

JOHN McCORMICK | ROD HAGUE | MARTIN HARROP

# COMPARATIVE



# GOVERNMENT



# AND POLITICS



TWELFTH EDITION

B L O O M S B U R Y



## **PRAISE FOR *COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS*, TWELFTH EDITION**

‘This is an invaluable overview of comparative government and politics. Written in an accessible manner and within a clearly organized framework, it’s a first-rate teaching resource for any foundational course in comparative politics.’ – **Pippa Norris, Harvard University, USA**

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– **Claudia Lueders, Oxford Brookes University, UK**

# COMPARATIVE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

## AN INTRODUCTION

12TH EDITION

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McCORMICK

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# Preface

In Peru, a former schoolteacher with little political experience is elected president. In Tunisia, years of steady democratization seem to be threatened as political leaders suspend the legislature and declare emergency powers. India's reputation as the world's largest democracy is sullied as the governing party continues to impose its discriminatory notions of a Hindu nationalist state. In Botswana and Costa Rica, the steady development of stable democracy continues, often unnoticed in much of the rest of the world. On every continent, governments continue to struggle to address the Covid-19 pandemic, faced with publics that are often deeply divided over the best steps to take.

Why is all this happening, and what does it mean? How can we make sense of the political news from countries about which we often hear much too little? Are these developments unusual, or are they part of wider trends around the world? Why do different political systems operate on different rules? How do the powers of different governments explain their actions, and how do their citizens feel about the changes they see? Why are some countries ruled by a president and others by a prime minister? Why do some countries have a single dominant political party while others have dozens? And what is the difference between a supreme court and a constitutional court?

These are the kinds of questions addressed and answered by comparative politics. As well as helping us identify the rules of government and politics, comparative analysis also helps us make sense of political news from around the world. And as advances in technology, trade, and science bring us all closer together, so can developments in one part of the world have effects on many others, making it more important that we understand the changes we see. By studying different governments and political systems, we can better understand not just the country in which we live, but also other countries, their governments, their political decisions and their people.

This is a book designed to introduce you to the study of comparative government and politics. The goal of the chapters that follow is to provide a wide-ranging and accessible guide for courses and modules in this fascinating and essential sub-field of political science. We will look at the methods and theories of comparison, at the differences between democracies and dictatorships, at the many intriguing forms in which the institutions of government exist, and at the ways in which ordinary people take part – or are prevented from taking part – in government and in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

As with the last edition, the book takes a thematic approach to comparison, with chapters divided into three broad groups:

- The first group (Chapters 1–6) provides the foundations, with a review of the key concepts in comparative politics, followed by chapters on the methods of comparison, on the reach of states and nations, on political culture in its different forms, and on the features of democratic and authoritarian regimes.
- The second group (Chapters 7–12) focuses on institutions, which constitute the core subject matter of political science. It opens with a chapter on the constitutions that help us make sense of how institutions work and relate to one another, and of the supporting work of courts. This is followed by chapters on executives, legislatures, bureaucracies, sub-national government, and the media.
- The third group (Chapters 13–18) looks at political processes, beginning with a survey of political participation, then looking at elections, parties, and interest groups, wrapping up with chapters on public policy and political economy.

The book is designed to meet the needs of students in different countries, approaching the study of government and politics from different perspectives. You may be using it as part of the first (and perhaps only) course or module you are taking on government and politics, as part of a course you are required to take outside your major subject, as part of a course you are taking simply because you are interested in politics, or as part of a course you are taking in your major course of study. Whatever your background and motivation, the chapters that follow are designed to help you find your way through the many different forms in which politics and government exist around the world.

## KEY THEME OF THE BOOK: ADDRESSING CHANGE

On 31 December 2019, the Country Office of the World Health Organization (WHO) in China noticed a media statement from the municipal health commission in Wuhan, a huge city in central China, reporting on several local cases of ‘viral pneumonia’. The Country Office passed the information up the chain within WHO, which requested more information while also offering support to Chinese health authorities. The disease was identified as a new strain of coronavirus with origins in animals, and within a matter of days the first deaths had been reported in China and the first cases were reported in Thailand, Japan, the United States and Europe. The disease caused by the coronavirus was soon named Covid-19, and governments all over the world struggled to decide how to respond as millions of people were infected and hundreds of thousands died.

It soon became clear that governments were remarkably poorly equipped to deal with a problem that – for many – symbolized the emergence of a world that was increasingly connected and changing at a rapid pace. While scientists rushed to develop new vaccines, governments chose from a lengthening number

of options on the policy menu: impose lockdowns, close borders, require people to stay away from work and large gatherings, mandate the wearing of face masks, or simply deny either the existence or the seriousness of the problem. A debate broke out in multiple countries over how the right of individuals to ignore government instructions compared with the responsibility of governments and health authorities to encourage humans to protect themselves and each other.

Covid-19 has since proved to be yet another in the series of mounting concerns about the condition of government and politics around the world. Political scientists had already pointed with growing alarm to the inroads being made into democracy, the expansion of authoritarianism, and declining public trust in government. Critics had also been denouncing the slowness with which governments were addressing the existential problem of climate change, warnings about which had been issued as long ago as the late 1980s. Meanwhile, there were numerous ongoing problems that seemed almost to have become part of the permanent fabric of politics and society, including persistent poverty, food and water insecurity, gender inequality, income inequality, political polarization, racism, corruption, threats to biodiversity, and religious conflict.

Before we become too discouraged, though, it is important to realize that in spite of all the problems, life in many ways is far better than it was even a generation ago. On average, we live longer, healthier, and more productive lives thanks to remarkable advances in science, technology, and democratic ideals. At the same time, governments – and we as citizens – are perfectly capable of addressing the problems we now face: we have the creativity, the resources, the institutions, and the political processes needed to make the necessary changes, if we decide to make them. As a critical step in that direction, it will help if we understand how governments work, and if we compare the performance of governments around the world, establishing where they have done well and where not so well.

In the chapters that follow, we will examine not just the structure of political systems and the ways that citizens relate to them, but we will look also at the ebb and flow of democracy and authoritarianism, of nationalism and globalization, and of conflict and cooperation. We will look at what countries do well, what they do badly, how they might improve, and what they can learn from each other. The book is sprinkled with comparative data that not only shows how different countries are performing on a wide range of measures, but also gives us insight into the causes of the successes and can help us identify the responses to the problems.

Consider, as a sampler dish, this list of possibilities that have already been tried in multiple countries with encouraging results:

- Gender quotas that have helped increase the number of women elected to political office in Rwanda and Mexico.
- Compulsory voting that has improved voter turnout in Australia and Brazil.
- Proportional voting systems that have improved the accuracy of representation in Germany and Sweden.



- Generous welfare systems that have made life better for workers and retirees in Norway and Switzerland.
- Laws aimed at protecting freedom of the press in Costa Rica and Jamaica.
- Private–public partnerships that have averted corruption in Botswana and Mongolia.
- Professionalism and high salaries that have improved bureaucratic performance in Singapore and France.
- Outsourcing and restructuring that has helped make bureaucracy smaller and more efficient in New Zealand and the UK.

It is through the process of comparing government and politics that we can not only understand how government works, but also better understand the problems we face and the possible solutions. The story that is told is one of drama and consequence, of changing needs and demands, and of a cast of heroes and villains whose efforts to govern can sometimes inspire and at other times infuriate. At few times in history have the changes been as intense and as rapidly moving as they are today. At few times in history, though, are the possibilities greater, or the lessons to be learned from comparison more valuable and urgent.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rod Hague and Martin Harrop were senior lecturers in politics at the University of Newcastle, UK. John McCormick is professor of political science at the Indianapolis campus of Indiana University in the United States. Among his publications are *Cases in Comparative Government and Politics* (2019), *Understanding the European Union* (8th edition, 2021), and *Introduction to Global Studies*, 2nd edition (2022).

# Guide to the Twelfth Edition

It has only been three years since the last edition of *Comparative Government and Politics* was published, and yet much has changed in the world during that time, not least the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This new edition is an opportunity to reflect on those changes, while also remaining true to the core purpose of earlier editions: to provide an introductory survey of comparative politics, while integrating some fresh perspectives on the study of the topic. As before, this book – above all – is an introduction and assumes no prior knowledge about the subject; it continues to be designed for the needs of students either coming new to topic, or returning in search of a broad-ranging study of the topic.

Since John McCormick became a co-author with the tenth edition in 2016, he has had three main objectives: to continue building on the well-deserved reputation of the book created by Rod Hague and Martin Harrop, to modify it from a comparative introduction to political science to an introduction to comparative politics, and to ensure the widest possible coverage of the field. Those objectives continue to drive this new edition, using all the latest data, drawing off the latest and most important scholarship and quoting examples from nearly 90 countries in every part of the world.

**Structure and features.** There are six key structural changes to this new edition:

- The number of chapters has been reduced from 20 to 18, and each chapter has been made slightly longer.
- The two chapters on theories and methods have been combined into a single chapter that emphasizes methods, while the discussions about theory have been moved to 18 new *Using Theory* features designed to tie theory more closely to the body of the text.
- The two chapters on elections and voters have been combined into a single chapter that focuses mainly on elections, while the discussion about voters has been divided among the chapters on participation, elections and parties.
- A new *Exploring Problems* feature has been introduced in order to show how comparison can be used to help us address pressing questions about government and politics and develop answers.
- The coverage of authoritarian states has continued to be expanded with a reworking of Chapter 6, more examples inserted throughout the text and the chapter sections on authoritarian rule expanded.
- More effort has been made to make the structure of chapters more similar. For example, new sections have been added or expanded on origins and

evolution (of democracies, constitutions and political parties, for example), and new tables have been added that summarize the roles of institutions (such as executives, the media and interest groups).

While the Focus features that were part of earlier editions have been removed to make way for the *Using Theory* and *Exploring Problems* features, all other features introduced in recent editions have been kept and developed, including the Previews to each chapter, the Spotlights, the closing sets of Discussion Questions and updated sets of further reading.

**Length.** The phenomenon of textbooks that expand with each edition is well known, but *Comparative Government and Politics* remains one of the notable exceptions. Although every chapter is slightly longer than in the last edition, the blending of four earlier chapters into two new chapters ensures that the twelfth edition remains only slightly longer than the eleventh edition.

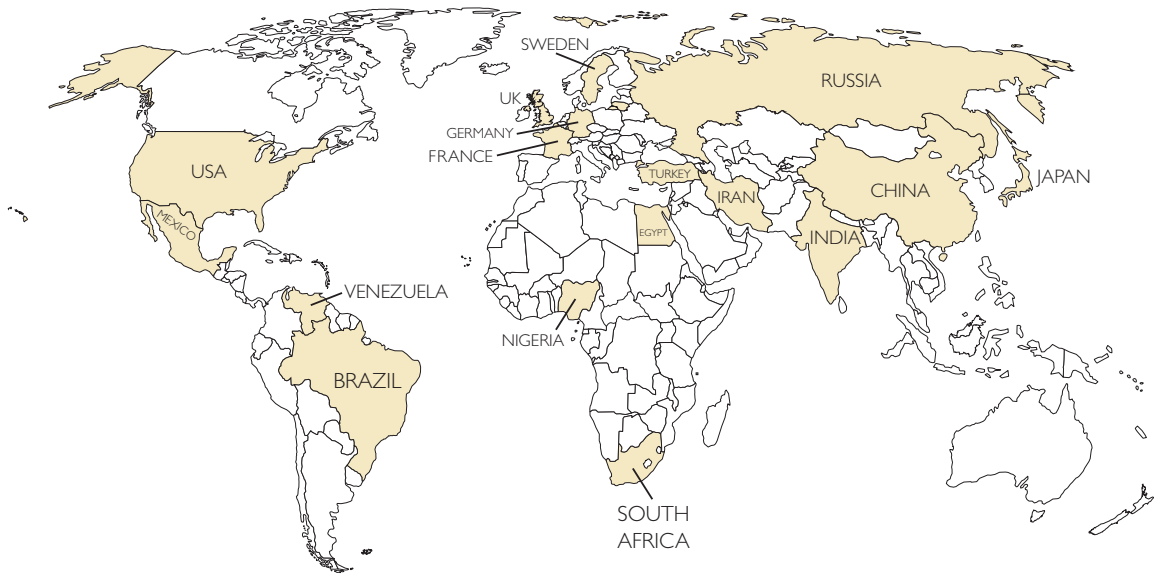
**Classification of political systems.** The tenth edition saw the introduction of the Democracy Index and the Freedom House ranking *Freedom in the World*. This dual system of classification has been expanded, with more examples used in the body of the text to illustrate the features of both systems.

