biological and genetic forces—what is now called sociobiology—that are involved?

My answer is that probably all of these factors are involved—and at the same time it is often a silly debate, like asking which came first, the chicken or the egg? No one knows the answer to that, either—the question can never be answered—and it doesn't get us anywhere to even ask the question.

Clearly, in studying the change process in comparative politics, cultural, socioeconomic, and political-structural factors are always involved. If one does not know or understand the role of religion and cultural factors in Asia or Latin America, for example, then that is an admission that one knows little about the area. Similarly, one must understand the power of the great motor forces of economic development and industrialization in giving rise to class changes (the rise of an entrepreneurial class, a middle class, and an organized working class), which, in turn, affect politics and political institutions at all levels. At the same time, political institutions are themselves often "independent variables," filtering the process of cultural and political change and shaping the form, direction, and speed of economic development.

Hence, if we ask, as in our chicken-egg dilemma, whether it is culture change that sets the conditions in which economic growth can begin or economic change that changes the culture and the political system, the answer is *both*. That is, culture helps determine the form of the economy and, at the same time, is itself changed by economic growth. Meanwhile, political factors affect both culture and the economy and are, in turn, changed by them. Change is, therefore, not one-way or monocausal but multifaceted; the image we should draw on is that of a lattice with multiple routes to

development and various crossing members that mutually influence one another.

Having said that, we should also recognize that the relative influence of these three main factors—cultural, socioeconomic, political-structural—as well as doubtless other factors (accidents, biology, chance, and so on) may vary over time and from country to country. Culture may be the most important factor at some points in history; at other times it will be socioeconomic factors; at still others the main forces will be political and institutional. Moreover, in some countries and areas the cultural influences will be stronger, in others the economic forces will be strongest, and so on. It will be up to students of comparative politics to wrestle with these issues, to sort them out, and to try to draw conclusions from them. The issues are complex; those who simply assert the predominance of one factor over another or jump to hasty conclusions about them are probably making an ideological statement rather than engaging in serious scholarship. For *serious* students of comparative politics, these issues, and our minds, must remain open; there is no simple or pat formula. Rather, it is one of the joys and enthusiasms of the field that we must remain open-minded, pragmatic, and always willing to explore new relationships.