PATRICK H. O'NEIL | KARL FIELDS | DON SHARE

CASES AND CONCEPTS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

2ND EDITION

CASES *and*
CONCEPTS
in Comparative Politics

CASES *and* CONCEPTS
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SECOND EDITION

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Preface

The past three decades have seen the dramatic transformation of comparative politics: the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the spread of democracy around the world, the rise of new economic powers in Asia, the emergence of globalization. For a time, many looked upon these changes as unmitigated progress that would bring about a decline in global conflict and produce widespread prosperity. Recently, however, there has been growing doubt, as the uncertainties of the future seem to portend more risk than reward, more conflict than peace. One can no longer suggest that a country and its citizens can function well without a good understanding of the billions of people who live outside of its borders. Consider the Arab Spring and conflict across the Middle East: Will the region face violence and repression for the foreseeable future, or could the current turmoil eventually pave way for greater stability and democracy? Clearly we ignore such questions at our peril.

This textbook is meant to contribute to our understanding of comparative politics (the study of domestic politics around the world) by investigating the central ideas and questions that make up this field. It begins with the most basic struggle in politics—the battle between freedom and equality and the task of reconciling or balancing these ideals. How this struggle has unfolded across place and time represents the core of comparative politics. The text continues by emphasizing the importance of institutions. Human action is fundamentally guided by the institutions that people construct, such as culture, constitutions, and property rights. Once established, these institutions are both influential and persistent—not easily overcome, changed, or removed. How these institutions emerge, and how they affect politics, is central to this work.

With these ideas in place, we tackle the basic institutions of power—states, markets, societies, democracies, and nondemocratic regimes. What are states, how do they emerge, and how can we measure their capacity, autonomy, and efficacy? How do markets function, and what kinds of relationships exist between states and markets? How do societal components like nationalism, ethnicity, and ideology shape political values? And what are the main differences between democratic and nondemocratic regimes, and what explains why one or the other predominates in various parts of the world? These are a few of the questions we will attempt to answer.

Alongside an in-depth exploration of these concepts and questions, we will apply them directly to thirteen political systems (we call them *cases*)—developed democracies, communist and postcommunist countries, and developing countries. Selecting only thirteen cases is, of course, fraught with drawbacks. Nevertheless, we believe that this collection represents countries that are both important in their own right and representative of a broad range of political systems. Each of the 13 cases has special importance in the context of the study of comparative politics. Five of our cases (France, Germany, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom) are

advanced industrial democracies, but they represent a wide range of institutions, societies, political-economic models, and relationships with the world. Japan is an important example of a non-Western industrialized democracy and an instructive case of democratization imposed by foreign occupiers. Though the United Kingdom and the United States have been known for political stability, France and Germany have fascinating histories of political turmoil and regime change.

Two of our cases, China and Russia, share a past of Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism. Communism thrived in these two large and culturally distinct nations. Both suffered from the dangerous concentration of power in the hands of communist parties and, at times, despotic leaders. The Soviet Communist regime imploded and led to a troubled transition to an authoritarian regime with a capitalist political economy. China has retained its communist authoritarian political system but has experimented with a remarkable transition to a largely capitalist political economy.

The remaining six cases illustrate the diversity of the developing world. Of the six, India has had the longest history of stable democratic rule, but like most countries in the developing world, it has nevertheless struggled with massive poverty and inequality. The remaining five have experienced various forms of authoritarianism. Brazil and Nigeria endured long periods of military rule. Mexico's history of military rule was ended by an authoritarian political party that ruled for much of the twentieth century through a variety of nonmilitary means. South Africa experienced decades of racially based authoritarianism that excluded the vast majority of its population. Iran experienced a modernizing authoritarian monarchy followed by its current authoritarian regime, a theocracy ruled by Islamic clerics.

Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics can be traced to a decades-long experiment undertaken by the three comparative political scientists in the Department of Politics and Government at the University of Puget Sound. Over the years we spent much time discussing the challenges of teaching our introductory course in comparative politics. In those discussions we came to realize that each of us taught the course so differently that students completing our different sections of the course did not really share a common conceptual vocabulary. Over several years we fashioned a unified curriculum for Introduction to Comparative Politics, drawing on the strengths of each of our particular approaches.

All three of us now equip our students with a common conceptual vocabulary. All of our students now learn about states, nations, and different models of political economy. All students learn the basics about nondemocratic and democratic regimes, and they become familiar with characteristics of communist systems and advanced democracies. In developing our common curriculum, we became frustrated trying to find country studies that were concise, uniformly organized, sophisticated, and written to address the major concepts of comparative politics.

We also began to introduce students to country studies using pairs of cases (over the years we have varied the pairs) as a way to get students to think comparatively and to hone their understanding of key concepts. We found that teaching Japan and the United Kingdom, for example, was a wonderful way to study the main features and dilemmas of advanced democracies, while teaching students that such systems can thrive in very different political, economic, and cultural settings. Because we almost always assign reading that covers two countries at once, we have produced country studies that are organized identically and written with a common depth and style. Instructors can therefore easily assign the sections on the historical development of the state (to take one example) from any of the 13 case studies, and have students draw meaningful comparisons.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The three of us have logged over 70 combined years teaching Introduction to Comparative Politics, and we are well aware that there are many ways to approach this challenging course. With that in mind, we have created *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics* for instructors who prefer a single text containing both conceptual chapters and country studies along with helpful pedagogy to facilitate the comparative process. While the conceptual chapters reproduce much of the material contained in Patrick O'Neil's *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, they have been enhanced by the inclusion of comparative examples drawn from our 13 country studies. In Chapter 5, Political Violence, for instance, we include a section that considers whether recent acts of political violence in the United States might be designated as terrorism or as hate crimes. To take another example, in Chapter 8, Nondemocratic Regimes, a special section compares the relative successes and failures of military rule in Brazil and Nigeria. Unlike other texts that ask students to navigate back and forth across the book, we hope that these integrated examples show students more easily how comparative politics concepts apply to real-world situations and institutions. Likewise, although the country studies are based on those found in our co-authored *Cases in Comparative Politics*, we've significantly streamlined those chapters, so as to be able to include them with the conceptual chapters in a single volume. Country studies are placed throughout the book after the most relevant conceptual chapters. The Russia and China cases, for example, immediately follow Chapter 8, Nondemocratic Regimes, and Chapter 9, Communism and Postcommunism.

NEW TO THE SECOND EDITION

In this Second Edition, we incorporated new features in the text and to the digital resource package to further support this comparative work. Throughout the conceptual chapters, marginal icons point to opportunities to explore examples of the concepts in the cases chapters. These new "Concepts in Action" icons are accompanied by a series of questions that appear at the end of the conceptual chapters and provide a framework to think critically about the concepts and their implications in select countries.

Additionally, new "Questions and Methods" features appear at the end of the conceptual chapters. These present puzzles in comparative politics and show how data can be used to find answers and develop new questions for further exploration. This new feature offers an introduction to some of the methodological tools used by political scientists.

We realize resources that support teaching and learning are essential to helping students meet the goals of the course whether it's held online or in person. That's why we've expanded our suite of resources with this edition. InQuizitive, Norton's adaptive learning tool, reinforces understanding of the key concepts of the course, helps remediate on areas of weakness, and challenges students to identify the underlying concepts in action in diverse, real-world examples that go beyond the text. Free with the purchase of a new text or ebook, InQuizitive helps students master the concepts and come to class prepared to apply them. (See the back cover for details.) Norton also offers the textbook in ebook format. Support materials, including a test bank, PowerPoint lecture outlines, and a supplementary image bank, are also available at https://digital.wwnorton.com/casesconcepts2.