**Spotlight cases.** As with the last two editions, this one focuses on a selection of Spotlight case study countries, enhanced in the new edition to provide political, economic, social and geographical variety. The cases are shown in Table 0.1 and Map 0.1.

**Sources.** As discussed in *Exploring Problems 1* and *Using Theory 10*, much of the research in political science is published in English by publishers based in Europe and the United States, and the scholarship has long been dominated by the work of men. Imbalances of this kind have the effect of producing a lop-sided view of the world. As always, great care has been taken in this new edition to use the most recent scholarship and the most diverse possible community of scholars and sources.

**Table 0.1:** Spotlight cases

Full democracies	Flawed democracies	Hybrid regimes	Authoritarian regimes
Germany	Brazil	Nigeria	China
Japan	France	Turkey	Egypt
Sweden	India		Iran
UK	Mexico		Russia
	South Africa	<b>Not classified</b>	Venezuela
	USA	European Union	



**Map 0.1** Spotlight cases

## CHANGES TO THIS EDITION

The changes that began in the tenth edition with the addition of a new author continue in this new edition, where particular effort has been made to ensure the logic of the progression of the chapters, to more tightly bind cases and concepts, to expand the coverage of authoritarian regimes and to make the structure of the chapters more similar and consistent.

- *Chapter 1* (Concepts): More focus on a few key concepts and expanded sections on the goals and benefits of comparison. Discussion of ideology moved to the chapter on parties.
- *Chapter 2* (Methods): Combines earlier chapters on theories and methods, while most of the discussion about theory has been distributed across all chapters in the book.
- *Chapter 3* (States and nations): Mainly unchanged, except for expanded coverage of nations and nationalism.
- *Chapter 4* (Political culture): Moved up from later in the book, with expanded discussion of the meaning of political culture, the issue of political trust and political culture in authoritarian regimes.
- *Chapter 5* (Democratic rule): Includes new sections on the features of democratic rule, democratic regime types, the democratic recession and illiberal democracy.
- *Chapter 6* (Authoritarian rule): New detail on the nature of authoritarian rule and regime types, and new sections on origins and evolution and on the future of authoritarian rule.

- *Chapter 7* (Constitutions and courts): Revised opening overview of constitutions, new section on origins and evolution and deletion of section on systems of law to make room for new depth on supreme courts, constitutional courts, judicial activism and judicial review.
- *Chapter 8* (Executives): More clarity given on executive types and the differences among them and greatly expanded section on authoritarian executives.
- *Chapter 9* (Legislatures): More detail on the features of legislatures, new sections added on impeachment and on origins and evolution and greatly expanded section on authoritarian legislatures.
- *Chapter 10* (Bureaucracies): Significantly rewritten and updated with new sections on the effectiveness of bureaucracies and an expanded and rewritten section on authoritarian bureaucracies.
- *Chapter 11* (Sub-national government): More detail on the features of sub-national government and an expanded and rewritten section on authoritarian regimes.
- *Chapter 12* (The media): Significantly rewritten and updated, with a new focus on the media as an institution. More detail on the features of the media, entirely new section on media freedom, expanded section on the internet and disinformation and an expanded and rewritten section on authoritarian regimes.
- *Chapter 13* (Participation): More detail on the features of participation, mainly rewritten and integrated section on voting and an expanded section on authoritarian regimes.
- *Chapter 14* (Elections): Mainly rewritten overview of elections, integration of section on voter turnout and an expanded section on authoritarian regimes.
- *Chapter 15* (Political parties): More detailed opening overview of parties, new background on origins and evolution and an expanded and rewritten section on authoritarian regimes.
- *Chapter 16* (Interest groups): Significantly rewritten and updated, with an almost entirely rewritten opening overview, a new section on origins and evolution, a revised section on the dynamics of groups and an expanded and rewritten section on authoritarian regimes.
- *Chapter 17* (Public policy): Mainly rewritten opening overview of policy, deletion of the section on the policy cycle to make way for entirely new section on policy styles, injection of much more comparison and an expanded section on authoritarian regimes.
- *Chapter 18* (Political economy): Mainly unchanged, except for the injection of much more comparison and an expanded section on authoritarian regimes.

# Guide to Learning Features

**Preview** Each chapter begins with a short outline of the contents of the chapter, designed as a preview of what to expect in the pages that follow.

## PREVIEW

So far we have looked mainly at the broad sweep of comparative politics, including key concepts, research methods and regime types. In the next few chapters we will focus on political institutions, beginning here with a review of constitutions and the courts that accompany them. Constitutions outline the rules of political systems, and tell us much about the aspirations of states, the structure of governments and the rights of citizens. For their part, courts strive to make sure that the rules are respected and equally applied. Just as humans are imperfect, however, so are the laws and institutions they create and manage: there are significant gaps between constitutional ideals and practice and questions about the efficacy of courts.

The chapter begins with an assessment of constitutions: what they are, what they do, their character and durability, how their performance can be measured, how they are changed and how they have evolved. There is no fixed template for constitutions; they vary widely in terms of their length and efficacy, and the gap between aspiration and achievement differs from one constitution to another. The chapter goes on to look at the structure and role of courts and their relationship with constitutions, examining the differences between supreme courts and constitutional courts and the incidence of judicial activism. It then focuses on judges: how they are recruited, the terms of their tenure and how such differences impact judicial independence. It ends with an assessment of the place of constitutions and courts in authoritarian regimes.

- Origins and evolution
- The role of courts
- The role of the judiciary
- Constitutions and courts in authoritarian regimes

**Highlights** Each chapter begins with six key arguments, chosen to underline some of the more important points made in the chapter.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Constitutions are critical to achieving an understanding of government, offering a power map through key political principles and rules.
- As the number of states increased, so did the number of constitutions, and more than half the states in the world have adopted a new constitution since 1990.
- Understanding governments requires an appreciation not just of the content of constitutions, but also of their durability and how they are amended.
- Awareness of the structure and role of courts is also critical, as is the distinction between supreme courts and constitutional courts.
- Judges have become more willing to enter the political arena, making it more important to understand the rules on judicial recruitment.
- In authoritarian regimes, constitutions and courts are weak, with governments either using them as a facade or bypassing them altogether.

**Marginal definitions** The first time a key term is used it appears in boldface and is defined in a marginal box. The definitions are kept as brief and clear as possible, and each term is listed at the end of the chapter in which it is defined.

## Constitution

A document or a set of documents that outlines the powers, institutions and structure of government, as well as expressing the rights of citizens and the limits on government.



## USING THEORY 7

### INSTITUTIONALISM

The study of governing institutions has long been a central interest of political science in general and of comparative politics in particular. In fact, institutions were long regarded as the core subject matter of political science, and scholarship was dominated by **institutionalism**, using approaches that were often descriptive and less interested in developing theory. Institutionalism briefly fell out of favour in the 1960s as the behavioural movement emerged (see *Using Theory 14*) but was revisited in the 1980s when new research on social and political structures combined with the reform of governing institutions in developing countries to give birth to what became known as **new institutionalism** (or neo-institutionalism) (March and Olsen, 1984).

This reformulation looked not just at the formal rules of government but also at how institutions shaped political decisions, at the interaction of institutions and society and at the informal patterns of behaviour within formal institutions. This approach lent itself well to comparative politics as researchers undertook cross-national studies, many of them interested in better understanding the process of democratization.

One of the benefits of the institutional approach is that it can tell us not only how institutions work but also where their strengths and weaknesses lie and what can be done to make them more efficient. It also helps remind us that institutions are constantly changing in response to new circumstances and are frequently subject to a process of **institutionalization**. This begins following their creation, as they develop rules and procedures, build internal complexity, entrench their position, are clearly distinguished from their environment and come to be accepted by external actors as part of the governing apparatus. It continues as they evolve in response to pressures for change, as well as new needs and opportunities.

We should also remember that institutions do not tell us the whole story about a political system, because they rarely act independently of social forces. In many authoritarian regimes, for example, the entire superstructure of government is a facade behind which personal networks and exchanges are the key driving force in politics. Even in democracies, it is always worth asking whose interests benefit from a particular institutional arrangement, just as an institution can be created for specific purposes, so too can it survive by serving the interests of those in charge.

**Using Theory** A new feature is introduced in every chapter that focuses on one of the major theories used in comparative politics.



## EXPLORING PROBLEMS 7

### HOW CAN WE ENSURE THE INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES?

It might be intuitive to believe that the political independence of judges is a key part of the foundation of an effective constitution, which is – in turn – a key part of the foundation of democracy. Just what judicial independence means, though, has long been a matter of debate, with particular questions asked about the difference between *de jure* independence (based on the formal rules of a legal system) and *de facto* independence (based on the political realities surrounding a legal system). Questions have also been asked about exactly how judicial independence should be measured, which raises questions in turn about how it is best protected.

Melton and Ginsburg (2014) developed a list of six constitutional features that they believe can be used to comparatively measure judicial independence:

- An explicit statement in a constitution on the independence of judges.
- The length of tenure of judges.
- The selection procedure for judges and the bodies involved.
- The removal procedure for judges and the bodies involved.
- The conditions under which judges can be removed.
- Protection of the salaries of judges.

Using these six features, the Comparative Constitutions Project (2021) – a US-based web site containing a wealth of information about constitutions – compares judicial independence around the world and produces some unexpected results. Only four countries (Argentina, Bulgaria, The Gambia and Nepal) have all six features, while several countries that are very different democratically (including Canada, Cuba, North Korea, Sweden and Venezuela) each have only one, and the United States and Russia both have three. Clearly *de jure* protection of judges and courts does not tell us much, and even Melton and Ginsburg themselves admit to being sceptical about the effect that a formal constitutional statement will have on judicial independence in practice.

- Where do these findings leave us in terms of measuring and achieving judicial independence?
- Is it something that we are most likely to understand intuitively when we see it (or find it to be missing), or do we need to rely on objective measures such as those listed above?
- Should we be surprised to see Sweden likened in any way to North Korea and the United States in any way to Russia?

**Exploring Problems** Another new feature is introduced in every chapter that focuses on a problem in government and politics and poses questions about how comparison gives us insight into possible solutions.

#### Feature Purpose

Preamble	Seeks popular support for the document with a stirring declaration of principles and, sometimes, a definition of the purposes of the state.
Organization	Sets out the powers and structure of government institutions.
Rights	Covers individual and often group rights, including access to legal redress.
Amendment procedure	Outlines the procedure for revising the constitution.

Figure 7.1 Features of constitutions

**Figures** A wide range of figures is used throughout the book to provide visual support to topics covered in the body of the text or to summarize lists of subjects covered in the text.

Table 7.2: Comparing supreme courts and constitutional courts

	Supreme court	Constitutional court
Form of review	Mainly concrete.	Mainly abstract.
Appellate function	Yes.	No.
Standing	Anyone with legal standing can bring a case.	Only specified institutions can bring cases.
Examples	Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Sweden, Turkey, United States.	Austria, Egypt, France, Germany, most of Eastern Europe, Russia, South Africa, UK.