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A note about the data: The data that are presented throughout the text in numerous tables, charts, and other figures are drawn from the CIA World Factbook *unless otherwise noted.*

	UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	FRANCE	GERMANY	JAPAN	RUSSIA
Geographic Size Ranking	80	3	43	63	62	1
Population Size Ranking	22	3	21	19	11	9
GDP per Capita at PPP, $	$46,827	$65,111	$45,893	$45,385	$44,246	$28,797
GDP per Capita at PPP, Ranking (Estimated)	30	11	29	20	31	55
UN Human Development Index Ranking	16	10	21	4	17	49
Freedom House Rating	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Not free
Transparency International Corruption Score Ranking	11	22	21	11	18	138
Capital City	London	Washington, D.C.	Paris	Berlin	Tokyo	Moscow
Head of State	Queen Elizabeth II	Donald Trump	Emmanuel Macron	Frank-Walter Steinmeier	Naruhito	Vladimir Putin
Head of Government	Boris Johnson	Donald Trump	Jean Castex	Angela Merkel	Shinzō Abe	Mikhail Mishustin
Legislative–executive System	Parliamentary	Presidential	Semi-Presidential	Parliamentary	Parliamentary	Semi-Presidential
Unitary or Federal?	Unitary	Federal	Unitary	Federal	Unitary	Federal
Electoral System for Lower House of Legislature	Single-member districts with plurality	Single-member districts with plurality	Single-member districts with two rounds of voting	Mixed proportional representation and single-member districts with plurality	Mixed proportional representation and single-member districts with plurality	Proportional representation
Political-economic System	Liberal	Liberal	Social democratic	Social democratic	Mercantilist	Mercantilist

	CHINA	INDIA	IRAN	MEXICO	BRAZIL	SOUTH AFRICA	NIGERIA
	4	7	18	14	5	25	32
	1	2	17	10	7	26	6
	$18,166	$7,850	$19,376	$20,616	$16,146	$13,629	$5,966
	74	124	83	68	86	100	137
	85	129	65	76	79	113	158
	Not free	Free	Not free	Partly free	Free	Free	Partly free
	87	78	138	138	105	73	144
	Beijing	New Delhi	Tehran	Mexico City	Brasília	Pretoria, Cape Town, Bloemfontein	Abuja
	Xi Jinping	Ram Nath Kovind	Ali Khamenei	Andrés Manuel López Obrador	Jair Bolsonaro	Cyril Ramaphosa	Muhammadu Buhari
	Li Keqiang	Narendra Modi	Hassan Rouhani	Andrés Manuel López Obrador	Jair Bolsonaro	Cyril Ramaphosa	Muhammadu Buhari
	Communist party authoritarian regime	Parliamentary	Semi-presidential theocracy	Presidential	Presidential	Parliamentary	Presidential
	Unitary	Federal	Unitary	Federal	Federal	Unitary	Federal
	Not applicable	Single-member districts with plurality	Single- and multimember districts	Mixed proportional representation and single-member districts with plurality	Proportional representation	Proportional representation	Single-member districts with plurality
	Mercantilist	Liberal	Mercantilist	Liberal	Liberal	Liberal	Liberal

UNITED
KINGDOM

FRANCE

UNITED
STATES

MEXICO

BRAZIL

| 0 | 1000 | 20 |
| 0 | 1000 | 2000 km |

GERMANY RUSSIA

JAPAN

CHINA

IRAN

INDIA

NIGERIA SOUTH
AFRICA

2000 mi
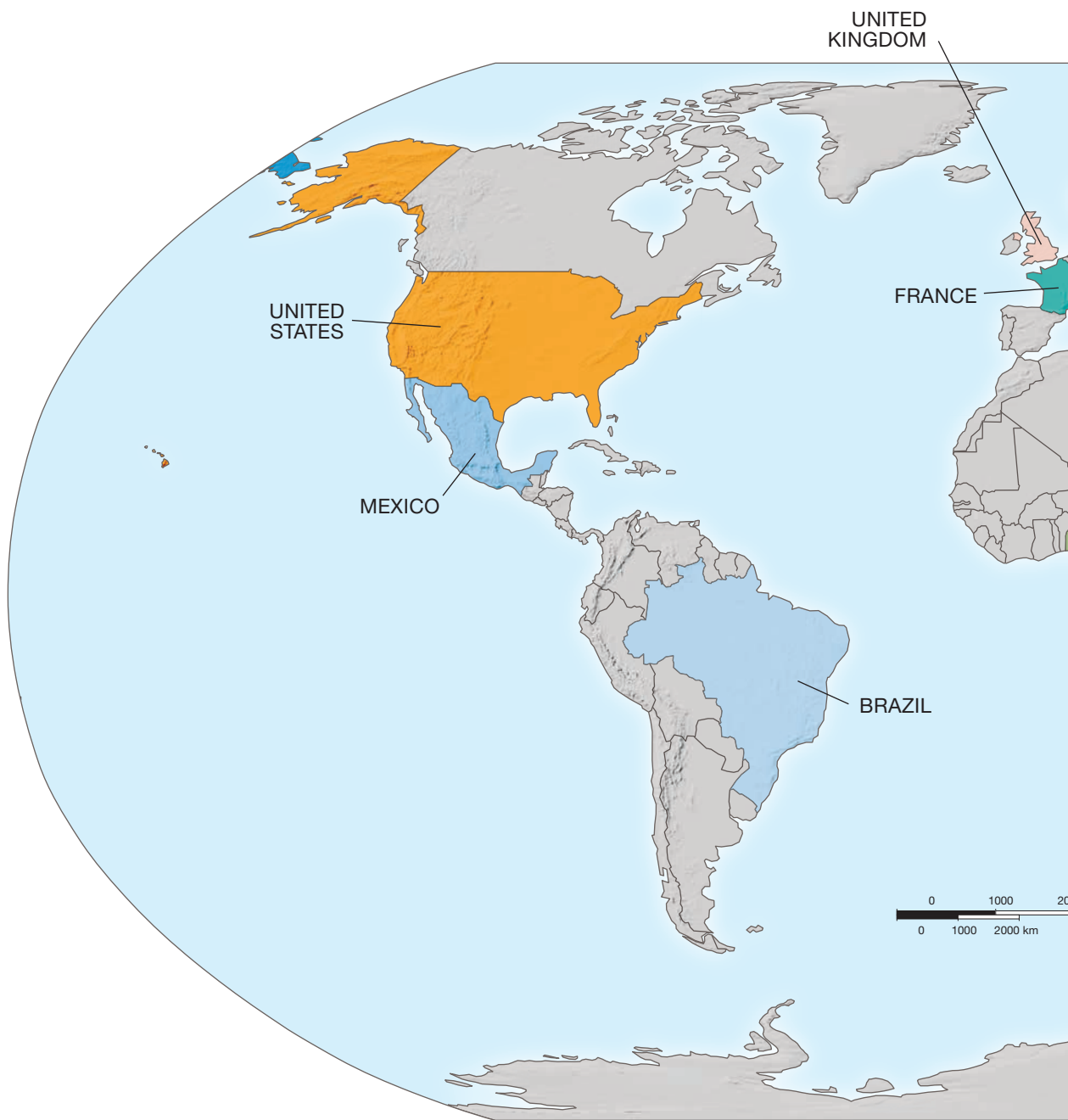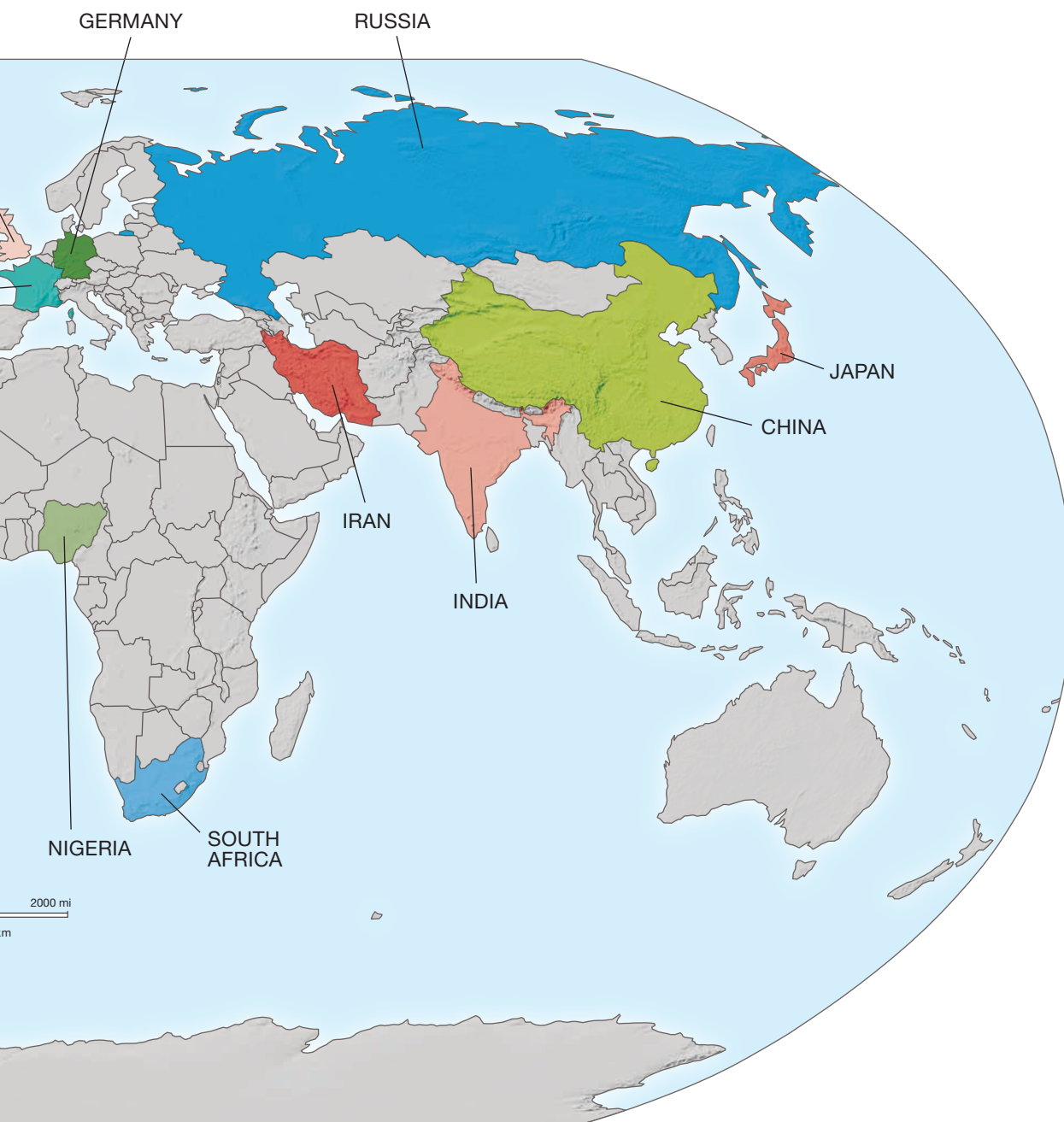
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Protesters gather in Bouazizi Square in Tunisia in front of a mural commemorating Mohamed Bouazizi. In December 2010, the Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire to protest corruption in his home country, inspiring the Arab Spring that ignited the region the following year.