**Tables** These display statistics or key features of a topic in the nearby text, or summarize subjects covered in the text.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which is best: a constitution that is short and ambiguous, leaving room for interpretation, or one that is long and detailed, leaving less room for misunderstanding?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of supreme courts and constitutional courts?
- Judicial restraint or judicial activism – which is best for the constitutional well-being of a state?
- What is the best way of recruiting judges, and what are the most desirable limits on their terms in office, if any?
- What are the best forms of protection to ensure the independence of judges and courts?
- Which of the four roles of constitutions in authoritarian regimes do you find most convincing?


**Discussion questions** Each chapter closes with a set of six open-ended discussion questions, designed to consolidate knowledge by highlighting major issues and to spark classroom discussions and research projects.

### FURTHER READING


- Ginsburg, Tom, and Alberto Simpser (eds) (2014) *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes* (Cambridge University Press). An edited collection on the design, content and consequences of constitutions in authoritarian regimes.
- Harding, Andrew, and Peter Leyland (ed) (2009) *Constitutional Courts: A Comparative Study* (Wildy, Simmonds & Hill). A comparative study of constitutional courts, with cases from Europe, Russia, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia.
- Issacharoff, Samuel (2015) *Fragile Democracies: Contested Power in the Era of Constitutional Courts* (Cambridge University Press). Argues that strong constitutional courts are a powerful antidote to authoritarianism because they help protect against external threats and the domestic consolidation of power.
- Rosenfeld, Michel, and Andr s Saj  (eds) (2013) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law* (Oxford University Press). A comparative collection of studies of history, types, principles, processes and structures of constitutions.
- Smith, Rogers M., and Richard R. Beeman (eds) (2020) *Modern Constitutions* (University of Pennsylvania Press).

**Further reading** An annotated list of six suggested readings is included at the end of each chapter, with an emphasis on the most recent and helpful surveys of the topics covered in that chapter.

## GUIDE TO SPOTLIGHT FEATURES




**SPOTLIGHT 7**  
**SOUTH AFRICA**




**BRIEF PROFILE:**

South Africa languished for many decades under a system of institutionalized racial separation known as apartheid. This ensured privileges and opportunities for white South Africans at the expense of black, mixed race and Asian South Africans. In the face of growing resistance and ostracism from much of the outside world, an agreement was reached that paved the way for the first democratic elections in 1994. Much was originally expected from a country with a wealth of natural resources, but corruption is endemic, unemployment remains stubbornly high, many still live in poverty and South Africa faces major public security challenges, with one of the highest per capita homicide and violent assault rates in the world. Despite being the second largest economy in Africa (after Nigeria), it has only partly realized its potential as a major regional power.


<b>Form of government</b>	Unitary presidential republic. State formed 1910; most recent constitution adopted 1997.
<b>Executive</b>	Presidential. A president heads both the state and the government, ruling with a cabinet. The National Assembly elects the president after each general election. Presidents limited to two five-year terms.
<b>Legislature</b>	Bicameral Parliament: lower National Assembly (400 members) elected for renewable five-year terms and upper National Council of Provinces with 90 members, ten appointed from each of the nine provinces.
<b>Judiciary</b>	The legal system mixes common and civil law. The Constitutional Court decides constitutional matters and can strike down legislation. It has 11 members appointed by the president for terms of 12 years.
<b>Electoral system</b>	The National Assembly is elected by proportional representation using closed party lists; half are elected from a national list and half from provincial lists.
<b>Parties</b>	Dominant party: The African National Congress (ANC) has dominated since the first full democratic and multi-racial election in 1994. The more liberal Democratic Alliance, now the leading party in the Western Cape, forms the official opposition.



**59m**  
Population



**\$351bn**  
Gross Domestic Product



**\$6,001**  
Per capita GDP

**Democracy Index rating**

✗ Full Democracy

✓ Flawed Democracy

✗ Hybrid Regime

✗ Authoritarian

✗ Not Rated

**Freedom House rating**

✓ Free

✗ Partly Free

✗ Not Free

✗ Not Rated

**Human Development Index rating**

✗ Very High

✓ High

✗ Medium

✗ Low

✗ Not Rated


**THE CONSTITUTION OF SOUTH AFRICA**

South Africa's transformation from a state based on apartheid to a more egalitarian and democratic order was one of the most remarkable political transitions of the late twentieth century. In 1994, after two years of hard bargaining between the African National Congress (ANC) and the white National Party (NP), agreement was reached on a new 109-page constitution to take effect in February 1997. For a contextual analysis, see Kug (2010).

The preamble begins with a recognition of 'the injustices of our past', emphasizes the importance of healing divisions and asserts that South Africa's 'new, sovereign, democratic state' based on the value of 'human dignity, the achievement of equality... non-racism and non-sexism'. It then – before describing the system of government – includes a lengthy bill of rights, including support for privacy, the right to peacefully demonstrate, freedom of movement and the right to free and fair elections.

Although the new political system was built on the foundations of the old, it also involved several key changes, including an upper chamber of Parliament designed to represent the country's nine provinces, a president elected by Parliament from among its members and an expansion of human rights. South Africa has since had five rounds of parliamentary elections and five presidents, but the initial optimism for South Africa's new democracy has been tarnished by the dominance of the ANC and by corruption that has become institutionalized in the sense that the abuse of public office for private gain has become a routine part of political life.

Some have argued that the constitution should be replaced with a document that is more reflective of the needs and realities of African society, replacing the compromises that were made at the end of the apartheid era. Others argue that it is a landmark attempt to create a society based on social, economic and political rights for all citizens and that its true implementation has yet to be achieved (Dixon and Roux, 2018). The effects of the constitution, more than most, should be judged by what preceded it, and in that sense the achievements of the new South Africa are remarkable indeed.



**Further reading**

Butler, Anthony (2017) *Contemporary South Africa*, 3rd edn (Penguin).

Dixon, Rosalind, and Theunis Roux (eds) (2018) *Constitutional Triumphs, Constitutional Disappointments: A Critical Assessment of the 1996 South African Constitution's Local and International Influence* (Cambridge University Press).

De Plas, Carin, and Martin Platt (2018) *Understanding South Africa* (Hurst and Company).

These focus on the 18 country cases from which examples are most often quoted in the body of the text. They include a brief profile of each country (or regional organization, in the case of the European Union), brief descriptions of their political features, some key demographic and economic data and a short case study of each country in the context of the topic of the chapter in which the Spotlight appears.

Topic	Features and sources
Form of government	A general description of the form of a government, including dates on state formation and the adoption of the most recent constitution.
Executive	Form and structure of the executive.
Legislature	Form and structure of the legislature.
Judiciary	Form and structure of the judicial system.
Electoral system	Form and structure of the electoral system.
Parties	Outline of the party system and the major parties at work in the country.
Population	Data for 2020 from World Bank (2021a).
Gross Domestic Product	Total value of goods and services produced by a country, in US dollars. Data for 2019–20 from World Bank (2021a).
Per capita Gross Domestic Product	Total value of goods and services produced per head by a country, in US dollars. Data for 2019–20 from World Bank (2021a).
Democracy Index rating	From the Economist Intelligence Unit (2021), which divides states into full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.
Freedom House rating	From Freedom House (2020a), which divides states into groups rated Free, Partly Free or Not Free.
Human Development Index rating	From the United Nations Development Programme (2021), which divides states into groups rated Very High, High, Medium and Low.



# Guide to the Website

This book is accompanied by a freely available website which provides an array of resources for students and instructors. See: [bloomsbury.pub/comparative-government-and-politics](https://bloomsbury.pub/comparative-government-and-politics)

## Comparative Government and Politics

12th Edition  
by John McCormick, Rod Hague and Martin Harrop

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*Comparative Government and Politics* has introduced generations of students to the field and remains the definitive text for those approaching the subject for the first time. Fully revised and updated, the twelfth edition offers a comprehensive introduction to the comparison of governments and political systems, helping students to understand not just the institutions and political cultures of their own countries but also those of a wide range of democracies and authoritarian regimes from around the world.

**FOR STUDENTS:** an interactive *Spotlight Map* providing key information and statistics about the countries from around the world, a *Guide to Researching Comparative Politics* to help you navigate the multitude of resources available related to the comparative study of politics, and a *Flashcard Glossary* to help you test your knowledge of the key terms in each chapter.

**FOR INSTRUCTORS:** A set of *PowerPoint Slides* for each individual chapter, ready for instructors to adapt and customize to suit their weekly lectures, and a *Testbank* comprising 500 pre-prepared multiple-choice and true or false questions relating to the coverage of each of the book's chapters.

## FOR STUDENTS

- **Guide to Researching Comparative Politics** This guide helps students navigate their way through the multitude of resources available on the internet related to the comparative study of politics.
- **Flashcard Glossary** These flashcards help students to test their knowledge of the key terms highlighted and defined in each chapter.
- **Spotlight Map** An interactive map providing key information about the countries appearing in the Spotlight features in this book, as well as a number of additional countries.

## FOR INSTRUCTORS

- **Testbank** The Testbank comprises a series of pre-prepared multiple-choice questions related to the coverage of each of the book's chapters.
- **PowerPoint Slides** A corresponding set of PowerPoint slides has been prepared for each individual chapter, ready for instructors to adapt and customize to suit their weekly lectures.

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- The World Values Survey for Figure 4.4: The Inglehart–Welzel cultural map of the world

# PART I PRINCIPLES

## CHAPTERS

- |          |                         |          |                    |
|----------|-------------------------|----------|--------------------|
| <b>1</b> | Government and politics | <b>4</b> | Political culture  |
| <b>2</b> | Making comparisons      | <b>5</b> | Democratic rule    |
| <b>3</b> | States and nations      | <b>6</b> | Authoritarian rule |

## PREVIEW

The first part of the book provides a survey of the key concepts needed to understand government and politics. It begins with a chapter reviewing terms such as *government*, *politics* and *power*, and discussing the ways in which we group political systems in order to better understand them comparatively. The second chapter looks at comparative research methods, including how we choose the cases we want to compare. This is followed by chapters discussing the characteristics of state, nations, and political culture. The last two chapters in this opening section focus on the differences between democratic and authoritarian political systems.

# Government and politics

## CONTENTS

- Understanding government and politics
- The benefits of comparison
- Government and governance
- Politics, power and authority
- Regimes and political systems

## PREVIEW

Every field of study has its own vocabulary of terms or concepts that need to be understood in order to provide us with the building blocks of learning. Comparative government and politics is no different, which is why this opening chapter – after looking at the meaning of social and political science, and at the foundations of comparison and its many benefits – reviews five of the key terms that crop up regularly throughout the book: *government*, *governance*, *politics*, *power*, and *authority*. The chapter ends with a discussion of how to understand political systems and regimes and how we classify them, focusing on two of the typologies available to help us make better sense of a complex, diverse and changing political world.

These concepts are central to an understanding of the manner in which governments are organized and the way in which politics unfolds. We will find, though, that their meanings are often contested. This is a problem found not just in political science, but throughout the social sciences. Anthropologists, economists, geographers, historians and sociologists alike will often argue about the meaning of ideas and concepts, whose definitions are never static and which are fine-tuned as we learn more about the world around us, and blend views and perspectives from different parts of the world. Be prepared, then, for plenty of discussion – in this chapter and all those that follow – about the meaning of the key terms used to understand government and politics in its many different forms.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The main goal of political science is to help us understand how government works. Comparative politics adds depth to that understanding by drawing out the contrasts and similarities among different political systems.
- The benefits of comparison include establishing the core facts about government and politics, providing context, drawing up rules, helping us understand, and helping us make predictions and choices.
- While *government* describes the institutions and offices through which societies are governed, *governance* describes the process of collective decision-making.
- An exact definition of *politics* is difficult, because the term has many nuances, but it is clearly a collective activity, and involves making decisions.
- While *power* is the capacity to act and to bring about intended effects, *authority* is the acknowledged right to take such action.
- Typologies help us compare by imposing some order on the variety of the world's political systems.