Introduction

What can political science tell us that we don't already know?

WHO WOULD HAVE PREDICTED 15 years ago that the Middle East would change so much in such a short period of time? Dramatic historical events often take scholars, politicians, and even participants by surprise. For example, in the 1980s few people expected that communism would come to a dramatic end in Eastern Europe—if anything, modest reforms in the Soviet Union were expected to give communist institutions a new lease on life. Following the collapse of communism and increased democratization in parts of Asia and Latin America, many scholars expected that regimes in the Middle East would be next. But by the turn of the century, these expectations appeared unfounded; authoritarianism in the region seemed immune to change. Scholars chalked this up to a number of things—the role of oil, Western economic and military aid, lack of civic institutions, or the supposedly undemocratic nature of Islam.

Yet again, history took us by surprise. The opening events of the Arab Spring were disarmingly simple. In December 2010, a young Tunisian man, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire to protest police corruption and government indifference. Angry protests broke out shortly thereafter, and the long-standing

government was overthrown within weeks. New protests then broke out across the region in January and February 2011. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign after 30 years in office. In Libya, protests turned to widespread armed conflict and led to the killing of Mu'ammar Gaddhafi after more than 40 years of rule. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad clung to power as peaceful protests eventually turned into a civil war that has devastated the country, killed perhaps as many as half a million people, and triggered a migration crisis that roiled European politics.

The immediate political future of these and other countries in the region is uncertain. Tunisia has transitioned into a fragile democracy, while Egypt has returned to dictatorship; Libya is in the midst of civil war, while the Syrian conflict helped catalyze a new wave of international terrorism. At the same time, an entire range of countries in the region have faced down public protests or did not face them at all. This is especially true among the monarchies of the Persian Gulf, where one might have imagined that these anachronistic forms of rule would be the first to fall.

We are thus left with a series of puzzles. Why did the Arab Spring take place? What was the source of these tumultuous changes—revolution, civil war, and one of the largest refugee crises in recent history? Why did these uprisings take different forms and differ in the level of violence from place to place? Finally, why did some countries not see significant public protest to begin with? The hopeful nature of an Arab Spring has since been replaced by a much darker sense of the future politics of the region. Democracy, even political stability, seems further away than ever, and there have been serious repercussions for the Middle East and beyond. Can political science help us answer these questions? Can it provide us with the tools to shape our own country's policies in this regard? Or are dramatic political changes, especially regional ones, simply too complex?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain the methods political scientists use to understand politics around the world.
- Trace the development of the field of political science.
- Define key terms in the study of political institutions and behaviors.

DURING THE PAST 35 YEARS, the world has seen an astonishing number of changes: the rise of new economic powers in Asia, the collapse of communism, revolutions across the Middle East, the return of religion to politics, the spread of information technology and social media, and the shifting effects of globalization. Many of the traditional assumptions and beliefs held by scholars, policy makers, and citizens

have been overturned. New centers of wealth may reduce poverty, but they may also increase inequality within and between countries. Democracy, often seen as an inexorable force, can founder on such obstacles as religious or economic conflict. Technological change may create new, shared identities and sources of cooperation, but it can destabilize and fragment communities.

One pertinent example is the role of ethnic and religious conflict, which we have seen emerge in Syria and Iraq. Why does this form of political violence occur? Is it a response to inequality or political disenfranchisement? Is it a function of cultural differences, a "clash of civilizations"? Is it fostered or tempered by globalization? Perhaps the explanation lies somewhere else entirely, beyond our purview or comprehension. How can we know what is correct? How do we scrutinize a range of explanations and evaluate their merits? Competing assumptions and explanations are at the heart of political debates and policy decisions, yet we are often asked to choose in the absence of reliable evidence or a good understanding of cause and effect. To be better citizens, we should be better students of political science and **comparative politics**—the study and comparison of domestic politics across countries. Comparative politics can be contrasted with another related field in political science, **international relations**. While comparative politics looks at the politics inside countries (such as elections, political parties, revolutions, and judicial systems), international relations concentrates on relations between countries (such as foreign policy, war, trade, and foreign aid). Of course, the two overlap in many places, such as in ethnic or religious conflict, which often spills over borders, or political change, which can be shaped by international organizations or military force. For now, however, our discussion will concentrate on political structures and actions within countries.

comparative politics The study and comparison of domestic politics across countries

international relations A field in political science that concentrates on relations between countries, such as foreign policy, war, trade, and foreign aid

This chapter lays out some of the most basic vocabulary and structures of political science and comparative politics. These will fall under three basic categories: *analytical concepts* (assumptions and theories that guide our research), *methods* (ways to study and test those theories), and *ideals* (beliefs and values about preferred outcomes). Analytical concepts help us ask questions about cause and effect, methods provide tools to seek out explanations, and ideals help us compare existing politics with what we might prefer.