## UNDERSTANDING GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

On 3 November 2020, voters went to the polls in the United States to decide whether to return President Donald Trump to a second term in office, or to replace him with former Vice-President Joe Biden. They also cast votes for members of Congress, state representatives, and a host of other offices, but it was the presidential election that attracted the most attention. Speculation focused on the races in a few key states, while (thanks partly to the Covid-19 pandemic) early and absentee voting numbers shattered all records. As a result, it took four days of counting before the election was called for Biden. Even before Election Day, though, Trump had made claims of electoral fraud, and it would be another six weeks before a meeting of the Electoral College – a device unique to the United States – confirmed Biden's victory.

Even then, Trump and many of his supporters refused to concede, prompting talk of an attempted 'soft coup' and comparisons between the United States and some of the world's authoritarian regimes. All of a sudden, Americans paid much closer attention to vote counts, vote counters, reporting deadlines, and a host of other details about American government that they had previously taken for granted. Matters reached a new low on 6 January 2021 when thousands of Trump supporters invaded and broke into the Capitol building of the US



Toyfun Coskun/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

The shocking scene on 6 January 2021 as supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump stormed the buildings of the US Congress in Washington DC, protesting the ratification of the result of the November 2020 presidential election.

Congress, leading to several deaths, many injuries, and hundreds of arrests. The experience proved to be an intense lesson in government and politics, made all the more trying because it was held against a background of the Covid-19 pandemic and deepening economic woes.

What exactly was going on here? How could a country with such a long-established history of democracy break down in violence of this kind? How could so many people be convinced – in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary – that the election had been rigged? How, in the end, did democracy prevail, and how did the United States survive such a blatant challenge to its democratic processes and the authority of its governing institutions?

It is cases such as this that remind us why it is so important to understand how government works and how power is expressed. And while we can develop answers through closer study of our own political system and the events that most immediately affect us, we can develop much stronger answers by making comparisons, and looking at how different countries approach similar needs and problems. This is where **political science** enters the equation. It helps us understand how government works, the role and authority of leaders and institutions, the dynamics of processes such as elections, and why people act the way they do on political matters.

The word *science* derives from the Latin *scientia* (knowledge) and describes the search for knowledge and understanding. It had a much broader meaning until the nineteenth century when it began to be applied more specifically to the physical and natural sciences (McLellan and Dorn, 2015), leaving the **social sciences** to head off on a separate track. Social scientists – including anthropologists, economists, geographers, historians, political scientists and sociologists – study the institutions we build, the rules we agree, the processes we use, our underlying motives, and the outcomes of our interactions. Because human behaviour is often so unpredictable, though, and harder to tie down to unchanging rules, the social sciences are in many ways more difficult to study than the natural and physical sciences.

One of the challenges – as we will see often in this book – is that the meanings of the terms used by social and political scientists (including *politics*, *nation*, *state*, and *rights*) are routinely contested. This is because discussions within the social sciences are often influenced by subjective preferences and biases, and by the constant evolution of our understanding of people, societies, and institutions. Even in the face of these difficulties, though, the social sciences have helped us better understand human behaviour, and – argues Woodward (2014) – better understand change, demonstrating the links between ‘global events and everyday experience’, and offering ‘critical ways of thinking and of making sense of social, political, cultural and economic life’. Without the work of social scientists, much of what we see happening in the world today – from the rise of nationalism to the tribulations of democracy – would be hard to understand.

If social science is a division of the search for knowledge, political science is the sub-division of social science that focuses on government and politics. The story does not end there, though, because political science itself has multiple

### Political science

The study of the theory and practice of government and politics, focusing on the structure and dynamics of institutions, political processes, and political behaviour.

### Social science

The study of human society and of the structured interactions among people within society.

Sub-field	Subject matter
Comparative politics	The comparative study of government and politics in different settings.
International relations	The study of relations between and among states, including diplomacy, foreign policy, international organizations, war and peace.
National politics	The study of government and politics in individual states, including institutions and political processes.
Political philosophy	The study of the way we think about government and politics, addressing topics such as authority, ethics, and freedom.
Political theory	The study of abstract or generalized approaches to understanding political phenomena.
Public policy	The study of the positions taken or avoided by governments in response to public needs.

Note: Political science is sub-divided differently in different countries and by different academic traditions. Additional sub-fields include law, methodology, political economy, and public administration.

**Figure 1.1** The sub-fields of political science

different facets, beginning with the sub-fields listed in Figure 1.1. Among them, **comparative politics** is critical. Comparison is not only one of the oldest tools of political science (found, for example, in the work of Aristotle), but it is also one of the most basic of all human activities, lying at the heart of almost every choice we make in our lives. No surprise, then, that it should be central to research in the social sciences as a whole, and political science in particular. Some have even argued that the scientific study of politics is unavoidably comparative (Almond, 1966, and Lasswell 1968) and that ‘comparison is the methodological core of the scientific study of politics’ (Powell et al., 2014).

As we will see in Chapter 2, the comparative study of government and politics has gone through many changes in the last few decades, with the focus on a few older states having widened thanks to the dramatic rise in the number and variety of countries we can study. It has also been shaken by the effects of the end of colonialism, the beginning and the end of the Cold War, the new interest in authoritarianism, the changing balance of global power, and the worrying signs in recent years of new threats to democracy. All these changes have combined to demand that we work harder to take a more global approach to understanding the similarities and differences among government and politics in its different forms; see *Exploring Problems 1*.

### Comparative politics

The systematic study of government and politics in different countries, designed to better understand them by drawing out their contrasts and similarities.

## THE BENEFITS OF COMPARISON

One of the more notable features of the Covid-19 pandemic that broke out in early 2020 was that while it was clearly a global problem, different countries



## EXPLORING PROBLEMS I

### HOW CAN WE TAKE A GLOBAL APPROACH TO COMPARISON?

In each of the chapters in this book there is a feature titled *Exploring Problems*, designed to draw attention to some of the practical problems of government and to pose questions about how we can address them using comparative analysis. We will look, for example, at the problems of declining trust in government, of unbalanced representation in legislatures, and of the threat posed by false news. Here in the first of these features, we deal with the fundamental question of how to take a global approach to comparison. In other words, how do we work around the practical problem of the unequal amounts of information we have available on the different countries of the world?

Even a quick online search, a glance along library shelves, or a scan through this book will reveal that some countries are more deeply studied than others, and that language stands as a potent barrier to equality. In English, for example, there is a vast body of information and of scholarly study available on government and politics in western Europe and the United States, in part because this is where so many scholars of comparative politics work and in part because these are the two academic and publishing giants of the world. There is also a large body of information and scholarly study on countries that European- and American-based scholars find particularly interesting, including China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria and Russia.

By contrast, less has been written and published in English on smaller European states, on English-speaking countries with smaller populations (such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand), on most Latin American and sub-Saharan African states (except those, such as Nigeria, with a significant native or expatriate community of scholars), or on smaller Asian states. There has also been relatively little published about the authoritarian regimes of the world, in part because relatively little data is available on these countries and in part because it can be hard to ask questions in these countries to which honest answers might be expected. In some, such as North Korea and Syria, it is almost impossible to undertake field research.

In short, the playing field of information is not level, which means that we always face the danger that our conclusions about comparative government and politics will be based on an incomplete sample of cases. How should we address this problem?

- Should we reduce our reliance on the work of academic scholars and make more use of reliable media outlets and the reports of international organizations for information about the less-deeply studied countries?
- To what degree can we rely on such sources for the analysis and context that we need to make consistent comparisons?
- Will such sources give us a similar base of information upon which to undertake our comparison, or will the results end up being skewed?



were affected differently. Consider just these three cases, using data from the World Health Organization (2021):

- In China, there was an early peak in the number of cases, with nearly 7,000 cases reported on a single day in February 2020. By early March, the number of new daily cases was apparently down to between 20 and 50, where it stayed for the rest of the year. By June 2021, China had reported fewer than three deaths per million inhabitants, and a vaccination rate of 16 per cent.
- In the United States, there were few cases in March 2020, but the number grew to a peak of about 70,000 in mid-July, tailed off slightly, and then grew rapidly, crossing the 200,000 mark in mid-December. By June 2021, the United States had reported about 1,800 deaths per million inhabitants, and a vaccination rate of 51 per cent. This was just before it began to struggle with the combined effects of resistance to vaccination and mask mandates, and the spread of the delta variant.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, there was a modest peak of 150 cases per day in June 2020, another peak of about 250 per day in January 2021, and a third peak of about 500 per day in June 2021. By then, the DRC had reported just over 1,000 deaths in total, and barely 4,000 people had been vaccinated in a country of nearly 87 million people.

During the pandemic, there was a great deal of comparative daily information available online, allowing us to check trends and numbers literally on a daily basis. What the numbers did not reveal, though, was the accuracy or completeness of government reporting, or why these differences – assuming they were real – existed. The answer lay partly in differences in health care systems and social values, but there was also a political element involved: China is an authoritarian regime whose government can usually take quick action regardless of public opinion, while the United States for much of the first year of the pandemic was governed by the administration of Donald Trump, which was slow to publicly acknowledge the seriousness of the threats his country faced. The DRC, meanwhile, is a poor and unstable country with poorly developed health care and infrastructure. Also, China is a unitary state that is governed from the centre, while the United States is a federal system in which individual states had much control over their own responses to the pandemic, and the DRC is a large country with poor internal connections. Finally, there was a question about just how much the Chinese data could be trusted.

This is just one small example of how comparison can help us understand how government and politics works by examining its varieties across a range of cases. We could learn a great deal about government and politics simply by studying a single case, and in fact most of the discussions we see in the media about politics is based on what is happening in the country or community within which we live, or those countries that most often capture the news headlines. The problem with this kind of focus, though, is that it does not tell us the whole story and does not provide the wider context within which to understand what

we are seeing. How usual or unusual is the way in which government works at home? What could we learn from how different countries are responding to problems such as Covid-19, climate change, crime, unemployment, or poverty?

The benefits of comparison are many (see summary in Figure 1.2).

### Describing government and politics

It is hard to understand government or politics – or to make comparisons among political systems – without first understanding the rules on which those systems are based. More than anything, comparison helps us in our search for facts: how governments are structured, how institutions work and relate to one another, how citizens relate to their governments, and how governments perform. In fact, ‘comparative’ politics – as we will see in Chapter 2 – was long understood to mean the study of ‘foreign’ political systems, and was almost purely descriptive in its approach. Description, though, only takes us so far, and comparison today is concerned also with understanding the *how* and the *why* of government and politics.

### Providing context

Although we know much about national political systems from the studies that have been written about them, from the constitutions on which they are based, and from the news we see and hear about them, our understanding will always remain one dimensional unless we can place all this information in context. It is only by doing this that we can build a clearer picture of how different systems work and how they evolved. How could we otherwise know if the object of our study is unusual or usual, efficient or inefficient, the best option available or significantly lacking in some way?

Take, for example, the six Spanish-speaking states of Central America: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. In many ways, including their histories and cultures, they are similar: they all became

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Qualities</i>
Description	Establishing the core facts about a political system.
Context	Understanding the context within which a political system functions.
Rules	Drawing up the rules about government and politics.
Understanding	Helping us understand ourselves, those around us, and the global system.
Prediction	Helping us predict political behaviour and outcomes.
Making choices	Helping us make better political choices.