Our survey will consider some of the most basic questions: What is politics? How does one compare different political systems around the world? We will spend some time on the methods of comparative politics and how scholars have approached its study. Over the past century, political scientists have struggled with the challenge of analyzing politics and have asked whether such analysis can actually be considered a science. Exploring these issues will give us a better sense of the limitations and possibilities in the study of comparative politics. We will consider comparative politics through the concept of **institutions**—organizations or activities that are self-perpetuating and valued for their own sake. Institutions play an important role in defining and shaping what is possible and probable in political life by laying out the rules, norms, and structures in which we live. Finally, in addition to institutions, we will take up the ideals of freedom and equality. If institutions shape how the game of politics is played, then the goal of the game is the right mix of freedom and equality. Which ideal is more important? Must one come at the expense of the other? Perhaps some other ideal is preferable to both? With the knowledge gained by exploring these questions, we will be ready to take on complex politics around the world.

institution An organization or activity that is self-perpetuating and valued for its own sake

What Is Comparative Politics?

politics The struggle in any group for power that will give one or more persons the ability to make decisions for the larger group

First, we must identify what comparative politics is. **Politics** is the struggle in any group for power that will give one or more persons the ability to make decisions for the larger group. This group may range from a small organization to the entire world. Politics occurs wherever there are people and organizations. For example, we may speak of "office politics" when we are talking about power relationships in a business. Political scientists in particular concentrate on the struggle for leadership and power in a political community—a political party, an elected office, a city, a region, or a country. It is therefore hard to separate the idea of politics from the idea of **power**, which is the ability to influence others or impose one's will on them. Politics is the competition for public power, and power is the ability to extend one's will.

power The ability to influence others or impose one's will on them

In political science, comparative politics is a subfield that compares this pursuit of power across countries. The method of comparing countries can help us make arguments about cause and effect by drawing evidence from across space and time. For example, one important puzzle we will return to frequently is why some countries are democratic, while others are not. Why has politics in some countries resulted in power being dispersed among more people, while in other countries politics has concentrated power in the hands of a few? Why is South Korea democratic, while North Korea is not? Looking at North Korea alone won't necessarily help us understand why South Korea went down a different path, or vice versa. A comparison of the two, perhaps alongside similar cases in Asia, may better yield explanations. As should be clear from our discussion of the Arab Spring, these are not simply academic questions. Democratic countries and pro-democracy organizations actively support the spread of like-minded regimes around the world, and democracy has backslid in many countries over the past few years. If it is unclear how or why democracy emerges, it becomes much harder to promote or defend it. It is therefore important to separate ideals from our concepts and methods and not let the former obscure our use of the latter. Comparative politics can inform and even challenge our ideals, providing alternatives and guiding us to question our assumption that there is one right way to organize political life.

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

If comparison is an important way to test our assumptions and shape our ideals, how we compare cases is important. If there is no set of criteria or guide by which we gather information or draw conclusions, our studies become little more than collections of details. Researchers thus often seek out puzzles—questions about politics with no obvious answer—as a way to guide their research. From there, they rely on some **comparative method**—a way to compare cases and draw conclusions. By comparing countries or subsets within them, scholars seek out conclusions and generalizations that could be valid in other cases.

comparative method The means by which social scientists make comparisons across cases

To return to our earlier question, let us say that we are interested in why democracy has failed to develop in some countries. We might approach the puzzle of democracy by looking at North Korea. Why has the North Korean government remained communist and highly repressive even as similar regimes around the world have collapsed?

A convincing answer to this puzzle could tell scholars and policy makers a great deal and even guide our tense relations with North Korea in the future. Examining one country closely may lead us to form hypotheses about why a country operates as

it does. We call this approach **inductive reasoning**—the means by which we go from studying a case to generating a hypothesis. But while a study of one country can generate interesting hypotheses, it does not provide enough evidence to test them. Thus we might study North Korea and conclude that the use of nationalism by those in power has been central to the persistence of nondemocratic rule. In so concluding, we might then suggest that future studies look at the relationship between nationalism and authoritarianism in other countries. Inductive reasoning can therefore be a foundation on which we build greater theories in comparative politics.

Comparative politics can also rely on **deductive reasoning**—starting with a puzzle and from there generating some hypothesis about cause and effect to test against a number of cases. Whereas inductive reasoning starts with the evidence as a way to uncover a hypothesis, deductive reasoning starts with the hypothesis and then seeks out the evidence. In our example of inductive reasoning, we started with a case study of North Korea and ended with a testable generalization about nationalism; in deductive reasoning, we would start with our hypothesis about nationalism and then test that hypothesis by looking at a number of countries. By carrying out such studies, we may find a **correlation**, or apparent association, between certain factors or variables. If we were particularly ambitious, we might claim to have found cause and effect, or a **causal relationship**.[1] Inductive and deductive reasoning can help us better understand and explain political outcomes and, ideally, could help us predict them.

Unfortunately, inductive and deductive reasoning is not easy, nor is finding correlation and causation. Comparativists face seven major challenges in trying to examine political features across countries. Let's move through each of these challenges and show how they complicate the comparative method and comparative politics in general. First, political scientists have difficulty controlling the variables in the cases they study. In other words, in our search for correlations or causal relationships, we are unable to make true comparisons because each of our cases is different. By way of illustration, suppose a researcher wants to determine whether increased exercise by college students leads to higher grades. In studying the students who are her subjects, the researcher can control for a number of variables that might also affect grades, such as the students' diet, the amount of sleep they get, or any factor that might influence the results. By controlling for these differences and making certain that many of these variables are the same across the subjects, with the exception of exercise, the researcher can carry out her study with greater confidence.

But political science offers few opportunities to control the variables because the variables are a function of real-world politics. As will become clear, economies, cultures, geography, resources, and political structures are amazingly diverse, and it is difficult to control for these differences. Even in a single-case study, variables change over time. At best, we can control as much as possible for variables that might otherwise distort our conclusions. If, for example, we want to understand why gun ownership laws are so much less restrictive in the United States than they are in most other industrialized countries, we are well served to compare the United States with countries that have similar historical, economic, political, and social backgrounds, such as Canada and Australia, rather than Japan or South Africa. This approach allows us to control our variables more effectively, but it still leaves many variables uncontrolled and unaccounted for.

A second, related problem concerns interactions among the variables themselves. Even if we can control our variables in making our comparisons, there is

inductive reasoning
Research that works from case studies in order to generate hypotheses

deductive reasoning
Research that works from a hypothesis that is then tested against data

correlation An apparent relationship between two or more variables

causal relationship Cause and effect; when a change in one variable causes a change in another variable

multicausality When variables are interconnected and interact to produce particular outcomes

the problem that many of these variables are interconnected and interact. In other words, many variables interact to produce particular outcomes, in what is known as **multicausality**. A single variable, such as a country's electoral system or the strength of its judicial system, is unlikely to explain the variation in countries' gun control laws. The problem of multicausality also reminds us that in the real world there are often no single, easy answers to political problems.

A third problem involves the limits to our information and information gathering. Although the cases we study have many uncontrolled and interconnected variables, we often have too few cases to work with. In the natural sciences, researchers often conduct studies with a huge number of cases—hundreds of stars or thousands of individuals, often studied across time. This breadth allows researchers to select their cases in such a way as to control their variables, and the large number of cases prevents any single unusual case from distorting the findings. But in comparative politics, we are typically limited by the number of countries in the world—fewer than 200 at present, most of which did not exist a few centuries ago. Even if we study some subset of comparative politics (like political parties or acts of terrorism), our total number of cases will remain relatively small. And if we attempt to control for differences by trying to find a number of similar cases (for example, wealthy democracies), our total body of cases will shrink even further.

A fourth problem in comparative politics concerns how we access the few cases we do have. Research is often further hindered by the very factors that make countries interesting to study. Much of the information that political scientists seek is not easy to acquire, necessitating work in the field—that is, conducting interviews or studying government archives abroad. International travel requires time and money, and researchers may spend months or even years in the field. Interviewees may be unwilling to speak on sensitive issues or may distort information. Libraries and archives may be incomplete, or access to them restricted. Governments may bar research on politically sensitive questions. Confronting these obstacles in more than one country is even more challenging. A researcher may be able to read Russian and travel to Russia frequently, but if he wants to compare authoritarianism in Russia and China, it would be ideal to be able to read Chinese and conduct research in China as well. Few comparativists have the language skills, time, or resources to conduct field research in many countries. There are almost no comparativists in North America or Europe who speak both Russian and Chinese. As a result, comparativists often master knowledge of a single country or language and rely on inductive reasoning. Single-case study can be extremely valuable—it gives the researcher a great deal of case depth and the ability to tease out novel observations that may come only from close observation. However, such narrow focus can also make it unclear to researchers whether the politics they see in their case study has important similarities to the politics in other cases. In the worst-case scenario, scholars come to believe that the country they study is somehow unique and fail to recognize its similarities to other cases.

Fifth, even where comparativists do widen their range of cases, their focus tends to be limited to a single geographic region. The specialist on communist Cuba is more likely to study other Latin American countries than to consider China or North Korea, and the specialist on China is more likely to study South Korea than Russia. This isn't necessarily a concern, given our earlier discussion of the need to control variables—it may make more sense to study parts of the world where similar variables are clustered rather than to compare countries from different parts of the world. This regional focus, however—often referred to as **area studies**—is distributed unevenly

area studies A regional focus when studying political science, rather than studying parts of the world where similar variables are clustered

around the world. For decades, the largest share of research tended to focus on Western Europe, despite the increasing role of Asia in the international system.[2] Why? As mentioned earlier, some of this is a function of language; many scholars in the West are exposed to European languages in primary or secondary school, and in many European countries the use of English is widespread, thus facilitating research. But English is also widespread in southern Asia; in spite of this, scholarship has lagged behind. For example, we find that over the past 50 years one of the top journals in comparative politics published as many articles on Sweden as on India. To be fair, much of this is changing thanks to a new generation of scholars, many of whom come from or work in a much wider array of countries around the world. Yet overall, comparative politics remains slow to redirect its attention when new issues and questions arise.

Sixth, the problem of bias makes it even harder to control for variables and to select the right cases. This is a question not of political bias, although that can sometimes be a problem, but of how we select our cases. In the natural sciences, investigators randomize case selection as much as possible to avoid choosing cases that support one hypothesis or another. But for the reasons mentioned earlier, such randomization is not possible in political science. Single-case studies are already influenced by the fact that comparativists study a country because they know its language or find it interesting. Yet even if we rely instead on deductive reasoning—beginning with a hypothesis and then seeking out our cases—we can easily fall into the trap of **selection bias**.

For example, say we want to understand revolutions, and we hypothesize that their main cause is a rapid growth in inequality. Revolution is what we would call our **dependent variable**—the variable that is dependent on, or affected by, another variable. Rapid growth in inequality would be our **independent variable**—the variable that doesn't depend on changes in other variables and is the presumed cause. How should we select our cases? Most of us would respond by saying that we should find as many cases of revolution as possible and then see whether a rapid growth in inequality preceded those revolutions. But this seemingly logical approach is a mistake, as it leads to what is known as bias on the dependent variable—in other words, a bias in sampling on the effect, rather than the cause. Why is this a problem? By looking only at cases of revolution (the dependent variable, or effect), we miss all the cases with rapid growth in inequality (the independent variable, or cause) where revolution has *not* taken place. Indeed, even if every revolution is preceded by changes in inequality, there may still be many more cases without revolution than with it, undermining our hypothesis. So, we would do better to start with what we think is the cause (growth in inequality) rather than working backward from the effect (revolution). While this may seem the obvious choice, it is a frequent mistake among scholars who are naturally drawn to particular outcomes and so start there.

A seventh and final concern deals with the heart of political science—the search for cause and effect. Let us for the sake of argument assume that the half-dozen problems we have laid out can be overcome through careful case selection, information gathering, and control of variables. Let us further imagine that with these problems in hand, research finds, for example, that countries with a low rate of female literacy are less likely to be democratic than countries where female literacy is high. Even if we are confident enough to claim that there is a causal relationship between female literacy and democracy—a bold statement indeed—a final and perhaps intractable problem looms. Which variable is cause and which is effect? Do low rates of

selection bias A focus on effects rather than causes, which can lead to inaccurate conclusions about correlation or causation

dependent variable A variable whose value changes based on that of another

independent variable A variable whose value does not depend on that of another

- Controlling a large number of variables
- Controlling for the interaction of variables (multicausality)
- Limited number of cases to research
- Limited access to information from cases
- Uneven research across cases and regions
- Cases selected on the basis of effect and not cause (selection bias)
- Variables may be either cause or effect (endogeneity)

endogeneity The issue that cause and effect are not often clear, in that variables may be both cause and effect in relationship to one another

female literacy limit public participation, empowering nondemocratic actors, or do authoritarian leaders (largely men) take little interest in promoting gender equality? This problem of distinguishing cause and effect, known as **endogeneity**, is a major obstacle in any comparative research. Even if we are confident that we have found cause and effect, we can't easily ascertain which is which. On reflection, this is to be expected; one political scientist has called endogeneity "the motor of history," for causes and effects tend to evolve together, each transforming the other over time. Thus early forms of democracy, literacy, and women's rights may well have gone hand in hand, each reinforcing and changing the others. In short, many things matter, and these many things affect each other. This makes an elegant claim about cause and effect problematic, to say the least.[3]

CAN WE MAKE A SCIENCE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS?

We have so far elaborated many of the ways in which comparative politics—and political science in general—makes for difficult study. Variables are hard to control and can be interconnected, while actual cases may be few. Getting access to information may be difficult, and comparisons may be limited by regional knowledge and interests. What questions are asked may be affected by selection bias and endogeneity. All these concerns make it difficult to generate any kind of political science **theory**, which we can define as an integrated set of hypotheses, assumptions, and facts. At this point, you may well have concluded that a science of politics is hopeless. But it is precisely these kinds of concerns that have driven political science, and comparative politics within it, toward a more scientific approach. Whether this has yielded or will yield significant benefits, and at what cost, is something we will consider next.

theory An integrated set of hypotheses, assumptions, and facts

Political science and comparative politics have a long pedigree. In almost every major society, there have been masterworks of politics that prescribe rules or, less often, analyzing political behavior. In the West, the work of the philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) departed from the traditional emphasis on political ideals to conduct comparative research on existing political systems (what we will call *regimes*), eventually gathering and analyzing the constitutions of 158 Greek city-states. Aristotle's objective was to delineate between what he took to be "proper" and "deviant," or despotic, political regimes. He also framed this discussion in terms of a puzzle—why were some regimes despotic and others not? With this approach, Aristotle conceived of an empirical (that is, observable and verifiable) science of politics with a practical

TIMELINE — Major Thinkers in Comparative Politics

Thinker	Description
Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.)	First separated the study of politics from that of philosophy; used the comparative method to study Greek city-states; in *The Politics*, conceived of an empirical study of politics with a practical purpose.
Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527)	Often cited as the first modern political scientist because of his emphasis on statecraft and empirical knowledge; analyzed different political systems, believing the findings could be applied by statesmen; discussed his theories in *The Prince*.
Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)	Developed the notion of a "social contract," whereby people surrender certain liberties in favor of order; advocated a powerful state in *Leviathan*.
John Locke (1632–1704)	Argued that private property is essential to individual freedom and prosperity; advocated a weak state in *Two Treatises of Government*.
Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755)	Studied government systems; advocated the separation of powers within government in *The Spirit of Laws*.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78)	Argued that citizens' rights are inalienable and cannot be taken away by the state; influenced the development of civil rights; discussed these ideas in *The Social Contract*.
Karl Marx (1818–83)	Elaborated a theory of economic development and inequality in *Das Kapital*; predicted the eventual collapse of capitalism and democracy.
Max Weber (1864–1920)	Wrote widely on such topics as bureaucracy, forms of authority, and the impact of culture on economic and political development; developed many of these themes in *Economy and Society*.