**Figure 1.2** The benefits of comparison

independent at the same time (in 1821), they are ethnically similar, they are all Catholic countries, they all have populations in the range of 5–17 million people, and they have all faced challenges with military governments and authoritarianism. But Costa Rica and Panama have since built relatively strong economies (with each having a per capita gross domestic product as much as five times greater than their neighbours) and relatively strong political systems. While Costa Rica firmly ranks as a democracy, for example, neighbouring Nicaragua ranks as an authoritarian regime, and the poverty and instability of Honduras and Guatemala make them major sources of unauthorized migration to the United States. What are the contextual explanations for the differences?

### Drawing up rules

Comparison helps us draw up rules about government and politics, although the record on this front has been mixed. While the study of the physical and natural sciences has generated large numbers of laws that allow us to predict physical and natural phenomena, the social sciences – because they deal with human behaviour – do not generate laws so much as theories, tendencies, likelihoods, adages, or aphorisms. (A famous example of the latter – see Chapter 6 – is Lord Acton's suggestion that 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely'.) Five examples of 'laws' of politics that came out of comparative study are offered by Cuzán (2015):

1. All governments can count on the votes of only a minority of the electorate.
2. In developed democracies, incumbents are re-elected more than half the time thanks partly to their exploitation of state resources.
3. It is rare for incumbent parties to win much more than 60 per cent of the vote, and this never happens twice within the same spell in office.
4. Incumbents typically lose support from term to term.
5. In democracies, the alternation of parties and leaders in office is usual.

Because much of what happens in government and politics is informal, and because the rules change from place to place and across time, it can be difficult to develop laws of political science. It would be all but impossible, though, without comparison.

### Improving understanding

By pinning down the key features of political institutions, processes and actions, we can better understand and appreciate the dynamics and character of political systems. The limitations of studying a single political system in isolation, though, are illustrated in a point made by Dogan and Pelassy (1990):

Because the comprehension of a single case is linked to the understanding of many cases, because we perceive the particular better in the light of generalities, international comparison increases tenfold the possibility of explaining political phenomena. The observer who studies just one country could interpret as normal what in fact appears to the comparativist as abnormal.

Comparison not only helps free us from the limitations of studying government in isolation, but also helps us learn about places with which we are unfamiliar. The ability to interpret events outside our borders grows in importance as globalization continues to deepen and broaden the political, economic and social links among us, as events from other parts of the world have a more direct impact on our lives, and as we find that we cannot afford to ignore the ‘foreign’. Applying political theory further deepens our understanding by helping us better explain what we see; see *Using Theory 1*.

### **Making predictions**

Comparison helps us make generalizations that can help us predict the outcome of political events. A careful study, for example, of campaigning and public opinion will help us better understand the possible outcome of elections. This is why we know from a study of those European countries where proportional representation is used (see Chapter 14) that its use is closely tied to the presence of more political parties winning seats and the creation of coalition governments. Similarly, if we know that subcontracting the provision of public services to private agencies (see Chapter 10) increases their cost-effectiveness in one country, then we can predict that the result will be similar in other countries.

While there is a lot to be said for strengthening predictions by drawing lessons from different countries, and asking ‘what if’ questions, there are many who argue that political science should not – or cannot – be in the business of predicting. The Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper (1959) asserted that long-term predictions could only be developed in regard to systems that were ‘well-isolated, stationary, and recurrent’, and that human society was not one of them. More recently, an opinion piece in the *New York Times* raised hackles when its author (Stevens, 2012) argued that in terms of offering accurate predictions, political science had ‘failed spectacularly and wasted colossal amounts of time and money’. She went on to assert that no political scientist foresaw the break-up of the Soviet Union, the rise of Al Qaeda, or the Arab Spring. She quoted an award-winning study of political experts (Tetlock, 2005) which concluded that ‘chimps randomly throwing darts at the possible outcomes would have done almost as well as the experts’.

As we will see in Chapter 2, though, the problem lies less with comparison as an approach than with some of its practicalities: the results of our research will depend on the number and the combination of the cases we use, the depth of information we have about each case, the reliability of our data, the research methods we use, and the extent to which we allow biases and assumptions to shape our research. Government and politics have been studied in a structured manner for barely a century; there is still much that we do not fully understand, and there are still many vigorous debates about meaning and interpretation. Comparison has opened up new horizons and exciting new possibilities as we learn more about the sheer variety of forms in which government and politics exist.



## USING THEORY I

### THEORY AND COMPARISON

In each of the chapters in this book there is a feature titled *Using Theory*, designed to focus on a theoretical approach to comparison. Given their purpose, it makes sense to begin here with a survey of **theory**, which is a key part of the exercise of achieving understanding in any field of knowledge, opening our minds to different ways of seeing. For comparative politics, it means developing and using principles and concepts that can help us explain everything from the formation of states to the character of institutions, the process of democratization, the methods of dictators, and the behaviour of voters.

Several challenges face the political theorist. First, the field of comparative politics is so broad and so full of possibilities that it includes numerous theoretical approaches, ranging from the general to the specific. For some scholars, there are so many choices that the diversity can sometimes seem too much; the political scientist Sidney Verba (1991) once described that diversity as bordering on anarchic. Others see the variety as a strength, offering comparativists a multitude of approaches that can be shaped to meet different needs. For Przeworski (1995), the variety allows comparativists to be 'opportunists' who can use whatever approach best works.

Second, the value of political theory is often compromised by the way in which it is the victim of fad, fashion, and individual preference. For every theoretical approach that is proposed or applied, there often seems to be a long line of critics waiting to shoot it down and propose alternatives. It can sometimes seem as though the debate about the pros and cons of competing theoretical approaches is more vibrant than that about their practical, real-world applications.

Third, the place of theory in the social sciences more generally is based on sometimes shaky foundations. The natural sciences have a strong record of developing theories that are well supported by the evidence, are broadly accepted, and can be used to develop laws, guide experiments and make predictions. The social sciences suffer greater uncertainties (if only because they focus more on trying to understand human behaviour), with the result that they generate theories that are subject to stronger doubts, with a weaker record in generating laws and predicting outcomes.

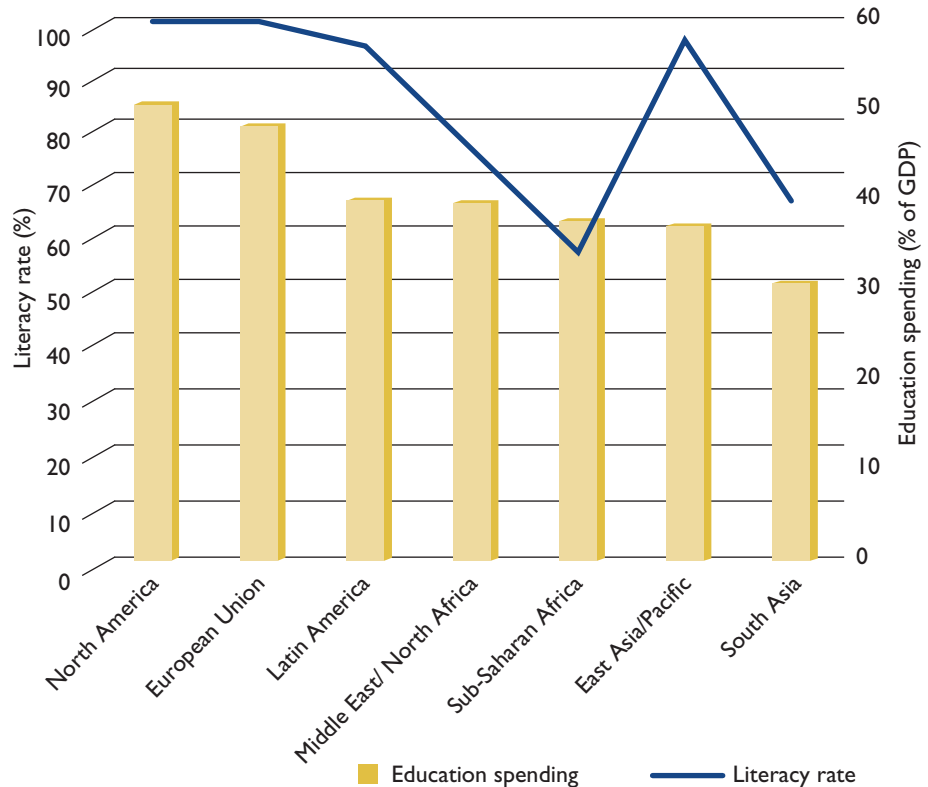
Finally, political theory has been criticized for focusing too much on ideas emerging from the Western tradition, a consequence of the relatively large numbers of political scientists working in Western states. As comparison takes a more global approach – pressed by the influence of globalization – there have been calls for it to be more inclusive. This trend will further expand the already substantial range of theoretical approaches, but it will remain hard to develop universal theories so long as many parts of the world remain relatively under-studied.

#### Theory

An abstract or generalized approach to explaining or understanding a phenomenon or a set of phenomena, supported by a significant body of hard evidence.

### Making better choices

Just as people can learn from each other, so can states. Despite their many differences, their citizens have often similar hopes and aspirations, challenges and concerns, and ways of relating to those around them. States and political



**Figure 1.3** Comparing education spending and literacy rates

Source: Based on World Bank (2021). Data are for 2019.

communities can use each other as laboratories for addressing public needs, learning from successes and mistakes, and adapting policies pursued in other countries to domestic needs and circumstances.

Consider, for example, approaches to education. Data collected by the United Nations show that spending on education (as a percentage of GDP) is similar in all the major regions of the world. Logically, then, the results of that spending should be about the same. However, while literacy rates are improving worldwide, Figure 1.3 shows significant regional differences, from as low as 65 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa to as high as 99 per cent in the European Union and North America. Why do literacy rates vary so much in Latin America and the Middle East (94 and 79 per cent, respectively) when both regions spend about 4.5 per cent of their GDP on education? How does East Asia spend relatively little (4.2 per cent of GDP) for such high returns (literacy rates of 96 per cent)? What can regions with lower literacy rates learn from those with higher rates about the best way to invest their education funds?

The benefits of comparison, then, are many, and it is not surprising that comparison – as we saw earlier – is considered the methodological core of the scientific study of government and politics.

## GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Since this is a book about comparative government and politics, it is important that we understand the meaning of the term **government**. Small groups of people can reach collective decisions without any special procedures; a family, for example, can reach an understanding through informal conversations, and its agreements can be self-executing in the sense that those who make the decision carry it out themselves. However, such simple mechanisms are impractical for larger units such as towns, cities, or states, which must develop procedures and **institutions** for making and enforcing collective decisions.

In political science, the term *institution* is usually applied to the major bodies of national government, particularly those described in constitutions, such as executives, legislatures, judiciaries and, sometimes, political parties (see Table 1.1). Since they often have a legal identity with privileges and duties under law, institutions are treated as formal ‘actors’ in the political process. However, the concept of an institution is also used more informally to include the rules, interactions and practices that distinguish such entities as the family, marriage, religion, money, law and even language.

Taking the broad view, government consists of all those institutions endowed with public authority and charged with reaching and executing decisions for a community. By this definition, the police, the military, bureaucrats and judges are all part of government, even if they do not come to office through the means usually associated with government, such as elections. The term *government* can also apply to the group of people who govern (as in the Japanese government), a specific administration (the Modi government in India), the form of the system of rule (centralized government), and the character of administration (good government).

### Government

The institutions and processes through which societies are governed.

### Institution

A formal or informal organization or practice with rules and procedures, marked by durability and internal complexity.