purpose: statecraft, or how to govern. Aristotle was perhaps the first Westerner to separate the study of politics from that of philosophy.[4]

Aristotle's early approach did not immediately lead to any systematic study of politics. For the next 1,800 years, discussions of politics remained embedded in the realm of philosophy, with the emphasis placed on how politics should be rather than on how politics was actually conducted. Ideals, rather than conclusions drawn from evidence, were the norm. Only with the works of the Italian Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) did a comparative approach to politics truly emerge. Like Aristotle, he sought to analyze different political systems—those that existed around him as well as those that had preceded him, such as the Roman Empire—and even tried to make generalizations about success and failure. These findings, he believed, could then be applied by statesmen to avoid their predecessors' mistakes. Machiavelli's work reflects this pragmatism, dealing with the mechanics of government, diplomacy, military strategy, and power.[5]

Because of his emphasis on statecraft and empirical knowledge, Machiavelli is often cited as the first modern political scientist, paving the way for other scholars. His writings came at a time when the medieval order was giving way to the Renaissance, with its emphasis on science, rationalism, secularism, and real-world knowledge over abstract ideals. The resulting work over the next four centuries reinforced

the idea that politics, like any other area of knowledge, could be developed as a logical, rigorous, and predictable science.

During those centuries, a number of major thinkers took up the comparative approach to the study of politics, which slowly retreated from moral, philosophical, or religious foundations. In the seventeenth century, authors like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke followed in Machiavelli's footsteps, advocating particular political systems on the basis of empirical observation and analysis. They were followed in the eighteenth century by such scholars as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Baron de Montesquieu, whose studies of the separation of power and civil liberties would directly influence the writing of the U.S. Constitution and other constitutions to follow. The work of Karl Marx and Max Weber in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which analyzed the nature of political and economic organization and power, would further add to political science. All these developments reflected widespread changes in scholarly inquiry and often blended political ideals with analytical concepts and some attempt at a systematic method of study.

Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century, political science formally existed as a field of study, but it still looked much different from the way it does now. The study of comparative politics, while less focused on ideals or philosophy, resembled a kind of political journalism: largely descriptive, atheoretical, and concentrated on Europe, which still dominated world politics through its empires. Little of this work was based on the comparative method.

The two world wars and the rise of the Cold War would mark a turning point in political science and comparative politics, particularly in the United States. There were several reasons for this. First, a growing movement surfaced among universities toward applying more rigorous methods to the study of human behavior, whether in sociology, economics, or politics. Second, the world wars raised serious questions about the ability of scholars to meaningfully contribute to an understanding of world affairs. The creation of new countries, the rise of fascism, and the failure of democracy throughout much of interwar Europe were vital concerns, but political scholarship did not seem to shed enough light on these issues and what they meant for international stability. Third, the Cold War with a rival Soviet Union, armed with nuclear weapons and revolutionary ideology, made understanding comparative politics seem a matter of survival. Finally, the postwar period ushered in a wave of technological innovation, such as early computers. This development generated a widespread belief that, through technological innovation, many social problems could be recast as technical concerns, finally to be resolved through science. The fear of another war was thus married with a belief that science was an unmitigated good that had the answers to almost all problems. The question was how to make the science work.

Although these changes dramatically transformed the study of politics, the field itself remained a largely conservative discipline, taking capitalism and democracy as the ideal. In comparative politics, these views were codified in what was known as **modernization theory**, which held that as societies developed, they would become capitalist democracies, converging around a set of shared values and characteristics. The United States and other Western countries were furthest ahead on this path, and the theory assumed that all countries would eventually catch up unless "diverted" by alternative systems such as communism (as fascism had done in the past).

During the 1950s and 1960s, comparativists influenced by modernization theory expanded their research to include more cases. Field research, supported by

modernization theory
A theory asserting that as societies developed, they would take on a set of common characteristics, including democracy and capitalism

government and private grants, became the normal means by which political scientists gathered data. New computer technologies combined with statistical methods were also applied to this expanding wealth of data. Finally, the subject of investigation shifted away from political institutions (such as legislatures and constitutions) and toward individual political behavior. This trend came to be known as the **behavioral revolution**. Behavioralism hoped to generate theories and generalizations that could help explain and even predict political activity. Ideally, this work would eventually lead to a "grand theory" of political behavior and modernization that would be valid across countries.

Behavioralism and modernization theory were two different things: modernization theory was a set of hypotheses about how countries develop, and behavioralism was a set of methods with which to approach politics. However, both were attempts to study politics more scientifically to achieve certain policy outcomes.[6] Behavioralism also promoted deductive, large-scale research over the single-case study common in inductive reasoning. It seemed clear to many that political science, and comparative politics within it, would soon be a "real" science.

By the late 1970s, however, this enthusiasm began to meet with resistance. New theories and sophisticated methods of analysis increased scholars' knowledge about politics around the world, but this knowledge in itself did not lead to the expected breakthroughs. The theories that had been developed, such as modernization theory, increasingly failed to match politics on the ground; instead of becoming more capitalist and more democratic, many newly independent countries faced violent conflict, authoritarianism, and limited economic development. This did not match Western expectations or ideals. What had gone wrong?

Some critics charged that the behavioral revolution's obsession with appearing scientific had led the discipline astray by emphasizing methodology over deep knowledge of the countries under consideration. Others criticized the field for its ideological bias, arguing that comparativists were interested not in understanding the world on its own terms but in prescribing the Western model of modernization. At worst, comparativists' work could be viewed as simply serving the foreign policy interests of the United States. Since that time, comparative politics, like all of political science, has grown increasingly fragmented—or, if you prefer, more diverse. While few still believe in the old descriptive approach that dominated the earlier part of the century, there is no consensus about a direction for scholarship and what research methods or analytical concepts are most fruitful. This lack of consensus has led to several main divisions and lines of conflict.

behavioral revolution
A movement within political science during the 1950s and 1960s to develop general theories about individual political behavior that could be applied across all countries

RESEARCH METHODS. One area of conflict is over methodology—how best to gather and analyze data. We have already spoken about the problems of comparative methodology, involving selecting cases and controlling variables. Within these concerns are further questions of how one gathers and interprets the data to compare these cases and measure these variables. Some comparative political scientists rely on **qualitative methods**, evidence, and methodology, such as interviews, observations, and archival and other forms of documentary research. Qualitative approaches are often narrowly focused, deep investigations of one or a few cases drawing from scholarly expertise. However, some qualitative studies (such as work on modernization or revolution) do involve numerous cases spread out across the globe and spanning centuries. Either way, qualitative approaches are typically inductive, beginning with case studies to generate theory.

For some political scientists, a qualitative approach is of dubious value. Variables are not rigorously defined or measured, they argue, and hypotheses are not tested by using a large sample of cases. Asserting that qualitative work fails to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge and is little better than the approach that dominated the field a century ago, these critics advocate **quantitative methods** instead. They favor a wider use of cases unbound by area specialization, greater use of statistical analysis, and mathematical models often drawn from economics. This quantitative methodology is more likely to use deductive reasoning, starting with a theory that political scientists can test with an array of data. Many advocates of qualitative research question whether quantitative approaches measure and test variables that are of any particular value or simply focus on the (often mundane) things that can be expressed numerically. Overdependence on quantifiable measures can lead scholars to avoid the important questions that often cannot be addressed using such strict scientific methods.