**Table 1.1: The institutions of government**

Institution	Role and purpose	Examples
Executive	Governing, making policy, providing leadership and direction.	Presidents, prime ministers, ministers, cabinets.
Legislature	Representing the interests of citizens; making law; forming governments.	Parliaments, Congresses, National Assemblies, Diets.
Judiciary and courts	Upholding and interpreting the constitution.	Supreme courts, constitutional courts.
Bureaucracy	Implementing policy.	Departments, ministries, divisions, agencies.
Political parties	Offering policy alternatives, fielding candidates, forming governments and oppositions.	Conservatives, liberals, socialists, greens, nationalists.

The classic case for government was made by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) in his famous treatise *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 1651). In it, he cynically argued that humans had an uncanny ability to turn their ambitions into conflict, and that without a ruler to keep them in check, the outlook was grim: ‘during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man’. The result was a life that was ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’. In order to avoid this outcome, people agreed to set up a commonwealth ‘that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will’, thereby transforming anarchy into order, securing peace and the opportunity for mutually beneficial cooperation.

In a democracy (see Chapter 5), government supposedly provides security and predictability to those who live under its jurisdiction. Citizens and businesses can plan for the long term, knowing that laws are developed in a standardized fashion, take into account competing opinions, and are consistently (if not always perfectly) applied. Of course, nothing is ever that simple because governments create their own dangers. The risk of Hobbes’s commonwealth is that it will abuse its authority, leading to the kind of authoritarian habits outlined in Chapter 6. A key aim in studying government, then, is to learn how to ensure its benefits while also limiting its inherent dangers.

### Governance

The process by which decisions, laws and policies are made, with or without the input of formal institutions.

A related concept is **governance**. Where *government* suggests a relatively static world of institutions, *governance* highlights the process and quality of collective decision-making. The emphasis is on the activity of governing, which is why, for example, we can talk about global governance: there is no such thing as a global government, but there is a large community of international organizations (such as the United Nations), thousands of treaties that form the basis of international law, and a constant interaction involving governments, corporations and interest groups, all of which amount to a process of governance. Governance is less about the command-and-control function of government and more about the broader task of public regulation, a role which political leaders and bureaucrats in democracies share with other bodies. We need the concept of governance as a supplement, rather than a replacement, for the concept of government.

The notion of governance has been prominent in discussions about the European Union (EU). This regional organization has several institutions – including an elected European Parliament and a Court of Justice – that look much like an EU government but that are better regarded as a system of governance (McCormick, 2020). Their job is to develop policies and laws, and to oversee the implementation of those policies and laws, but they can only do as much as the foundational treaties of the EU and the governments of its member states allow them to do. They are better seen as servants of the process of European integration than as the government of the EU.

Because governance refers to the activity of ruling, it has also become the preferred term when examining the quality and effectiveness of rule. In this context, governance refers to what the institutions of government do and to how



well or badly they do it. Good governance should, at a minimum, be accountable, transparent, efficient, responsive and inclusive, but these are all ideals; even those countries that rank at the top of political rating systems (see later in this chapter) have flaws. At the same time, bad governance is much more clearly evident in less democratic political systems; see *Spotlight 1* on Nigeria.

## POLITICS, POWER AND AUTHORITY

While government is tangible in the sense that we can see most of the people who are part of it, and the buildings that governing institutions inhabit, there are three other concepts that are equally important and yet less easy to identify and to measure.

### Politics

At first glance, it might seem fairly easy to define **politics** and to list examples of political activity. When lawmakers in parliaments and congresses meet to thrash out the details of new laws and policies, for example, or to debate how to raise and spend the funds that make up national budgets, politics is clearly involved. When the Spanish region of Catalonia held non-binding independence referendums in 2014 and again in 2017, politics was again on view. When thousands of the citizens of Belarus took to the streets in 2020 to protest the result of the presidential election (and also to express their opposition to the government), they too were taking part in politics.

While the political heartland represented by such examples is clear, though, the boundaries of politics are less precise. When fighting breaks out between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over the status of Armenians living in Azerbaijan, are the two sides engaged in politics or in war? When the Chinese Communist Party changed the law in Hong Kong in 2020 in order to make it more difficult for the political opposition to challenge the authority of the party, was it playing or preventing politics? Is politics limited to governments, or can it also be found in businesses, families, and even university classrooms?

A precise definition of politics – one which fits just those qualities we instinctively call ‘political’ – is difficult, because the term is used in so many different ways. Three of its features, though, are clear:

- It is a collective activity, occurring between and among people. A lone castaway on a desert island could not engage in politics, but if there were two castaways on the same island, they would have a political relationship.
- It involves making decisions regarding a course of action to take or avoid, or a disagreement to be resolved.
- Once reached, political decisions become policy for the group, binding and committing its members even if some of them continue to resist (an action which is in itself political).

Politics is unavoidable because of the social nature of humans. We live in groups that must reach collective decisions about using resources, governing

### Politics

The process by which people negotiate and compete in making and executing shared or collective decisions.



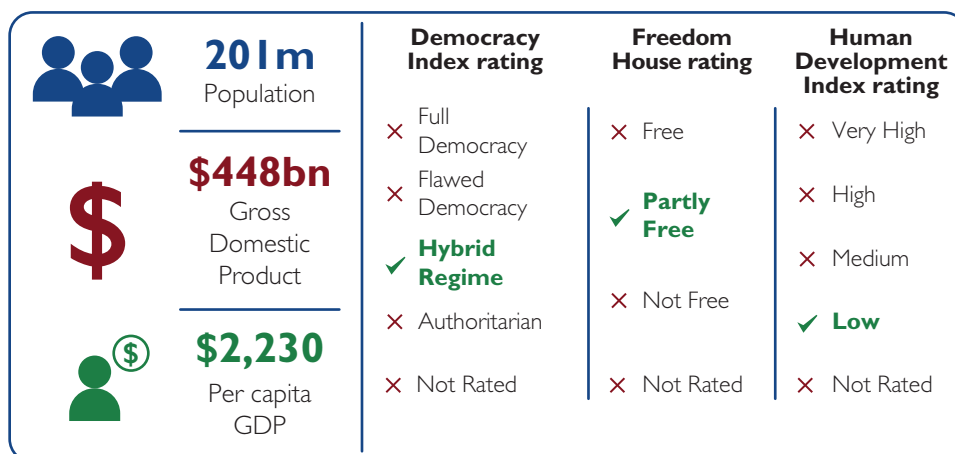
# SPOTLIGHT I NIGERIA



## BRIEF PROFILE

Although Nigeria has been independent since 1960, it was not until 2015 that it experienced a presidential election in which the incumbent was defeated by an opposition opponent. This makes an important point about the challenges faced by Africa's largest country by population, and one of the continent's major regional powers, in developing a stable political form. Nigeria is currently enjoying its longest spell of civilian government since independence, but the military continues to play an important role, the economy is dominated by oil, corruption is rife at every level of society, security concerns and poor infrastructure discourage foreign investment, and a combination of ethnic and religious divisions pose worrying threats to stability. Incursions and attacks since 2002 by the Islamist group Boko Haram have added to the country's problems, but it has still nonetheless been recently upgraded from authoritarian to a hybrid on the Democracy Index.

<b>Form of government</b>	Federal presidential republic consisting of 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory. State formed 1960, and most recent constitution adopted 1999.
<b>Executive</b>	Presidential. A president elected for a maximum of two four-year terms, supported by a vice-president and cabinet of ministers, with one from each of Nigeria's states.
<b>Legislature</b>	Bicameral National Assembly: lower House of Representatives (360 members) and upper Senate (109 members), both elected for fixed and renewable four-year terms.
<b>Judiciary</b>	Federal Supreme Court, with 14 members nominated by the president, and either confirmed by the Senate or approved by a judicial commission.
<b>Electoral system</b>	President elected in national contest and must win a majority of all votes cast and at least 25 per cent of the vote in at least two-thirds of Nigeria's states. Possibility of two runoffs. National Assembly elected using single-member plurality.
<b>Parties</b>	Multiparty, led by the centre-left All Progressives Congress and the centre-right People's Democratic Party.



## GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

Many of the facets of the debate about government, governance, politics, power, and authority are on show in Nigeria, a country that is still struggling to develop a workable political form and national identity in the face of multiple internal divisions.

Understanding Nigeria is complicated by the lack of durable patterns of government. Since independence in 1960, Nigerians have lived through three periods of civilian government, five successful and several attempted military coups, a civil war, and nearly 30 years of military rule. The first civilian government (1960–1966) was based on the parliamentary model, but the second and third (1979–1983, and 1999–present) were based on the presidential form. Since 2007, Nigeria has twice made the transition from one civilian government to another, and the long-term political prognosis has improved. Still, considerable uncertainties remain.

Political doubts reflect economic drift, and vice versa. The country's growing population is expected to double in the next 25 years, straining an infrastructure that is already woefully inadequate to support a modern economy. Nigeria's core economic problem is its heavy reliance on oil, which leaves the size and health of the economy – as



### Further reading

- Ajayi, Rotimi, and Joseph Yinka Fashagba (eds) (2021) *Nigerian Politics* (Springer).
- Campbell, John, and Matthew T. Page (2018) *Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press).
- Levan, A. Carl, and Patrick Ukata (eds) (2018) *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics* (Oxford University Press).



President Muhammadu Buhari addresses members of the Nigerian National Assembly in Abuja after submitting his annual federal budget.

SUNDAY AGHAEZE/AP via Getty Images

well as government revenues – dependent on the fluctuating price of oil. To make matters worse, much of the oil wealth has been squandered and stolen, feeding into the corruption that is rife in Nigeria, and there have been bitter political arguments over how best to spend the balance; see discussion about the resource curse in Chapter 18.

Nigeria's political problems are more than just economically driven. In social terms, Nigeria is divided by ethnicity, handicapping efforts to build a sense of national identity. It is also separated by religion, with a mainly Muslim north, a non-Muslim south, and controversial pressures from the north to expand the reach of sharia, or Islamic law. Regional disparities are fundamental, with a north that is dry and poor and a south that is better endowed in resources and basic services. Regional tensions have been made worse by the geography of oil, most of which lies either in the south-east or off the coast, but with much of the profit distributed to political elites in other parts of the country.

society, relating to others, and planning for the future. A country deliberating on whether to institute a lockdown in the wake of pandemic, a company deciding where to locate a new factory, a family discussing where to go on holiday, a university deciding whether its priority lies with teaching or research: these are all examples of groups forming judgements affecting their members. Politics involves assessing different options and opinions, and ideally brings members of a community together into a compromise course of action.

This interpretation of politics as a community-serving activity can be traced to the ancient Greeks. The philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) argued that ‘man is by nature a political animal’ (1962), by which he meant not only that politics was unavoidable, but also that it was the highest human activity, clearly separating us from other species. His view was that people can only express their nature as reasoning, virtuous beings by participating in a political community which seeks to identify the common interest through discussion and tries to pursue it through actions to which all contribute. In Aristotle’s model constitution, ‘the ideal citizens rule in the interests of all, not because they are forced to by checks and balances, but because they see it as right to do so’ (Nicholson, 2004).

This idea of politics as a peaceful process of open discussion leading to collective decisions acceptable to all stakeholders in society is all well and good, but the reality rarely measures up to the ideal. Perhaps more realistically, politics can also be seen as a competitive struggle for power and resources between people and groups seeking their own advantage, and perhaps aiming to impose their values on everyone else. From this second perspective, politics can involve narrow concerns taking precedence over collective benefits when those in authority place their own goals above those of the wider community. Along the way, they use methods that can spill over into manipulation, corruption, and perhaps even violence and bloodshed.