THEORY. A second related debate concerns theoretical assumptions about human behavior. Are human beings rational, in the sense that their behavior conforms to some generally understandable behavior? Some say yes. These scholars use what is known as **rational choice** or **game theory** to study the rules and games by which politics is played and how human beings act on their preferences (for instance, how and why people decide to vote, choose a political party, or support a revolution). Such models can, ideally, lead not only to explanation but also to prediction—a basic element of science. As you might guess, rational choice theory is closely associated with quantitative methods. And like the critics of quantitative methods in general, those who reject rational choice theory assert that the emphasis on individual rationality discounts the importance of things like historical complexity, unintended outcomes, or cultural factors. In fact, some consider rational choice theories, as they do behavioralism, to be Western (or specifically American) assumptions about self-interest, markets, and individual autonomy that do not easily describe the world.

As these debates have persisted, the world around us continues to change. Just as the wrenching political changes in the Middle East were not anticipated, neither was the end of the Cold War some twenty years earlier. Few scholars, regardless of methodology or theoretical focus, anticipated or even considered either dramatic set of events. Similarly, religion has reemerged as an important component in politics around the globe—a force that modernization theory (and research focused on

qualitative method Study through an in-depth investigation of a limited number of cases

quantitative method Study through statistical data from many cases

rational choice Approach that assumes that individuals weigh the costs and benefits and make choices to maximize their benefits

game theory An approach that emphasizes how actors or organizations behave in their goal to influence others; built upon assumptions of rational choice

Europe) told us was on the wane. New economic powers have emerged in Asia, coinciding with democracy in some cases but not in others. Terrorism, once the tactic of secular revolutionary groups in the 1970s, has also resurfaced, albeit in the hands of different actors. It seems that many political scientists, whatever their persuasion, have had little to contribute to many of these issues—time and again, scholars have been caught off guard.

Where does this leave us now? In recent years, some signs of conciliation have emerged. Scholars recognize that careful (and sloppy) scholarship and theorizing are possible with both qualitative and quantitative methods. Inductive and deductive reasoning can both generate valuable theories in comparative politics. Rational choice and historical or cultural approaches can contribute to and be integrated into each other. One finds more mixed-method approaches that use both quantitative and qualitative research. As a result, some scholars have spoken optimistically of an integration of mathematics, "narrative" (case studies), and rational choice models, each contributing to the other. For example, large-scale quantitative studies of political activity can be further elucidated by turning to individual cases that investigate the question in greater detail.[7] At the same time, it is worth noting that the difficulties in making comparative politics and political science more rigorous and scientific are not unique. Across the social and life sciences there is what has been termed a "replication crisis," where numerous influential studies cannot be replicated. Much to the relief of parents, this includes the famous "marshmallow test," which concluded that a child's ability to delay gratification—for example, waiting to eat a marshmallow—could predict future achievement in school and work.[8]

A final observation is in order as we bring this discussion to a close. Irrespective of methodology or theory, many have observed that political science as a whole is out of touch with real-world concerns, has become inaccessible to laypersons, and has failed to speak to those who make decisions about policy—whether voters or elected leaders. Commentators and scholars often assert that political science has created "a culture that glorifies arcane unintelligibility while disdaining impact and audience."[9] This is misleading, given the growing emphasis on reconnecting political science to central policy questions.[10]

Comparative politics should not simply be about what we can study or what we want to study but also about how our research can reach people, empower them, and help them be better citizens and leaders. A call for greater relevance may represent a change for some scholars, but relevance and rigor are not at odds. They are in fact central to a meaningful political science and comparative politics.

A Guiding Concept: Political Institutions

A goal of this textbook is to provide a way to compare and analyze politics around the world. Given the long-standing debates within comparative politics, how can we organize our ideas and information? One way is through a guiding concept, a way of looking at the world that highlights some important features while deemphasizing others. There is certainly no one right way of doing this; any guide, like a lens, will sharpen some features while distorting others. With that said, our guiding concept is institutions, defined at the beginning of this chapter as organizations or activities that are self-perpetuating and valued for their own sake. In other words, an institution is something so embedded in people's lives as a norm or value that it is not easily dislodged or changed. People see an institution as central to their lives, and, as a result, the institution commands and generates legitimacy. Institutions embody the rules, norms, and values that give meaning to human activity.

Consider an example from outside politics. We often hear in the United States that baseball is an American institution. What exactly does this mean? In short, Americans view baseball not simply as a game but as something valued for its own sake, a game that helps define society. Yet few Americans would say that soccer is a national institution. The reason is probably clear: we do not perceive soccer as indispensable in the way that baseball is. Whereas soccer is simply a game, baseball is part of what defines America and Americans. Even Americans who don't like baseball would probably say that America wouldn't be the same without it. Indeed, even at the local level, teams command such legitimacy that when they merely threaten to move to another city, their fans raise a hue and cry. The Brooklyn Dodgers moved to Los Angeles in 1958, yet many in New York still consider them "their" team over half a century later. For many Canadians, while baseball is important, hockey is a national institution, thought of as "Canada's game" and an inextricable part of Canadian identity and history. In Europe and much of the world, soccer reigns as a premier social institution, and teams provoke such fervent loyalty that fan violence is quite common. Because of their legitimacy and apparent indispensability, institutions command authority and can influence human behavior; we accept and conform to institutions and support rather than challenge them. Woe betide the American, Canadian, or European who derides the national sport!

Another example connects directly to politics. In many countries, democracy is an institution: it is not merely a means to compete over political power but a vital element of people's lives, bound up in the very way they define themselves. Democracy is part and parcel of collective identity, and some democratic countries and their people would not be the same without it. Even if they are cynical about democracy in practice, citizens of democracies will defend and even die for the institution when it is under threat. In many other countries, this is not the case: democracy is absent, poorly understood, or weakly institutionalized and unstable. People in such countries do not define themselves by democracy's presence or absence, and so democracy's future there is less secure. However, these same people might owe a similar allegiance to a different set of institutions, such as their ethnic group or religion. Clearly, no single, uniform set of institutions holds power over people all around the world, and understanding the differences among institutions is central to the study of comparative politics.

What about a physical object or place? Can that, too, be an institution? Many would argue that the original World Trade Center was an American institution—not just a set of office buildings, but structures representing American values. The same can be said about the Pentagon. When terrorists attacked these buildings on September 11, 2001, they did so not simply to cause a great loss of life but also to show that their hostility was directed against America itself—its institutions, as they shape and represent the American way of life, and its relation to the outside world. Like the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the city of Jerusalem is a powerful cultural and national institution, in this case reflecting the identity and ideals of two peoples: Israelis and Palestinians. Both groups claim it as their capital, and for both the city holds key historical, political, and religious significance.

The examples just described raise the distinction between formal and informal institutions. When we think of **formal institutions**, we assume they are based on officially sanctioned rules that are relatively clear. Yet there are also **informal institutions**—unwritten and unofficial, but no less powerful as a result. And of course, institutions can be a combination of both.

Because institutions are embedded in each of us, in how we see the world and what we think is valuable and important, it is difficult to change or eliminate them. When institutions are threatened, people will rush to their defense and even re-create them when they are shattered. This bond is the glue of society. However, one problem that institutions pose is this very "stickiness," in that people may come to resist even necessary change because they have difficulty accepting the idea that certain institutions have outlived their value or need to be reformed. Thus, while institutions can and do change, rising and falling in power, they are by nature persistent. This, however, is not to say that institutions are eternal. Such structures can decline in power in the face of alternative norms, or be swept away when people find them too constraining or outmoded. The rise and institutionalization of soccer in the United States may mirror the decline of baseball, which is viewed by many young Americans as an outdated sport. Many assert that democracy seems to be losing its legitimacy even in places where it has long been a norm.

Politics is full of institutions. The basic political structures of any country are composed of institutions: the army, the police, the legislature, and the courts, to name a few. We obey them not only because we think it is in our self-interest to do so but also because we see them as legitimate ways to conduct politics. Taxation is a good example. In many Western democracies, income taxes are an institution; we may not like them, but we pay them nonetheless. Is this because we are afraid of going to jail if we fail to do so? Perhaps. But research indicates that a major source of tax compliance is people's belief that taxation is a legitimate way to fund the programs that society needs. We pay, in other words, when we believe that it is the right thing to do, a norm. By contrast, in societies where taxes are not institutionalized, tax evasion tends to be rampant; people view taxes as illegitimate and those who pay as suckers. Similarly, where electoral politics is weakly institutionalized, people support elections only when their preferred candidate wins, and they cry foul, take to the streets, and even threaten or use violence when the opposition gains power. Institutions can thus be stronger or weaker, and rise or decline in power, over time.

Institutions are a useful way to approach the study of politics because they set the stage for political behavior. Because institutions generate norms and values (good and bad), they favor and allow certain kinds of political activity and not others, making a more likely "path" for political activity (what is known as *path dependence*). As a

formal institutions Institutions usually based on officially sanctioned rules that are relatively clear

informal institutions Institutions with unwritten and unofficial rules

CONCEPTS IN ACTION
See formal and informal institutions in action in the UK on p. 229.

result, political institutions are critical because they influence politics, and how political institutions are constructed, intentionally or unintentionally, will profoundly affect how politics is conducted.

In many ways, our institutional approach takes us back to the study of comparative politics as it existed before the 1950s. Prior to the behavioral revolution, political scientists spent much of their time documenting and describing the institutions of politics, often without asking how those institutions actually shaped politics. The behavioral revolution that followed emphasized cause and effect but turned its attention toward political actors and their calculations, resources, or strategies. The actual institutions were seen as less important. The return to the study of institutions in many ways combines these two traditions. From behavioralism, institutional approaches take their emphasis on cause-and-effect relationships, something that will be prevalent throughout this book. However, institutions are not simply the product of individual political behavior; they powerfully affect how politics functions. In other words, institutions are not merely the result of politics; they can also be an important cause. Their emergence—and disappearance—can have a profound impact on politics.

There is a tremendous amount of institutional variation around the world that needs to be recognized and understood. This textbook will map some of the basic institutional differences between countries, acknowledging the diversity of institutions while pointing to some features that allow us to compare and evaluate them. By studying political institutions, we can hope to gain a better sense of the political landscape across countries.

A Guiding Ideal: Reconciling Freedom and Equality

We've spoken so far about analytical concepts (such as institutions), methods (such as inductive or deductive, quantitative or qualitative), and political ideals. We defined politics as the struggle to attain the power to make decisions for society. The concept of institutions gives us a way to organize our study by investigating the different ways that this struggle can be shaped. Yet this raises an important question: People may struggle for political power, but what are they fighting for? What do they seek to

achieve once they have gained power? This is where ideals come in, and we will concentrate on one core debate that lies at the heart of all politics: the struggle between freedom and equality. This struggle has existed as long as human beings have lived in organized communities, and it may be that these are more than ideals—they were a part of our evolutionary history as we transitioned from small, nomadic bands to larger, settled communities.

Politics is bound up in the struggle between individual freedom and collective equality and in how these ideals can be reconciled. Since *freedom* and *equality* can mean different things to different people, it is important to define each term. When we speak of **freedom**, we are talking about an individual's ability to act independently, without fear of restriction or punishment by the state or other individuals or groups in society. At a basic level, freedom connotes autonomy; in the modern world, it encompasses such concepts as free speech, free assembly, freedom of religion, and other civil liberties. **Equality** refers to a material standard of living shared by individuals within a community, society, or country. The relation between equality and freedom is typically viewed in terms of justice or injustice—a measurement of whether our ideals have been met.

Freedom and equality are tightly interconnected, and the relation between the two shapes politics, power, and debates over justice. It is unclear, however, whether one must come at the expense of the other. Greater personal freedom, for example, may imply a smaller role for the state and limits on its powers to do such things as redistribute income through social expenditures and taxes. As a result, inequality may increase as individual freedom trumps the desire for greater collective equality. This growing inequality can in turn undermine freedom if too many people feel as though the political system no longer cares about their material needs. Even if this discontent is not a danger, there remains the question of whether society as a whole has an obligation to help the poor—an issue of justice. The United States, as we shall see, has one of the highest degrees of economic inequality among developed democracies. Is this inequality undermining democratic institutions, as some suggest?

Alternatively, a focus on equality may erode freedom. Demands for greater material equality may lead a government to take greater control of private property and personal wealth, all in the name of redistribution for the "greater good." Economic and political powers may threaten individual freedom when concentrated in one place since people control fewer private resources of their own. In the Soviet Union the state held all economic power, giving it the ability to control people's lives—where they lived, the education they received, the jobs they held, the money they earned. Levels of inequality were in turn quite low, as was freedom.

Is the balance between freedom and equality a zero-sum game, in which the gain of one represents the loss of the other? Not necessarily. Some would assert that freedom and equality can also reinforce each other: material security can help to secure certain political rights, and vice versa. In addition, while a high degree of state power may weaken individual freedom, the state also plays an important role in helping to define individual freedom and protect it from infringement by other individuals. Finally, the meaning of *freedom* and *equality* may change over time as the material world and our values change. For some, managing freedom or equality necessitates centralized political power. Others view such power as the very impediment to freedom and equality. We will look at these debates more closely when we consider political ideologies in subsequent chapters.

freedom The ability of an individual to act independently, without fear of restriction or punishment by the state or other individuals or groups in society

equality A material standard of living shared by individuals within a community, society, or country

Can We Make a Science of Politics?

In much of our discussion, there is a sense that political science remains hindered by problems of data and theory that could prevent explanation, or even prediction, of political behavior. To use a metaphor coined by the philosopher Karl Popper: Do humans function in a regular, clocklike way, such that we can find out "what makes us tick" and predict how we will act? Or are humans more like clouds, shifting and complex? Some people do believe that humans are more clocklike and that science can produce better explanations and perhaps even predictions of human behavior. In this view, the main problem has been a lack of the necessary tools. However, certain scientific advances are under way that some believe will transform the social sciences. Researchers are at work in two interesting areas, both focusing on human nature in different but complementary ways.

The first we can call a macro-level approach to human nature. In this approach, the future of the discipline lies in the integration of life sciences, such as neuroscience and related fields. Politics can be investigated by starting with psychological and biological factors as the foundation of political actions and institutions. For example, biological studies of politics increasingly suggest that many key aspects of politics, such as ideological orientation, levels of social trust, and propensity toward political participation, may be as much inherited as learned. This does not suggest that people have a gene for such things as democracy or authoritarianism, conservatism or liberalism. But the macro-level approach does argue that biology can partially shape people's view of some issues and that political orientation is not simply a function of individual preference or existing social structures.

To return to our discussion of the wave of revolutions and civil conflict across the Middle East, macro-level research might focus on demographics, such as the large population under age 30, and the intersection of particular forms of youth behavior (such as risk-taking) and institutionalized barriers to opportunity (such as corruption). It might also consider the interaction between culture and biology in levels and sources of shame and humiliation. Mohamed Bouazizi did not set himself on fire because he was crazy or because he thought it would touch off a revolution. In our understanding, his act was irrational. But if we reconsider it as an explicable psychological response based on his particular environment, we gain a different insight. This of course does not provide any prediction of why a revolution would happen in the first place, or why in Tunisia as opposed to Morocco, which escaped the Arab Spring.

This is where micro-level approaches come into play. If macro-level studies look at how biological forces can interact with the social environment, micro-level research focuses on the science of cognition—how our tools for judgment frequently lead to a range of involuntary cognitive errors, including overconfidence, misunderstandings of statistics and probability, mental "shortcuts" that lead to biases and stereotypes, and the tendency to discern cause-and-effect relationships where none exist. In this scholarship, the very notion of human rationality is deeply problematic. This understanding can help explain why political scientists were surprised by the Arab Spring and the collapse of communism.