In this view, politics is a competition for acquiring and keeping power, a process that yields winners and losers. This is reflected in the famous definition by the American political scientist Harold Lasswell of politics as ‘who gets what, when, how’ (Lasswell, 1936). In short, it is anything but the disinterested pursuit of the public interest. Taking the cynical extreme, the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz once said that ‘war is the continuation of politics by other means’, a view backed up by Chinese leader Mao Zedong when he said that ‘war is politics with bloodshed’. We could as easily turn these ideas around, though, and argue that politics is the continuation of war by other means, or that politics is war without bloodshed.

### Power

The capacity to bring about intended effects. The term is often used as a synonym for influence, but is also used more narrowly to refer to more forceful modes of influence notably, getting one’s way by threats.

### Power

At the heart of politics is the distribution and manipulation of **power**. The word comes from the Latin *potere*, meaning ‘to be able’, which is why the British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1938) saw power as ‘the production of intended effects’. The greater our capacity to determine our own fate, the more power we possess. In this sense, describing China as a powerful country means that it is well placed to define and achieve its goals, and to stop others

from blocking or hindering them. Its economic power has been growing steadily now for decades, and its military power is beginning to deepen. Conversely, to lack power – as do many poor or unstable countries – is to be a follower rather than a leader. Arguably, though, every state has power, even if it is the kind of negative power involved in obliging a reaction from bigger and wealthier states; Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers from Honduras may seem powerless, for example, but both groups spark policy responses from the governments of the countries they most immediately affect.

Notice that the emphasis here is on power *to* rather than power *over* – on the ability to achieve goals, rather than the more specific exercise of control over other people or countries. However, most analyses of power focus on relationships: on power over others. Here, the three dimensions of power identified by the British sociologist Steven Lukes (2021) (see Table 1.2) help us answer the question of how we can measure power, or at least establish whether one actor is more powerful than another. As we move through these dimensions, so the conception of power becomes more subtle – but also somewhat stretched beyond its normal use.

The first dimension is straightforward: power should be judged by identifying whose views prevail when the actors involved possess conflicting views on what should be done. The greater the correspondence between an actor's views and the decisions reached, the greater is that actor's influence: more wins indicate more power. The dimension is relatively clear and concrete, based on identifying preferences and observing decisions, and connecting directly with the concept of politics as the resolution of conflict within groups. In the United States, for example, and in spite of repeated mass shootings, the success of the gun lobby has meant that most leaders of the two major political parties have refused to impose meaningful limits on gun ownership, forming what amounts to an elite conspiracy to make sure that guns remain widely available.

**Table 1.2:** Three dimensions of power

Dimension	Core question	Application
First	Who prevails when preferences conflict?	Decision-making. Decisions are made on issues over which there is an observable conflict of interests.
Second	Who controls whether preferences are expressed?	Non-decision-making. Decisions are prevented from being taken on issues over which there is an observable conflict of interests.
Third	Who shapes preferences?	Ideological. Potential issues are kept out of politics altogether, whether through social forces, institutional practices, or the decisions of individuals.

Source: Based on Lukes (2021).



The second dimension of power focuses on the capacity to keep issues off the political agenda by preventing the discussion of topics which would run counter to the values or interests of decision-makers. As Bachrach and Baratz (1962) once put it, 'to the extent that a person or group – consciously or unconsciously – creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, that person or group has power'. In order to understand power, we need to understand the actors that gain the most from political decisions or the status quo, and those whose views are not heard. In Afghanistan under the control of the Taliban, for example, fear of government reprisals discourages many people from expressing their support for women's rights and democracy. By narrowing the public agenda in this way, the Taliban renders democracy a non-issue.

The third dimension broadens our conception of power by extending it to cover the formation, rather than merely the expression, of preferences. Where the first and second dimensions assume conflicting preferences, the third dimension addresses the idea of a manipulated consensus. In this and similar cases, agenda control is achieved by manipulating the flow of information so as to prevent disputes from arising in the first place. Take, for example, the influenza pandemic of 1918–20 that came to be known as the Spanish flu. It infected as many as one in three humans and estimates of the number of deaths range as high as 100 million. This was because news of the flu in the worst-affected countries was strictly controlled as a result of concerns about the effect it might have on morale as World War I drew to a close. The only country in which open reporting was allowed was Spain, which is why it came to be known as the Spanish flu.



LewisTsePuiLung/Stock

Politics, power and authority meet on the streets of Hong Kong as demonstrators use umbrellas to protect themselves from tear gas as they protest efforts by the Chinese government to exert more control over the province.

The implication of these examples of different forms of power is that the most efficient is one that allows for the shaping of people's information and preferences, thus preventing the first and second dimensions from coming into play. Denying people access to information is one way of achieving this, as in the examples of the Spanish flu, and of the selective briefings offered by many governments about the seriousness of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Power, then, is not just about whose preferences win out; we must also consider whose opinions are kept out of the debate and also the wider context in which those preferences are formed.

## Authority

In some ways, **authority** is more fundamental to understanding government than either politics or power. Where power is the capacity to act (or to rule), authority is the acknowledged right to do so. It exists when subordinates accept the capacity of superiors to give legitimate orders, so that while Russia may exercise some *power* over Russians living in neighbouring countries such as Ukraine, the Baltic states and Kazakhstan, its formal *authority* stops at the Russian border. The German sociologist Max Weber (1922) suggested that in a relationship of authority, the ruled implement the command as if they had adopted it spontaneously, for its own sake. For this reason, authority is a more efficient form of control than brute power. Yet, authority is more than voluntary compliance. To acknowledge the authority of your home state does not mean you always agree with the laws it has adopted; it means only that you accept its right to make laws and your own obligation to obey. In this way, authority provides the foundation for the state.

Just as there are different sources of power, so too can authority be built on a range of foundations. Weber distinguished three ways of validating political power:

- By tradition, or the accepted way of doing things.
- By charisma, or intense commitment to a leader and his or her message.
- By appeal to legal-rational norms, based on the rule-governed powers of an office, rather than a person.

This classification is still useful, even in democracies where we might think that legal-rational authority is the dominant form. We can also add to Weber's ideas: much of what a leader can or cannot achieve, for example, comes down to competence – or at least, to the perception that leaders actually know what they are doing – and to the extent to which leaders are able to represent the moral values and ideological goals of their followers.

## Authority

The right to rule. Authority creates its own power, so long as people accept that the person in authority has the right to make decisions.

## REGIMES AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS

In democratic regimes, government is influenced by a wide range of forces, such as interest groups, political parties, the media, corporations and public opinion. In authoritarian regimes, the government may lack much autonomy

**Regime**

A political type, based on a set of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures, and including – for example – a democratic regime or an authoritarian regime.

**Political system**

The interactions and institutions that make up a regime.

and effectively becomes the property of a dominant individual or elite. In both cases, the forces and influences surrounding government come together to form both a **regime** and a **political system**. Although these terms are often used as synonyms, the term *regime* describes a political type (for example, a democracy, a dictatorship, an elitist system, or a neoliberal regime), while the term *political system* summarizes the parts that make up the political life of a given state or community. In the words of the Canadian-American political scientist David Easton (1965), ‘a political system can be designated as the interactions through which values are authoritatively allocated for a society; that is what distinguishes a political system from other systems lying in its environment’.

The term *regime* has, unfortunately, come to be used most commonly in a pejorative sense to describe authoritarian or illegitimate political systems. So, for example, while the institutions that make up the Russian government might be described as its political system, we might hear critical references to the Putin regime, or the Russian regime. In a related fashion, the term *regime change* is typically used to describe the overthrow or removal of a government or a political system considered to be illegitimate or undesirable, as in the cases, for example, of the end of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, or efforts by exiles to work for the end of the Maduro regime in Venezuela.

In fact, the term *regime* has a more neutral and clinical meaning than the manner in which it is often used would suggest. Hence we can talk about Sweden as being a democratic regime, with a political system that is the space within which most of the activity of Swedish politics – whether positive or negative, or whether in the public or private interest – takes place. The Swedish regime has many similarities with the regimes of Denmark, Finland and Norway, but many differences with those of India, Mexico or South Africa, even if all these countries have governing institutions that have approximately the same purpose.

Although the political systems of states have many core elements in common – an executive, a legislature, and a judiciary, for example – the manner in which these elements work and relate to one another is far from the same. The various parts of different regimes or systems have different sets of powers and responsibilities, they relate to each other differently, and they are influenced by different sets of norms and expectations. To complicate matters, political systems are moving targets: they evolve and change, and often at a rapid pace. Finally, there are a lot of them: nearly 200 national political systems, and hundreds of thousands of local systems of government.

**Typology**

The system by which the types of something (states, languages, personalities, buildings, and organizations, for examples) are classified according to their common features.

**Political typologies**

In order to make sense of this confusing picture, it is helpful to have a guide through the maze, or to classify states according to a **typology**. With such a system in hand, we can make broad assumptions about the states in each group, using case studies to provide more detailed focus, and thus more easily develop explanations and rules, and test theories of political phenomena (Yin, 2018). The ideal typology is one that is simple, neat, consistent, logical, and as real



and useful to the casual observer as it is to students, journalists, political leaders, or political scientists. Unfortunately, such an ideal has proved hard to achieve; political scientists disagree about the value of typologies, and even those who use them cannot agree on the criteria that should be taken into account, or the groups into which states should be divided, or the labels to use, or even which states to place in each group. The result is that while there are multiple typologies from which to choose, none of them is generally accepted by political science.

The first attempt at developing such a system – and one of the earliest examples of comparative politics at work – was Aristotle's classification of the 158 city-states of Ancient Greece. Between approximately 500 and 338 BCE, these communities were small settlements with often different forms of rule, providing him with a laboratory in which to ask which type of political system achieved the ideals that he sought in a government: stability and effectiveness. Using two dimensions – the number of people involved in governing, and the form of government (based on whether rulers governed in the common interest or in their own interest) – he generated six classes of government, ranging from democracy to tyranny.

Another attempt to build a typology was *The Spirit of the Laws*, a treatise on political theory written by the French philosopher Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, and first published in 1748. He identified three regime types:

- *Republican* systems in which the people or some of the people had supreme power.
- *Monarchical* systems in which one person ruled on the basis of fixed and established laws.
- *Despotic* systems in which a single person ruled on the basis of their own priorities and perspectives.

A more recent typology that was current throughout much of the Cold War (late 1940s to late 1980s) was the Three Worlds system. Less a formal classificatory template developed by political scientists than a Western response to the geopolitical realities of the Cold War, it divided the world into three groups of countries based on ideological goals and political alliances:

- A *First World* of wealthy, democratic industrialized states, most of which were partners in the Western alliance against communism.
- A *Second World* of communist systems, including most of those states ranged against the Western alliance.
- A *Third World* of poorer, less democratic, and less developed states, some of which took sides in the Cold War, but some of which did not.

The system was simple and evocative, providing neat labels that could be slipped with ease into media headlines and everyday conversation. Even today, the term *Third World* still conjures up powerful images of poverty, underdevelopment, corruption, and political instability. Unfortunately, the typology was always more descriptive than analytical, and it was also both pejorative (in its

ranking) and simplistic: to consider almost all the states of Africa, Asia, and Latin America as a single Third World was always asking too much given their political and economic differences.

While nothing has yet replaced this typology in the sense of having won general support, there have been many candidates, of which this book relies mainly on two:

- The Democracy Index maintained by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a UK-based organization related to the news weekly *The Economist*.
- The *Freedom in the World* index maintained by the US-based research institute Freedom House.

Both typologies use multiple criteria to rank countries, and while the results are not exactly the same, there is a high degree of overlap (see Table 1.3), and both have identified the same worrying reversals we have seen in recent years in the health of democracy. Neither typology is perfect; questions can be asked about the methodologies upon which they are based; drawing the line between different political regimes has long been contentious (Lührmann et al., 2018); and we should always beware the danger of taking classifications and rankings too literally – government and politics are too complex to be reduced to a single table. Nonetheless, these typologies give us useful points of reference and a guide through an otherwise confusing world.

## Economies and societies

We will go further in this text and also use economic and social data to help us find our way through our comparisons. The relationship between politics and economics in particular is so intimate that – as we will see in Chapter 18 – there is an entire field of study devoted to the subject, called political economy. This involves looking not just at the structure and wealth of economies, but also at the relationship between politics and economic performance: good governance is more likely to go hand-in-hand with a successful economy, and bad governance less so.

The core measure of economic activity is output, and while there are various ways of measuring this, the most popular is **gross domestic product** (GDP). This is the sum of the value of the domestic and foreign economic output of the residents of a country in a given year and is converted to US dollars to allow comparison. Although the accuracy of the data itself varies by country, and the conversion to dollars raises questions about the effect of exchange rates, such measures are routinely used by governments and international organizations in measuring economic size (see Table 1.4). While GDP provides a measure of the absolute size of national economies, however, it does not take into account the population size of different states. For a more revealing comparison we divide GDP by population, giving us a per capita GDP figure that gives us a better idea of the relative economic size of different states.

### Gross Domestic Product

The value of the total domestic and foreign output by residents of a country in a given year.

**Table 1.3:** Comparing political rankings

	Democracy Index		Freedom in the World	
	Score out of 10	Rating	Score out of 100	Rating
Norway	9.81	Full democracy	100	Free
Sweden*	9.26	Full democracy	100	Free
New Zealand	9.25	Full democracy	99	Free
Canada	9.24	Full democracy	98	Free
Germany*	8.67	Full democracy	94	Free
UK*	8.54	Full democracy	93	Free
Japan*	8.13	Full democracy	96	Free
France*	7.99	Flawed democracy	90	Free
USA*	7.92	Flawed democracy	83	Free
South Africa*	7.05	Flawed democracy	79	Free
Brazil*	6.92	Flawed democracy	74	Free
India *	6.61	Flawed democracy	67	Partly Free
Mexico*	6.07	Flawed democracy	61	Partly Free
Thailand	6.04	Flawed democracy	30	Not Free
Bangladesh	5.99	Hybrid	39	Partly Free
Kenya	5.05	Hybrid	48	Partly Free
Turkey*	4.48	Hybrid	32	Not Free
Nigeria*	4.10	Hybrid	45	Partly Free
Iraq	3.62	Authoritarian	29	Not Free
Russia*	3.31	Authoritarian	20	Not Free
Egypt*	2.93	Authoritarian	18	Not Free
Venezuela*	2.76	Authoritarian	14	Not Free
China*	2.27	Authoritarian	9	Not Free
Iran*	2.20	Authoritarian	16	Not Free
Saudi Arabia	2.08	Authoritarian	7	Not Free
North Korea	1.08	Authoritarian	3	Not Free

Source: Based on Economist Intelligence Unit (2021) and Freedom House (2020).

For the latest information, see Economist Intelligence Unit at <https://www.eiu.com> and Freedom House at <https://freedomhouse.org>.

\* Spotlight cases in this book. European Union is not rated.

Finally, we must not forget the importance of understanding political systems by looking at their relative performances in terms of helping provide their citizens with basic social needs. There are different ways of understanding ‘basic needs’, but at a minimum they would include adequate nutrition, education, and health care, and in this regard the most often-used comparative measure is the Human Development Index maintained by the UN Development Programme. Using a combination of life expectancy, adult literacy, educational enrolment,

**Table 1.4: Comparing economies**

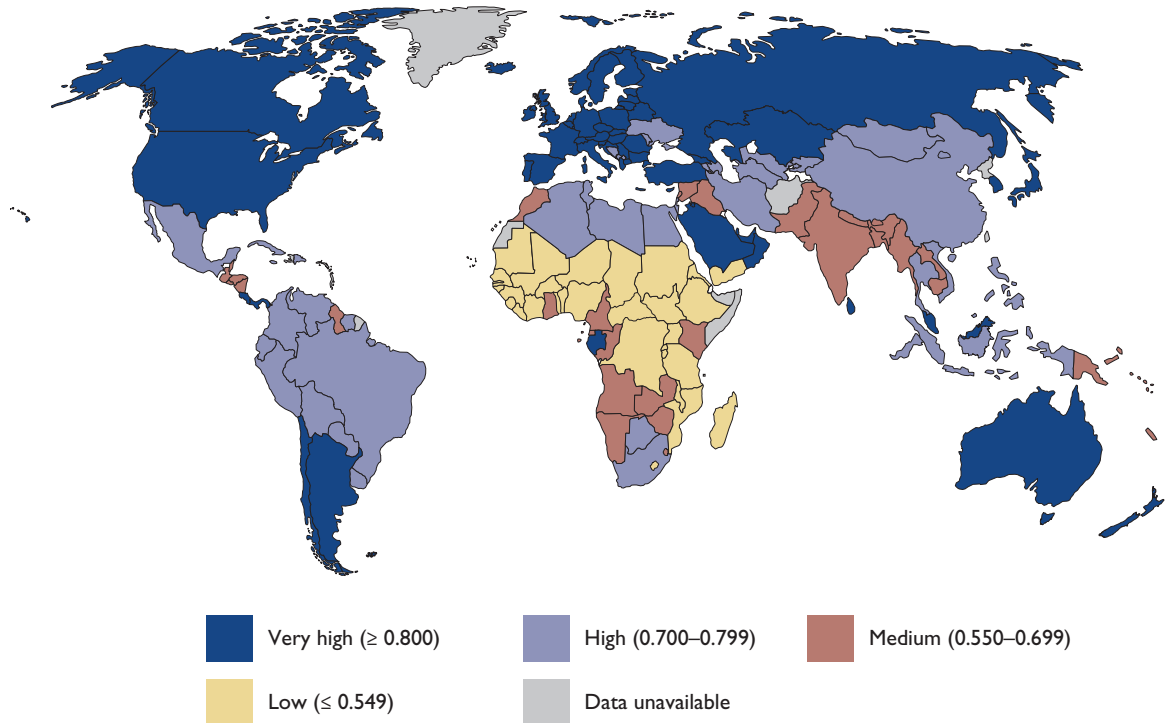
	<b>GDP (billion US\$)</b>	<b>Per capita GDP (US \$)</b>
United States	21,433	65,298
European Union	15,626	34,918
China	14,342	10,262
Japan	5,081	40,247
Germany	3,861	46,445
India	2,868	2,100
UK	2,829	42,330
France	2,715	40,494
Brazil	1,839	8,717
Canada	1,736	46,195
Russia	1,700	11,585
Australia	1,396	55,060
Mexico	1,269	9,946
Turkey	761	9,127
Sweden	531	51,615
Venezuela	482	16,054
Iran	454	5,550
Nigeria	448	2,230
South Africa	351	6,001
Egypt	303	3,019
New Zealand	207	42,084
Luxembourg	71	114,704
Burundi	3	261
WORLD	87,798	11,441

Source: Based on World Bank (2021). Data are for 2019.

For the latest information, see World Bank at <https://data.worldbank.org>.

and per capita GDP, it rates human development for most of the states in the world as either Very High, High, Medium, or Low. On the 2020 index, most of the wealthier democracies were in the top 30, while the poorest states – most of which were also authoritarian – ranked at the lower end of the table, with Niger in last place at 187 (see Map 1.1).

Although the conclusion we can draw from looking at numbers such as these is that wealthier democracies have been more successful in meeting the needs of their people than poorer authoritarian systems, the picture is not that simple. True enough, the citizens of democracies are, overall, wealthier and healthier and

**Map I.1** The Human Development Index

Source: United Nations Development Programme (2020). For the most recent information, see UNDP at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>.

happier than those who live in authoritarian regimes, but we should not overlook the sometimes enormous divisions that exist within states. All are divided along multiple planes, including gender, wealth, ethnicity, and religion, and we will see plenty of examples in the chapters that follow of political systems that have failed to be inclusive or to have achieved a state of equal opportunity for their citizens.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is it justifiable to describe comparison as 'the methodological core of the scientific study of politics'?
- Can we really understand government and politics without comparison?
- Which is the most important of the benefits of comparative government and politics?
- Where does politics begin and end?
- Who has power, who does not, and how do we know?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Democracy Index and Freedom in the World as means of classifying political systems?

## KEY CONCEPTS

- |                          |                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| ■ Authority              | ■ Political system |
| ■ Comparative politics   | ■ Politics         |
| ■ Governance             | ■ Power            |
| ■ Government             | ■ Regime           |
| ■ Gross domestic product | ■ Social science   |
| ■ Institution            | ■ Theory           |
| ■ Political science      | ■ Typology         |

## FURTHER READING

- Boix, Carles, and Susan C. Stokes (eds) (2007) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (Oxford University Press). Although more than 1,000 pages in length, this is a rich survey of the many different dimensions of comparative politics.
- Collander, David C., and Elgin F. Hunt (2019) *Social Science: An introduction to the Study of Society*, 17th edn (Routledge). An introduction to social science, and to its methods and goals, with examples from all over the world.
- Dogan, Mattei, and Dominique Pelassy (1990) *How to Compare Nations: Strategies in Comparative Politics*, 2nd edn (Chatham House). Although published many years ago, the arguments made in this short and readable book are still relevant.
- Garner, Robert, Peter Ferdinand, and Stephanie Lawson (2020) *Introduction to Politics*, 4th edn (Oxford University Press). A general survey of politics, with sections on key concepts, comparative politics and global politics.
- Heywood, Andrew (2019) *Politics*, 5th edn (Red Globe Press). Another survey of politics, with chapters on ideas, institutions and processes.
- Kendall-Taylor, Andrea, Natasha Lindstaedt, and Erica Frantz (2019) *Democracies and Authoritarian Regimes* (Oxford University Press). A survey of the features of democracies, dictatorships and autocracies, and the challenges faced by democracy.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Visit [bloomsbury.pub/comparative-government-and-politics](https://bloomsbury.pub/comparative-government-and-politics) to access additional materials to support teaching and learning.

# 2

## Making comparisons

### CONTENTS

- Understanding comparison
- Origins and evolution
- Choosing cases
- Choosing methods
- The challenges of comparison

### PREVIEW

In Chapter 1, we looked at some of the key concepts of comparative government and politics. Now we need to look at how we go about making comparisons: the questions that need to be asked, the theories and methods that can be used to carry out research, the options for designing comparative research, and the pitfalls to be avoided. This chapter is partly a survey of methods and partly a practical *How To* guide to comparison, giving more insight into the dynamics of that process. The goal is not to cover the details of specific techniques such as interviewing or statistical analysis so much as to provide an outline of strategies that will help you work on comparative projects of your own.

The chapter begins with a review of the comparative method and changes in approaches to comparative government and politics. It then looks at how we decide on the number of cases to compare; these range from one to many, the research methods used being different for single-case studies, those involving a small number of cases (small-*n* studies), and those involving a large numbers of cases (large-*n* studies). The chapter then reviews the features of qualitative, quantitative and historical research methods, arguing that the latter can be useful in offsetting some of the limitations inherent in the case study method. It ends with a discussion of some of the challenges faced by comparison, including the troubling problem of having too few cases and too many variables.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- The comparative method plays a key role in all political research, helping encourage critical thinking whether we take an empirical or normative approach.
- Approaches to comparison have undergone substantial changes in a short period of time, with a more global perspective having replaced an early Western insularity.
- Comparative researchers must make choices that include the unit of analysis, the level of analysis and the variables to be studied.
- Research methods include the qualitative, quantitative and historical methods, and a combination of all three.
- In making comparisons between two or more factors, it is worth considering the relative strengths of the most similar and most different system designs.
- Comparative research faces numerous challenges ranging from the number of cases available to bias in the selection of those cases.